

Asia: Official British Documents, 1945-65, On CD-ROM Selected Documents From The End Of World War II

Cuban Missile Crisis! Can you avoid nuclear armageddon?

You will be split into two teams, the USA and the USSR. Both teams are made up of a group of advisers and a leader, who should be chosen by the team. Read the information on your team's view, and on the six stages of the crisis. Team USA should follow the 'Guidelines for action' below, and then pass their decision on to Team USSR, who follow the same process and respond.

The Russian view

Since 1933, Cuba was run by a corrupt and violent dictator called Batista. He was kept in power by America. The Americans exploited the Cubans by owning the best land and biggest industries. There was a massive gulf between rich and poor.

In 1959, Batista was overthrown by a 'people's revolution' led by Fidel Castro. Castro wanted an end to American exploitation and to help create a fair society based on Communist ideas – the first in the American continent. The USSR stepped in to help Cuba after America ceased to buy Cuban sugar or lend her any money. The USSR and Cuba became close allies.

In 1961, American land and air forces tried to invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs and remove its legal government. Understandably, Castro looked to Russia for protection against the threat of another American attack. The USSR were glad to defend Cuba with military equipment.

President Kennedy

Kennedy was a new president and had many problems to solve in America. In 1961, Russian Chairman Khrushchev had met Kennedy in Vienna. Khrushchev thought the young president was naive and weak. Kennedy had already shown his poor judgement at the Bay of Pigs. Kennedy had also done nothing to stop Khrushchev building the Berlin Wall in the same year. Maybe Kennedy was too weak and inexperienced to cope?

Chairman Khrushchev

Khrushchev was at the height of his power and was a strong leader of the communist world. He had attacked and ended many of Stalin's policies. He needed to protect the USSR at all costs. He wanted 'peaceful co-existence' with the USA, but he was not going to reduce the USSR's strength. Khrushchev was worried that US missile bases in Europe and Turkey formed a ring around Russia. The USSR had no bases close to the US mainland.

Advisers

Military: the chiefs of the army, navy and air force, who are usually keen on action of some kind to make themselves more powerful.

Diplomatic: experts in foreign affairs, who will explain how other countries will judge your actions, and also understand international law.

Political: support their leader, and usually want to make sure the leader looks as strong as possible.

Intelligence: experts in how the other side thinks.

Guidelines for action

1. Each advisor should give their advice in turn.
2. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each piece of advice as a team.
3. Consider how the other side might react to your actions.
4. Do not back down or 'lose face'.
5. Make sure the majority of advisers agree, but the leader should make the final decision.

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