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The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised President Kennedy throughout the Cuban Missile Crisis. This image depicts those men. JFK had appointed Army General Maxwell Taylor (depicted in the center of this photo) as chairman of the Joint Chiefs on the 1st of October, 1962. From left to right, on either side of Taylor, are: Army Chief of Staff General Earle Wheeler; Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis LeMay; Chief of Naval Operations Admiral George Anderson; and Commandant of the Marine Corps General David Shoup. Image online courtesy Navy History & Heritage Command.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted President Kennedy to take swift and forceful military action. Pushing for an air strike, they also developed plans for an invasion.

Not knowing the Soviets had tactical nuclear weapons on the island, the Pentagon estimated military action would cost around 18,500 lives. Had America invaded, the human cost would have been *much* greater.

On October 24, while considering military options, the President reached a sobering conclusion. If the United States were to invade Cuba within ten days, some of the Soviet missiles would likely be fired at U.S. targets.

Concerned about people in the probable target areas, he pondered (at 2:30 into the tape) whether civilian populations could be evacuated a few days before an invasion.

In the event of U.S. military action, America's allies would have to be briefed. "Selling" the concept - in the face of potentially huge consequences in Berlin - would require deft handling. People involved in that sensitive process have written first-hand accounts of the discussions with America's allies.

In the midst of the turmoil, neither the President nor his brother lost sight of the political implications. Wondering whether challenging the Soviets was the right course of action, JFK expressed his belief that had he done nothing, he would have been impeached. He and Bobby agreed (at 3:43 into the tape) on that issue.

It was up to Adlai Stevenson to test the political waters at the United Nations. Confronting Soviet representatives with proof of their missiles in Cuba, Stevenson (with the help of Colonel David Parker) had a one-way conversation on October 25.

The Russians refused to answer.

With no movement by the Kremlin, U.S. military forces were instructed to move to DEFCON 2 - one step less

than maximum readiness. DEFCON 2 had never been reached before. It was not reached again until September 11, 2001.

The superpowers were at the brink of nuclear war.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/BATTLE-PLANS-Cuban-Missile-Crisis>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/BATTLE-PLANS-Cuban-Missile-Crisis>

Media Stream



Adlai Stevenson

Image online, courtesy Princeton University.

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Colonel David Parker

Image online, courtesy The National Security Archives, George Washington University.

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Adlai Stevenson - Evidence of Soviet Missiles in Cuba

Universal Newsreel, 25 October 1962, online courtesy Library of Congress and Archive.org.

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