

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."