

WATERLOO CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

MODEL UNITED NATIONS



HISTORICAL COMMITTEE

CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

MAY 12-14, 2026

Key Issue: On October 14, 1962 an American U-2 spy plane discovered that the Soviet Union was installing nuclear missile sites on the island of Cuba that had the capability of striking cities on the eastern seaboard of the United States. Eight days later, President John F Kennedy, through a nationally televised address, announced that the United States was implementing a naval quarantine of the island of Cuba, designed to intercept and board any and all incoming ships, including ships from the Soviet Union. Claiming the missile sites did not have nuclear capability and were meant as defensive missile sites only, the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev announced, on October 23, 1962, that the Soviet Union would not acquiesce to the blockade and had full intentions to supply the island of Cuba. The immediate threat to world peace and possible nuclear warfare between the world's two superpowers seemed like a real possibility.

How should the General Assembly of the United Nations respond to the immediate threat posed by the imposition of a quarantine around the island of Cuba by the United States and the intended response of the Soviet Union?

Background : In 1959, Fidel Castro led a successful takeover of the island of Cuba by ousting President Fulgencio Batista who had come to power in 1952 through his own takeover of power. Batista had proven to be a corrupt leader who was affiliated with organized crime groups from the United States, in particular the Mafia. As part of his takeover of Cuba, Castro began the nationalization of property owned by US citizens in Cuba. He also expelled the heads of organized crime who had profited greatly through casinos run on the island. Even though Castro had not explicitly stated it when he took over power on the island, US officials believed that Castro was a communist who was a threat to US security and continued business interests on the island. Eventually, Castro nationalized a number of key industries that had been controlled by US interests, including American oil companies operating on the island. When his communist leanings and his growing relationship with the Soviet Union was revealed, a number of Cuban citizens who had fled the island, along with a variety of US military and intelligence agencies began to plot the removal of Castro from his leadership on the island. In a plan formulated by the government of president Dwight Eisenhower, but carried out during the early presidency of John Kennedy, an invasion of the island was attempted in April of 1961. In an embarrassing episode that was to be called the Bay of Pigs Invasion, a group of American military personnel and Cuban ex-patriates tried to land on the shores of Cuba. The invasion was grossly unsuccessful and Kennedy was portrayed as an inept leader despite the plan being formulated by Eisenhower's administration. The failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion both scared the Cubans and Soviets while emboldening their resolve. The Cubans and Soviets realized that this failed invasion attempt would not be the last attempt to overthrow Castro's government while at the same time they believed that Kennedy's inexperience as a world leader could be exploited. So to ensure Cuban security in the face of the American threat, the Soviet Union and Cuba undertook a strategy to install a missile offensive system that could be used to deter any future American attempts at invading Cuba. By the summer of 1962 a number of missile sites had been secretly installed on the island. After a routine surveillance flight by US spy planes detected Soviet activity on the island, the US issued a warning against the installation of any missile system on Cuba. The

Cubans and Soviets denied any such activity was occurring but on October 14, 1962, a U-2 spy plane took photographic images which clearly showed medium-range and intermediate-range ballistic missiles were under construction. Evidence showed that the construction of these sites was being accelerated after the initial warning by the United States.

President Kennedy convened a meeting of his top advisors and the heads of the various US military branches where three options were discussed:

1. The first option, favoured by the diplomats was a diplomatic solution that was preceded by a stern warning to the Soviets
2. The second option was direct military intervention that included missile strikes to destroy the Soviet installations followed by an invasion of the island
3. The third option was to order a “quarantine of the island” by US navy.

Each option had its risks. Option 1 would be the least likely to avoid bloodshed and an escalation of hostilities but it was also the response that would least likely cause the Soviet Union to stop or slow production of the sites. Option 2 was the most likely option that would stop the missile build up but it was also the most likely to lead to a full military confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States. Instead, Kennedy chose the middle option which showed a willingness to engage the Soviets in a confrontation but also held out hope for a diplomatic solution. Kennedy chose to use the word “quarantine” as opposed to the more confrontational term “blockade”. Even though both terms essentially meant the same thing, it was felt that the term blockade was in fact a declaration of war. On October 22, Kennedy, during a nationally televised speech advised the US public that the Soviets had installed missiles that had the capability to reach the eastern seaboard of the United States. He also announced the establishment of the quarantine of the island of Cuba. On October 24, the Soviets responded saying that the US action was indeed a blockade and that it was an act of aggression. Premier Khrushchev of the Soviet Union also announced that ships bound for Cuba were ordered to proceed. It appeared that a confrontation between US and Soviet ships, with the possibility of nuclear deployment, was about to occur.

Key Points for Consideration for Delegates:

This is not a typical Model UN committee. The historical committee will act more like a Crisis Committee and as a result, the following should be considered:

- a. The injection point into the conflict is October 22 with the announcement of an American quarantine of the island of Cuba.
- b. Delegates can only use historical references up to and including October 23, 1956.
- c. Delegates may “predict” possible outcomes and solutions but they may not use them as fact.
- d. Delegates must understand the motivations of the country assigned to them including any historic relations/allegiances between themselves and other countries. An understanding of post WWII conflict is recommended.

Committee work will operate in two phases:

Phase 1 – Dealing with the immediate crisis.

1. Initial statements: delegates will focus on the actions of the the United States in imposing a quarantine on Cuba in response to the installation of nuclear missile sites and the subsequent Soviet threat to ignore the quarantine
2. Continued debate: delegates should continue to debate both immediate consequences of the actions and any potential consequences. Delegates will continue to sign up for the opportunity to speak, however, delegates will have the right to respond directly by posing questions to the initial speaker
3. Produced statement: delegates will work to producing a statement that hopes to immediately resolve the conflict posed by the actions of both the United States and the Soviets. This is not meant to act as a long term solution but as a solution to the immediate crisis. The committee will ultimately vote on the statement to be issued by the committee.
4. The traditional use of an unmoderated caucus can be used to help formulate the statement.
- 5.

Phase 2 – Proposing long term solution to the crisis.

1. Debating long-term solution: delegates will toward seeking a permanent solution to the threat posed by the installation of the nuclear sites and any American reaction to those sites. A new speakers list will be created to deal with the long term solution.
2. Committee work: students will begin to propose possible solutions with the goal of creating a resolution or series of resolutions seeking to end the conflict. Students can use “predictive” solutions to end the conflict.
3. The traditional use of moderated and unmoderated caucuses will apply.

Delegate countries:

The UN committee, for purposes of encouraging debate will be comprised of the following:

1. NATO countries (based on membership between 1956-1962)
2. Warsaw Pact countries (based on membership between 1956-1962)
3. Selected countries which were part of the Security Council in the years of 1956 and 1962
4. Countries directly affected by the crisis
5. Randomly selected countries representing a global perspective.

RESOURCES:

The Cuban Missile Crisis. Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation
<https://armscontrolcenter.org/the-cuban-missile-crisis/>

The Cuban Missile Crisis, October 1962. Office of the Historian.
<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/cuban-missile-crisis>

Cuban Missile Crisis. Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban_Missile_Crisis