The Cuban Missile Crisis

Kennedy Orders Blockade of Cuba As Reds Build Nuclear Bases There; U.S. Will Sink Defiant Arms Ships

Medium Range Ballistic Missile Base in Cuba
Setting the Stage

1. The Truman Doctrine
2. The Marshall Plan
3. Containment
4. The Domino Theory
5. The Berlin Blockade
6. The Berlin Wall

Why are these events so important when trying to understand the Cold War?

Based on your knowledge of the Cold War, outline the reasons why your historical policy or event helped increase the tension at the outset of the Cuban Missile Crisis.
The Bay of Pigs Invasion

- The 1961 **Bay of Pigs Invasion** was an unsuccessful attempt at invasion following the Cuban Revolution that saw Fidel Castro come to power.
- It was planned and funded by the United States.
- The invasion was carried out by armed Cuban exiles in southwest Cuba.
- This action accelerated a rapid deterioration in Cuban-American relations worsened by the Cuban Missile Crisis the following year.
The Cuban Missile Crisis – A Chronology

- October 14: U2 recon. flight over Cuba spots sites installing nuclear missiles
- October 15: Presence of missiles is confirmed
- October 16-22: President Kennedy is notified, EXCOMM is created and secret deliberations on what should be done begin
- October 22: Kennedy tells the nation of his plan for blockade and quarantine
Range of Weapons
October 24: Naval quarantine begins and successfully changes course of many Soviet ships

October 25: One Soviet ship challenges naval quarantine; Kennedy lets it pass

October 25: At the UN, Adlai Stevenson directly challenges the Soviet ambassador to admit to the existence of missiles

When the ambassador refuses, Stevenson wheels out pictures of the missile sites
The Aerial Photos
October 26: Soviets raise possibility for a deal: if we withdraw missiles will America promise not to invade Cuba

October 27: Soviets demand that Americans also withdraw missiles from Turkey

Major Anderson’s plane is missing over Cuba, presumably shot down; U.S. recon plane strays over Soviet airspace

Kennedy tells Khrushchev that he will accept the proposal of the 26th, Kennedy tells his brother to tell the Soviet Ambassador that though the Turkey missiles would not be part of the bargain, they would be removed in time

October 28: USSR agrees to withdraw missiles
Why Cuba Mr. Khrushchev?

- Brinkmanship
- An opportunity to close the missile gap—Currently far behind U.S. in terms of number of missiles
- Protect Cuba – Castro had begun relations with the USSR
- Reciprocity: The U.S. has missiles pointing at the Soviets (ie. Turkey)
Kennedy and Congress had already passed a resolution stating the placement of nuclear weapons in Cuba would not be tolerated.

They realized they had to act quickly before the missiles were active.

They had a number of choices at their disposal – This has become known as the “Escalation Ladder”.
The Escalation Ladder

1. Do Nothing
2. Go to the United Nations
3. Naval Blockade
4. Strategic Air strike
5. Full Invasion of Cuba

Which policy do you think the USA should have employed with the Soviets? In groups of 5 or 6 which I will choose – make a case for your option.
Why was “Do Nothing” not an option?

1. The Truman Doctrine prevented it
2. The weapons were too dangerous to American safety
3. Kennedy would be perceived as weak by the Soviets – This could empower them to make another move on Berlin or another contentious European location
4. Kennedy would be committing political suicide at home
Go to the UN?

**PROS**
- Using the United Nations for diplomacy which is good
- Validates the United Nation’s role in global politics

**CONS**
- Takes too long
- Could appear indecisive
- Too many interest groups
- Russia and the United States both have veto powers on the Security Council – hard to reach a consensus

DECISION: Good option in conjunction with another choice
Naval Blockade

**PROS**

- Its not war and it is a show of strength without missiles
- A Naval quarantine is an effective way of turning away missiles

**CONS**

- Puts the United States in direct confrontation with the USSR
- Sinking a soviet ship is an act of war

**DECISION:** Safer than an air strike or full invasion
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<th>PROS</th>
<th>CONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Will effectively knock out Soviet missiles</td>
<td>• When Soviet missiles are destroyed it is likely that Soviet soldiers will die as well – this is an act of war</td>
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<td>• Good show of American strength</td>
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**DECISION:** Option number two but would prefer not to use it
**Invasion**

**PROS**

- The United States secures Cuba and ensures nuclear safety from the country
- The United States sends a clear message to the Soviets to stay out of the west

**CONS**

- A full invasion would surely kill Soviet soldiers which would be considered an act of war
- The nuclear consequences could be disastrous

DECISION: Too risky, can only be used as a last resort
What Happened?

- On October 26 the Soviet Union offered to withdraw the missiles in return for a U.S. guarantee not to invade Cuba or support any invasion.
- On October 27 the USSR called for the withdrawal of U.S. missiles from Turkey in addition to the demands of the 26th.
- The crisis peaked on the 27th, when a U-2 (piloted by Major Rudolph Anderson) was shot down over Cuba and another U-2 flight over Russia was almost intercepted when it strayed over Siberia all the while Soviet merchant ships were nearing the quarantine zone.
- Kennedy responded by publicly accepting the first deal and then sent Robert F. Kennedy to the Soviet embassy to privately accept the second deal. The fifteen Jupiter missiles in Turkey would be removed six months later.
- The Soviet ships turned back, and on October 28 Khrushchev announced that he had ordered the removal of the Soviet missiles in Cuba. The decision prompted then Secretary of State Dean Rusk to comment, "We were eyeball to eyeball, and the other fellow just blinked."
- Satisfied that the Soviets had removed the missiles, President Kennedy ordered an end to the quarantine of Cuba on November 20.
Further Thought

1. Was it really possible that the USA and the USSR would use nukes?
2. How much of the threat was real and how much of it was fueled by the press and governments?
3. Was this a defining moment in the Cold War? Was there a balance of power shift?