

## Options in Brief

---

### Option 1: Pursue Diplomacy

The United States should pursue purely diplomatic actions through the United Nations (UN) in order to pressure the Soviets to remove the missiles from Cuba. This would reduce the likelihood of military conflict. Any other steps could be too dangerous. We should also work with the Organization of American States (OAS) to bring pressure on Cuba from other Latin American states. As a means of resolving the crisis, the United States would be publicly willing to eliminate U.S. Jupiter missiles in Turkey in exchange for the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba.

### Option 2: Blockade Cuba

The U.S. Navy should blockade Cuba. This action would prevent the arrival of Soviet ships carrying materials necessary to make the missiles operational. A naval blockade represents a combination of diplomatic and military responses, but minimizes the risks to U.S. military personnel as well as Cubans and Soviets. The United States will demonstrate its willingness to fight if necessary, but there would still be room for a peaceful solution if the Soviets and Cubans are cooperative.

### Option 3: Airstrike and Invade

The U.S. military should launch an air strike followed by an invasion to destroy the missile sites. Although such an action would risk American lives and is likely to kill Soviet and Cuban military personnel and Cuban civilians, it is worth the cost to preserve our safety and our credibility as an opponent of the Soviet Union. Failure to respond to the missile build-up will lead to a loss of confidence in the United States, particularly in Latin America, and provide encouragement to pro-communist forces there. The free peoples of the world are depending on us. We cannot appear to be weak or indecisive.

## Option 1: Pursue Diplomacy

---

The placement of missiles in Cuba is an affront that we cannot bear. However, we must not let our anger get the better of us and provoke a series of events that could cost the lives of millions. Even a limited military response against Cuba could kill Soviet military personnel in Cuba. We must face the possibility that this could provoke a Soviet response against Berlin or against NATO bases in Turkey. What would come next? No one knows. It could escalate to a deadly exchange of missiles.

The world teeters on the brink of catastrophe. The United States should pursue purely diplomatic actions through the United Nations (UN) in order to pressure the Soviets to remove the missiles from Cuba. This would reduce the likelihood of military conflict. We should send personal emissaries to both Castro and Khrushchev. This would allow us to begin to uncover their motives and objectives. We must be clear that it is the Soviets that have caused this crisis. They promised that they would not put nuclear weapons into Cuba, even as they were doing just that. Because of their rash actions in Cuba and their threats against Berlin, we are in danger of upsetting the delicate nuclear balance. The United States cannot be hasty. We are not a nation that is rash, impulsive, or indifferent to the safety of the human race. We must recognize that negotiation involves give and take.

As a means of resolving this crisis, we must be willing to eliminate our Jupiter missiles in Turkey on the Soviet border in exchange for the withdrawal of Soviet missiles in Cuba. The United States will never accept the blackmail and intimidation of the Soviet Union. Yet given the tremendous consequences, it is only sane that we first attempt to negotiate a solution to this serious problem. History will not be kind to a nation that is blamed for firing the first shot that unleashes a nuclear exchange and brings unfathomable destruction to the earth. The United States must not be the nation that starts a nuclear war. Rather, this is a battle that we can win in the court of public opinion.

### Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 1

---

1. Military action by the United States could lead to a nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union and grave damage to the United States.

2. Diplomacy and communication hold the most promise for resolving an

international issue of this magnitude.

3. The United States must be willing to trade missile bases in Turkey—publicly—in exchange for the removal of the missiles in Cuba.

### Supporting Arguments for Option 1

---

1. Any other course of action would risk the lives of Americans and others.

2. Diplomatic efforts would help build world opinion on the side of the United States in the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

3. Diplomacy gives the United States time to assess the situation, gather information, and build coalitions with other nations. It prevents hasty or rash action that could prove dangerous.

## From the Historical Record

---

*Statement to ExComm by Secretary of State Dean Rusk*

“We [should] stimulate the OAS [Organization of American States] procedure immediately for prompt action to make it quite clear the entire hemisphere considers that the Rio Pact has been violated.... The OAS could constitute itself as an organ of consultation promptly, although maybe it may take two or three days to get instructions from governments and things of that sort. The OAS could, I suppose, at any moment, take action to insist to the Cubans that an OAS inspection team be permitted to come and look directly at these sites, [and] provide assurances to the hemisphere.”

*Statement to President Kennedy by U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson*

“Let’s not go into an air strike until we have explored the possibilities of a peaceful solution.”

*Statement to ExComm by Secretary of State Dean Rusk*

“I think also that we ought to consider getting some word to Castro, perhaps through the Canadian ambassador in Havana or through his representative at the UN. I think perhaps the Canadian ambassador would be the best, the better channel to get to Castro, get him apart privately and tell him that this is no longer support for Cuba, that Cuba is being victimized here, and that the Soviets are preparing Cuba for destruction, or betrayal. You saw the [*New York Times*] story yesterday morning that high Soviet officials were saying: ‘We’ll trade Cuba for Berlin.’ This ought to be brought to Castro’s attention. It ought to be said to Castro that this kind of a base is intolerable and not acceptable.”

*Memorandum to President Kennedy by U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson*

“To start or to risk starting a nuclear war is bound to be divisive at best and the judgments of history seldom coincide with the tempers of the moment...you should have made it clear that the existence of nuclear missile bases anywhere is negotiable before we start anything.”

*Statement to ExComm by Secretary of State Dean Rusk*

“I think we’ll be facing a situation that could well lead to general war. Now with that we have an obligation to do what has to be done, but to do it in a way that gives everybody a chance to pull away before it gets too hard.”

*Memorandum by former U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union Charles Bohlen*

“The existence of Soviet MRBM [medium range ballistic missiles] bases in Cuba cannot be tolerated. The objective therefore is their elimination by whatever means may be necessary. There are two means in essence: by diplomatic action or by military action. No one can guarantee that this can be achieved by diplomatic action, but it seems to me essential that this channel should be tested out before military action is employed. If our decision is firm (and it must be) I can see no danger in communication with Khrushchev privately, worded in such a way that he realized that we mean business. This I consider as an essential first step.”

## Option 2: Blockade Cuba

The United States cannot put up with the presence of offensive nuclear weapons just ninety miles from its shores. The Soviet Union has misled us privately and publicly about its intentions in Cuba. Its motivations for this deployment are unclear. We must be prepared for any eventuality, including that the weapons would be used against us or used to pressure us to withdraw from Berlin. The United States must steer a careful course. If we tolerate the presence of these missiles in Cuba our credibility and courage will be questioned around the world. We will use force if necessary, but a blockade could allow us to pursue a solution with the Soviets that does not back them into a corner.

The U.S. Navy should blockade Cuba. Our military experts cannot tell us for sure how many or if any missiles in Cuba are operational. We must factor in this uncertainty. They also say that they cannot guarantee the destruction of all of the missiles if we launch an air strike. If a surprise air strike cannot eliminate the risk of a missile launch from Cuba against the United States, then it is too dangerous to undertake such an action. A naval blockade would prevent the arrival of Soviet ships carrying more missiles or materials necessary to make the missiles operational. It allows for a peaceful solution.

A naval blockade represents a combination of diplomatic and military responses, but without the danger that would be caused by an immediate U.S. attack. On the other hand, an unannounced U.S. attack against Cuba holds the disadvantage of losing the moral high ground for the United States. We tried Japanese officials as war criminals for their sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. A sneak attack on Cuba would discredit us in the eyes of the world today and for generations to come.

The United States still maintains a significant edge in nuclear weapons over the Soviet Union even with these weapons so close to our shores. Our overwhelming nuclear superiority will deter any Soviet action against the United States.

### Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 2

1. The consequences and risks of a military attack on the missiles in Cuba are impossible to predict. A surprise military attack erodes U.S. moral standing around the world.

2. Using diplomacy could take months or years, allowing more missiles to be brought to and assembled in Cuba.

3. Accepting Soviet missiles on Cuban territory erodes U.S. standing around the world as a defense against the Soviet Union.

4. The Soviet missiles in Cuba do not actually change the strategic balance. The United States still has an overwhelming edge in nuclear weapons over the Soviet Union.

### Supporting Arguments for Option 2

1. A blockade is a prudent and flexible step that would allow the United States to move to military action (if necessary) without being accused of having conducted a “Pearl Harbor”-style attack.

2. Diplomatic action alone, without a blockade, would allow the Soviet Union to

continue to assemble missiles in Cuba.

3. A blockade of Cuba would prevent the Soviet Union from delivering more missiles and weapons to Cuba. It is a prudent first step demonstrating U.S. resolve against Soviet expansionism.

## From the Historical Record

---

*Statement to Joint Chiefs of Staff by President John F. Kennedy*

“If we attack Cuban missiles, or Cuba, in any way, it gives them [the Soviet Union] a clear line to go ahead and take Berlin, as they were able to in Hungary [in 1956] under the Anglo war [Suez Crisis] in Egypt. We would be regarded as trigger-happy Americans who lost Berlin. We would affect the West Germans’ attitude towards us. And [people would believe] that we let Berlin go because we didn’t have the guts to endure a situation in Cuba.”

*Statement to Joint Chiefs of Staff by President John F. Kennedy*

“So there isn’t any doubt that, whatever [military] action we take against Cuba, no matter how good our films are, or what this is going to cause in Latin America, a lot of people would regard this as a mad act by the United States, which is due to a loss of nerve.”

*Statement to ExComm by Llewellyn Thompson, Former U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union*

“My preference is this blockade plan...I think it’s very highly doubtful that the Russians would resist a blockade against military weapons, particularly offensive ones, if that’s the way we pitched it to the world.”

*Statement to ExComm, by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara*

“I don’t think there is a military problem here.... I’ve gone through this today, and I asked myself: ‘Well, what is it then, if it isn’t a military problem?’ Well, it is just exactly this problem: that if Cuba should possess a capacity to carry out offensive action against the U.S., the U.S. would act. Now it’s that problem. This is a domestic political problem. The announcement. [McNamara refers to a recent U.S. government announcement saying that it would not tolerate the presence of Soviet offensive weapons in Cuba.] We didn’t say we’d go in or not, and kill them. We said we’d act. Well, how will we act? Well, we want to act to prevent their use, and it’s really the act. Now

how do we prevent their use? Well, first place, we carry out open surveillance, so we know what they’re doing. [At] all times. Twenty-four hours a day from now and forever, in a sense, indefinitely. What else do we do? We prevent further offensive weapons coming in. In other words, we blockade offensive weapons. And then an ultimatum. I call it an ultimatum associated with these two actions, a statement to the world, particularly to Khrushchev, that we have located offensives. We’re maintaining a constant surveillance over them. If there is ever any indication that they’re to be launched against this country, we will respond not only against Cuba, but we will respond directly against the Soviet Union with a full nuclear strike. Now, this alternative doesn’t seem to be a very acceptable one. But wait until you work on the others.”

*Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara*

“If you go to nuclear war, and the other side retaliates, and only a few—maybe only one—bomb gets through to destroy an American city, you—the one who just initiated the nuclear war—will have to shoulder the responsibility for the worst catastrophe in the history of this country.”

*Memorandum by Undersecretary of State George Ball*

“I am persuaded that the disadvantages of an air strike are too great for us to undertake. I have, therefore, concluded that the blockade plan—while by no means wholly satisfactory—is the course we should follow.... It is my strongly held view that we cannot launch a surprise attack against Cuba without destroying our moral position and alienating our friends and allies. If we were to do so, we would wake up the following morning to find that we had brought down in ruins the structure of alliances and arrangements and that our whole post-war effort of trying to organize the combined strength of the Free World was in shards and tatters.”

## Option 3: Airstrike and Invade

**K**hrushchev has gone too far this time. The communists are threatening our security and way of life all around the world. Now they have the audacity to place nuclear missiles just ninety miles from our shores. We have warned the Soviet Union not to put offensive weapons in Cuba. The Soviets have assured us they would not. Now they have. The United States must act decisively and with force to remove this threat and to preserve our credibility with our political allies and neutral countries.

U.S. Air Force bombers should immediately launch an air strike to destroy the missile sites to prevent them from becoming operational. Because there is no guarantee that all of the missile sites would be destroyed in such a strike, a full-scale invasion of Cuba will need to follow. We do not have time to spare. Negotiations would give the Soviets the ability to make or to propose compromises and would not halt the deployment. While such military actions would risk American lives and kill Soviet and Cuban military personnel and Cuban civilians, it is worth the cost to preserve our safety and our credibility as an opponent of the Soviet Union. Failure to respond definitively to the missile build-up will lead to a loss of confidence in the United States and provide encouragement to pro-communist forces, particularly in Latin America.

A full-scale invasion could accomplish not only the removal of the missiles but also the end of the Castro regime. The Soviet Union is testing the resolve of the United States by placing missiles in our strategic backyard. Failure to react here means we will face more challenges around the world from the Soviets. The free peoples of the world are depending on us. We cannot appear to be weak or indecisive. History has taught us what comes from appeasing tyrants—war, suffering, and more tyrannical aggression. A weak response encouraged Hitler. We must not encourage the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union has backed down when faced with strong action by the United States. They will do so again.

### Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 3

1. Soviet missiles in Cuba are an immediate threat to the security of the United States and must be dealt with by whatever means are necessary.

2. The United States military

can successfully neutralize the Soviet missiles in Cuba.

3. The Soviet Union will not respond militarily elsewhere in the world to U.S. military action against Cuba.

### Supporting Arguments for Option 3

1. A military strike against Cuba signals that the United States is not prepared to bargain bases in Cuba for positions in Berlin and elsewhere.

2. Eliminating the missiles with force protects the U.S. position in the Western

Hemisphere by demonstrating our will to fight to protect national interests.

3. Military action against the missiles and Cuba would eliminate a military threat to the United States.



## From the Historical Record

---

*Memorandum by Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon*

“It is my view that the Soviet Union has now deliberately initiated a public test of our intentions that can determine the future course of world events for many years to come. If we allow the offensive capabilities presently in Cuba to remain there, I am convinced that sooner or later and probably sooner we will lose all Latin America to Communism because all credibility of our willingness to effectively resist Soviet military power will have been removed in the eyes of the Latins. We can also expect similar reactions elsewhere, for instance in Iran, Thailand, and Pakistan. I, therefore, believe that the survival of our nation demands the prompt elimination of the offensive weapons now.”

*Statement to President Kennedy by General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff*

“I think we all would be unanimous in saying that really our strength in Berlin, our strength any place in the world, is the credibility of our response under certain conditions. And if we don't respond here in Cuba, we think the credibility is sacrificed.”

*Statement to President Kennedy by General Curtis Lemay, Air Force Chief of Staff*

“I'd emphasize, a little strongly perhaps, that we don't have any choice except direct military action. If we do this blockade that's proposed, the first thing that's going to happen is your missiles are going to disappear into the

woods, particularly your mobile ones. Now, we can't find them, regardless of what we do, and then we're going to take some damage if we try to do anything later on.... Now, as for the Berlin situation, I don't share your view that if we knock off Cuba, they're going to knock off Berlin. We've got the Berlin problem staring us in the face anyway. If we don't do anything to Cuba, then they're going to push on Berlin and push real hard because they've got us on the run.... So I see no other solution. This blockade and political action, I see leading into war. I don't see any other solution. It will lead right into war. This is almost as bad as the appeasement at Munich.”

*Statement to President Kennedy by General Earle Wheeler, Army Chief of Staff*

“The lowest-risk course of action it would take in protecting the people of the United States against a possible strike on us is to go ahead with a surprise air strike, the blockade, and an invasion, because these series of actions progressively will give us increasing assurance that we really have gone after the offensive capability of the Cuban/Soviet corner. Now, admittedly, we can never be absolutely sure until and unless we actually occupy the island.”