

NSC SAMPLE WRITTEN REFLECTION

SUBJECT: U.S. policy toward Soviet missiles in Cuba

This memorandum reviews the president's decision regarding U.S. action against offensive Soviet military activity in Cuba. American U-2 reconnaissance has provided evidence of MiG fighter jets, IL-28 bombers, and sites for SS-4 and SS-5 missiles that are capable of launching against Washington and other U.S. cities within eighteen hours. The president should revise his orders and launch a full-scale invasion of Cuba to stop all missile activity, destroy existing equipment, prevent a nuclear attack on the United States, and clearly demonstrate to the Soviet Union that its actions will not be tolerated.

OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS

During National Security Council (NSC) deliberations, officials debated a range of options for responding to the Soviet military threat in Cuba, including diplomatic negotiations, a naval quarantine, air strikes, and a full-scale ground invasion. The president ordered a naval quarantine of Cuba supported by military preparation and diplomatic initiatives, but that is insufficient.

Diplomacy in the face of significant Soviet aggression will make the United States look weak. Though seemingly low risk, this option is impractical and potentially catastrophic. While the United States pursues discussions with the Soviet Union, that country will be able to reinforce its military capabilities in Cuba and could potentially launch its missiles at the United States, causing millions of casualties and undermining the very purpose of a diplomatic initiative. The Soviet Union has made clear the gravity and scope of its intentions and the United States should respond in kind—not with talks, but with military action.

The president has partially agreed by establishing a naval quarantine and ordering military preparations. However, these measures are insufficient to curb Soviet military activity in Cuba. A quarantine can stop further deliveries of military supplies to Cuba, but can neither destroy existing Soviet installations nor prevent expansion of them using equipment already in place. Furthermore, the CIA believes that Soviet submarines may still be able to deliver new equipment to Cuba in spite of a quarantine, rendering that option ineffective. Military preparation, though useful to the United States, will not likely affect Soviet activity until the U.S. military actually attacks missile installations in Cuba.

The military steps the president has authorized should continue, but should serve as the precursor to more robust action: a ground invasion of Cuba.

RECOMMENDATION AND JUSTIFICATION

The president's decision to establish a naval quarantine around Cuba and to continue military preparations will not adequately deter Soviet aggression. The U.S. military should implement the quarantine, then execute air strikes and invade Cuba.

The obvious disadvantage of an invasion is that it significantly elevates the risk of casualties. However, other U.S. responses also involve risks, such as miscommunication between U.S. and Soviet ships during a quarantine or attacks on U.S. pilots conducting air strikes. These could cause casualties and ultimately

NSC SAMPLE WRITTEN REFLECTION

create a slow and costly path to on-the-ground combat. Launching a swift and contained U.S. invasion capable of decisively ending this dispute is a far more preferable course of action and more likely to deter further Soviet aggression, now and in the future.

First, the United States should reinforce its naval base at Guantanamo Bay, evacuate dependents of U.S. personnel there, raise military alert levels, strengthen air defenses in the southeastern United States, and take measures to protect U.S. shipping interests in the Florida Strait. In addition, reconnaissance missions over Cuba should continue.

Next, the U.S. Navy should establish a quarantine line and signal ships approaching it to stop for boarding and inspection, turning back any ships that carry offensive military equipment. The U.S. Air Force should simultaneously conduct air strikes on Soviet medium-range ballistic missile sites, IL-28 bombers, MiG jets, patrol boats, tanks, and airfields in Cuba. These would begin eliminating missile sites as well as limit Soviet capability to retaliate against U.S. forces and U.S. bases in Florida.

Finally, a full-scale ground invasion of Cuba should commence within seven days of air strikes. This invasion would focus on eliminating all existing Soviet military installations and equipment, especially missiles. An invasion would not pursue regime change or occupation of Cuba, because without Soviet military assets, regardless of its leader, Cuba cannot seriously endanger the United States. However, an invasion is necessary because a U.S. presence on the island is the only way to ensure the complete destruction of all Soviet military equipment in Cuba.

There is understandable fear that a U.S. invasion of Cuba would provoke a severe Soviet response, including a nuclear attack on the United States. However, the Soviet Union is aware that if it uses nuclear weapons, the United States will retaliate accordingly. This is a crucial deterrent. Moreover, as the CIA noted, the Soviet Union and Cuba are not linked by a public treaty, and the Soviet Union has not recognized its bases in Cuba, so it is not obliged to defend the island if the United States invades. It may not even be willing to do so.

REFLECTION

The presidential directive on this subject overlaps only somewhat with this proposal, which advocates for a ground invasion of Cuba in addition to a naval quarantine and air strikes, but not diplomatic negotiations. Though the president's commitment to diplomacy is laudable, the current situation is far too grave to allow time for such discussions. Only a full-scale invasion of Cuba will signal to the Soviet Union that the United States will not accept its aggression while ensuring the destruction of Soviet military capability just ninety miles from the U.S. coast. Had I been president, I would have ordered this step in my directive. I would also have used the directive to inform the American public and Soviet leaders why I believed an invasion was necessary. Only by clearly articulating and pursuing its policy goals can the United States maintain its leadership in the world.