Thirteen Days of Choice

Trace the risks, decisions, and agreements of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

TOT.C.9.3.C "Cuban Missile Crisis,"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two pressures that led the Soviets to place missiles in Cuba, circle the response Kennedy chose, and write 1 and 2 beside the public and private U.S. commitments that helped end the crisis.

A Crisis with No Safe Choice

1. In October 1962, an American spy plane photographed Soviet missile sites under construction in Cuba, about 90 miles from Florida. The missiles could carry nuclear weapons to parts of the United States. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev wanted to protect Cuba, whose government feared another U.S.-backed attack after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. He also wanted to strengthen the Soviet position against the United States, which had nuclear missiles in Turkey near Soviet territory. President John F. Kennedy faced a difficult problem: doing nothing might let the missile sites become operational, but a U.S. attack could start a war.

2. Kennedy's advisers debated air strikes, an invasion, and a naval quarantine. An air strike might destroy missile sites quickly, but it could kill Soviet personnel and provoke a Soviet response. An invasion posed an even greater risk of direct fighting. Kennedy chose the quarantine, announced on October 22, to prevent more offensive weapons from reaching Cuba while leaving time for talks. U.S. warships took positions near the island, and American forces prepared for possible combat. The quarantine did not remove missiles already on land, so Kennedy also demanded that the Soviets dismantle their sites.

3. On October 27, a Soviet-supplied surface-to-air missile shot down an American U-2 plane over Cuba, killing its pilot. Kennedy did not order an immediate strike. Instead, he answered a Soviet offer: the USSR would remove its missiles from Cuba in return for a U.S. promise not to invade the island. Privately, Kennedy also agreed to remove U.S. missiles from Turkey later; those missiles were already scheduled for removal. On October 28, Khrushchev announced that the Soviet missiles in Cuba would be dismantled. The crisis showed how military pressure and private negotiation could work together, even when a mistake might trigger nuclear war.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did two earlier actions help explain why Khrushchev placed missiles in Cuba?

2. Why might Kennedy have chosen a quarantine instead of an air strike, and what problem did the quarantine leave unsolved?

3. Why did the U-2 shootdown increase the risk of war, and how did Kennedy respond?

4. How did the public agreement and the private U.S. commitment address concerns on both sides?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are advising Kennedy on October 22, before the U-2 shootdown. Write a brief memo recommending a response and a step toward negotiation. Use at least two facts from the passage to explain your choice, and identify one risk your plan does not solve.

ANSWER KEY

Thirteen Days of Choice

HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.C.9.3.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two pressures that led the Soviets to place missiles in Cuba, circle the response Kennedy chose, and write 1 and 2 beside the public and private U.S. commitments that helped end the crisis. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did two earlier actions help explain why Khrushchev placed missiles in Cuba?	**The failed Bay of Pigs invasion made Cuba fear another U.S.-backed attack, and U.S. nuclear missiles in Turkey gave Khrushchev a reason to strengthen the Soviet position.**
2	Why might Kennedy have chosen a quarantine instead of an air strike, and what problem did the quarantine leave unsolved?	**A quarantine left time for talks and avoided immediately killing Soviet personnel, but it did not remove missiles already in Cuba.**
3	Why did the U-2 shootdown increase the risk of war, and how did Kennedy respond?	**The death of an American pilot could have prompted a U.S. strike and further fighting. Kennedy did not strike immediately; he responded to a Soviet offer.**
4	How did the public agreement and the private U.S. commitment address concerns on both sides?	**The Soviets agreed to remove missiles from Cuba, addressing the U.S. threat. The United States promised not to invade Cuba and privately agreed to remove its missiles from Turkey, addressing Soviet concerns.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

President Kennedy, I recommend a naval quarantine paired with a private offer to promise not to invade Cuba if Soviet missiles leave. An air strike could kill Soviet personnel and trigger a wider war, while a quarantine gives both governments time to talk. The plan has a serious risk: stopping new shipments will not remove missiles already on land. Ask Khrushchev to dismantle those sites promptly, and keep a direct channel open for his reply.

Accept other defensible recommendations in Part 3 if they use at least two accurate passage facts, propose a negotiation step, and identify an unresolved risk. For the marking job, accept either order for the numbers if both the public noninvasion promise and private Turkey commitment are marked.