

TOP SECRET BRIEFING B

To: President John F. Kennedy and advisors
From: The U.S. Intelligence Community
Re: U.S. Response to missile buildup in Cuba

Since our last briefing, Mr. President, the Soviet buildup of missiles in Cuba has continued at a frantic pace.

The missile launch site at San Cristobal, near the capital city of Havana, will be operational in 10 days. When complete, the warning time for a missile attack against the United States will be cut from 15 minutes to between 2 and 3 minutes. U.S. cities from Washington, DC, to Kansas City are at risk. Furthermore, some of our intelligence suggests that the Soviets are installing longer-range nuclear missiles that could be ready by mid November. These missiles would leave only one major U.S. city outside their range: Seattle.

Mr. President, you asked us to compile a series of options for you and your advisors to consider, keeping in mind your general goals: getting the missiles out of Cuba, avoiding a nuclear exchange, preparing for Soviet moves elsewhere in the world (such as Berlin), and not losing face.

As we see it, the United States can respond in at least five ways to the Soviet construction of missile sites in Cuba:

1. Ignore the missiles.
2. Initiate a naval blockade of Cuba to prevent Soviet ships from bringing further supplies to the island.
3. Invade Cuba.
4. Launch a conventional airstrike against the missile sites.
5. Send an emissary to discuss the matter with Khrushchev.

Critical-Thinking Question B: You are a member of the Executive Committee, known as ExCom, a group of Kennedy's closest advisors gathered to help him work through this crisis. The president has asked you to assess these five possible responses. How would you prioritize these possible responses? What are the positive and negative aspects of each?