Choices Under Pressure

Weigh the benefits and risks of Kennedy's Cold War decisions

USH.C.6.3.E "Evaluate President Kennedy's decisions regarding the Bay of Pigs Invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis, leading to the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number Kennedy's three main decisions in order. For each one, underline an intended benefit and circle a cost, risk, or limit so you can weigh the decision.

From Invasion to Agreement

1 In 1961, President John F. Kennedy approved a plan inherited from the Eisenhower administration: Cuban exiles would land at the Bay of Pigs and try to overthrow Fidel Castro. Kennedy hoped a successful landing would weaken a Soviet ally without an open U.S. invasion. He limited visible U.S. involvement and canceled a planned follow-up air strike shortly before the landing. Without enough air cover or support from Cubans on the island, the exile force was defeated in days. Approving the operation while restricting support left Kennedy with a failed invasion, damaged U.S. credibility, and a stronger Castro.

2 In October 1962, U.S. reconnaissance photographs revealed Soviet nuclear missile sites under construction in Cuba. Kennedy considered bombing the sites, but an attack might have triggered war with the Soviet Union. Instead, he ordered a naval quarantine to block further deliveries of offensive weapons and demanded removal of the missiles. This choice gave both governments time to negotiate, yet a clash at sea could still have escalated into nuclear war. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles. Kennedy publicly promised not to invade Cuba, and his administration secretly agreed to remove U.S. Jupiter missiles from Turkey later.

3 The crisis ended without nuclear war, but it showed how quickly threats and military moves could push both sides toward disaster. Kennedy and Soviet leaders then pursued a way to reduce one danger: radioactive fallout from nuclear tests. In 1963, Kennedy signed the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty with the Soviet Union and Britain. It banned nuclear tests in the atmosphere, outer space, and underwater, but allowed underground tests. The agreement reduced fallout and opened a path for cooperation, yet it did not end the arms race. Compared with the invasion and the quarantine, the treaty relied on negotiated limits rather than force.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Was approving the Bay of Pigs plan while limiting U.S. support an effective choice? Use the outcome to explain your judgment.

2. Why might Kennedy have judged a naval quarantine less dangerous than bombing the missile sites? What risk did the quarantine still carry?

3. How did Kennedy's promises and concessions help end the missile crisis? Name one cost of making them.

4. In light of the missile crisis, what made the test ban treaty a useful choice, and why was it only a partial solution?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a rival country stations armed ships near a U.S. ally. In four or five sentences, recommend a U.S. response, using two different Kennedy decisions as evidence and weighing one benefit and one risk of your proposal.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.6.3.E

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Number Kennedy's three main decisions in order. For each one, underline an intended benefit and circle a cost, risk, or limit so you can weigh the decision. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Was approving the Bay of Pigs plan while limiting U.S. support an effective choice? Use the outcome to explain your judgment.	**No. Kennedy hoped to weaken Castro without an open U.S. invasion, but the exiles were defeated, and U.S. credibility suffered.**
2	Why might Kennedy have judged a naval quarantine less dangerous than bombing the missile sites? What risk did the quarantine still carry?	**Bombing might have triggered war, while the quarantine allowed time to negotiate. A clash at sea could still have escalated into nuclear war.**
3	How did Kennedy's promises and concessions help end the missile crisis? Name one cost of making them.	**His promise not to invade Cuba and his administration's agreement to remove missiles from Turkey helped secure Soviet missile removal. The United States gave up its Jupiter missiles in Turkey.**
4	In light of the missile crisis, what made the test ban treaty a useful choice, and why was it only a partial solution?	**It reduced radioactive fallout and created a path for cooperation after a dangerous standoff. It still allowed underground tests and did not end the arms race.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would propose direct talks and an agreement to move the ships away. Kennedy's approval of the Bay of Pigs invasion shows that using force indirectly can fail and damage credibility. His naval quarantine gave both sides time to negotiate, though a clash at sea remained possible. Talks could lower the chance of a clash while giving each side a clear goal. The rival country might refuse to negotiate, so the United States would need to consider other peaceful pressure.

Accept reasoned judgments supported by accurate passage evidence. For the open task, look for two distinct Kennedy decisions and a plausible benefit and risk of the student's proposed response.