

Trump's North Korean Challenge: Lessons from the Cuban Missile Crisis

by

Lieutenant Colonel Timothy M. Brower
United States Army National Guard

Under the Direction of:
Dr. Frank L. Jones



United States Army War College
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Trump's North Korean Challenge: Lessons from the Cuban Missile Crisis

The national security advisor knocked on the door of the President of the United States' second floor bedroom in the White House. The time was 8:00 a.m., and the president remained in bed still wearing his pajamas and dressing gown as he read the morning paper. Annoyed by a headline in the *New York Times* criticizing his foreign policy,¹ the chief executive made eye contact with his visitor. "Mr. President, there is now hard photographic evidence, which you will see later...."²

On Tuesday, October 16, 1962, President John F. Kennedy's (JFK) national security advisor, McGeorge Bundy, informed Kennedy about the presence of Soviet ballistic missiles in Cuba. However, one can imagine a similar conversation occurring between President Donald Trump and his national security advisor, H.R. McMaster, as they discuss intelligence confirming that North Korea has successfully developed and fielded nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) targeting the continental United States.

Today's media contains numerous articles comparing the Cuban Missile Crisis and North Korea's decision to become a "nuclear state" with the capability of targeting the United States with weapons of mass destruction.³ Some reports describe the similarities between these events, while others point out the differences. With so many authors comparing and contrasting the Cuban Missile Crisis, should the Trump administration draw upon this historical event as the analogy on which to inform its policy toward North Korea?

Strategic advisors and senior leaders often turn to historical events when confronted with new situations and challenges. Sometimes they misuse history to justify

a decision or choose an inappropriate analogy, which can lead to flawed policy. In other instances, historical analogies serve to inform judgment and enhance decision-making.⁴

This paper argues that the Trump administration should use the Cuban Missile Crisis as a historical analogy to inform its policy and develop an effective strategy for dealing with North Korea. It uses Yuen Foong Khong's Analogical Explanation (AE) framework to analyze the Cuban Missile Crisis by conducting six diagnostic tasks useful for political decision making: 1) defining the nature of the North Korean threat, 2) assessing the political stakes involved, and 3) providing policy recommendations by 4) predicting their chances of success, 5) evaluating their moral rightness, and 6) warning about the dangers associated with available options.⁵ This paper also uses insights from the Cuban Missile Crisis to recommend a strategy for dealing with the North Korean threat.

Defining the Nature of the Challenge in North Korea

The Cuban Missile Crisis was an aggressive attempt by the Soviet Union to assert military power in the Western Hemisphere by offsetting a favorable U.S. nuclear balance, and to protect the communist Castro regime from another American invasion after the U.S.-supported Bay of Pigs invasion the year prior. Specifically, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev believed the Soviets were in a position of weakness compared to the United States. At the time, the Soviet Union only had about six missiles able to range the continental United States, but America possessed hundreds of missiles able to range the Soviet Union including assets in Great Britain, Italy, and Turkey. Russian missiles in Cuba carrying nuclear warheads threatened the security of millions of Americans. As Khrushchev remarked in his memoirs, it helped to give Americans "a little of their own medicine."⁶

Despite international pressure to halt its nuclear and missile programs, Kim Jung Un maintains an aggressive and belligerent attitude similar to Khrushchev's position. The primary reason why Kim Jung Un continues to develop and test nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles is to ensure survival of the Kim regime. Like his grandfather, Kim Il-Sung, and his father, Kim Jung Il, Kim Jung Un believes the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has a right to possess these technologies.

On January 10, 2003, Kim Jung Il withdrew the DPRK from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which no longer made North Korea subject to the Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency. North Korea stated its reason for withdrawing from the NPT was America's threat to its security. Withdrawal from the NPT allowed North Korea to resume missile testing, begin reprocessing spent fuel rods, and restart its nuclear facilities.⁷ In 2012, Kim Jung Il continued his efforts to persuade both internal and external audiences that North Korea had become a "nuclear state" by revising the DPRK's constitution proclaiming that he had "transferred the country into an undefeated country with strong political ideology, a nuclear power state, and invincible military power."⁸

North Korea is likely to continue developing and testing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Currently, both U.S. and South Korean experts agree that Pyongyang already possesses nuclear missiles capable of ranging Seoul, Japan, and Guam, which is U.S. territory. Furthermore, North Korea will develop the ability to attack the continental United States in the next two to five years.⁹ If the DPRK is able to develop ICBMs and the technologies required to miniaturize and place nuclear warheads on

them, then Pyongyang will possess the capability to threaten the continental United States with nuclear weapons as the Soviets did during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Assessing the Political Stakes Involved

The political stakes involved in the Cuban Missile Crisis offer an insightful comparison to current events with respect to North Korea. President Kennedy aimed to prevent the spread of communism in the Western Hemisphere. During his inaugural address on January 20, 1961, President Kennedy explained, “Let all our neighbors know that we shall join with them to oppose aggression or subversion anywhere in the Americas. And let every other power know that this Hemisphere intends to remain the master of its own house.”¹⁰ To contain the spread of communism in the hemisphere, President Kennedy authorized the Central Intelligence Agency’s Bay of Pigs invasion and Operation Mongoose, both designed to overthrow Fidel Castro’s communist regime. However, these failed attempts left Castro in power. When JFK learned that the Soviets had covertly placed offensive missiles into Cuba, the administration faced a crisis that lasted only thirteen days, yet threatened the survival of numerous large U.S. cities and millions of American lives.

Events regarding North Korea have not yet reached a crisis point, but the political stakes involved with a nuclear North Korea remain a vital U.S. national interest as the DPRK has accelerated its testing and the development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles under Kim Jung Un. These provocative actions threaten to undermine America’s longstanding policy objective of a denuclearized Korean peninsula.

Providing Policy Recommendations

The Cuban Missile Crisis analogy provides an implicit strategy recommendation regarding how the Trump administration should deal with the North Korean threat. This

study reveals that the U.S. blockade of Soviet military shipments to Cuba set the conditions to coerce Moscow to negotiate an agreeable resolution. Therefore, the implied strategy is one using “coercive diplomacy.”¹¹

Shortly after discovering Russian missiles in Cuba, President Kennedy convened his Executive Committee on the National Security Council (ExCOMM) which generated six alternatives for dealing with Soviet missiles in Cuba:¹²

1. Do Nothing: America was already vulnerable to Soviet ICBMs;
2. Diplomatic Pressures: provide an ultimatum to Moscow (i.e., remove missiles or face military action) or negotiate with the Kremlin;
3. A Secret Approach to Castro: offer Castro a choice to “split” from Soviet Communists or “fall” to U.S. invasion (i.e., regime change);
4. Invasion: military action to invade Cuba in order to remove missiles and overthrow Castro;
5. Air Strike: U.S. Air Force attack on missile sites; and
6. Blockade: U.S. Navy enforce an embargo on military shipments to Cuba.

Ultimately, President Kennedy decided to implement a naval blockade. However, a “blockade” constituted an act of war, so the administration changed the label to a “quarantine” of offensive weapons rather than a blockade of all materials.¹³ JFK announced the quarantine to the nation on October 22, 1962.

To halt this offensive buildup [of Soviet missiles in Cuba], a strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba is being initiated. All ships of any kind bound for Cuba from whatever nation or port will, if found to contain cargoes of offensive weapons, be turned back. This quarantine will be extended, if needed, to other types of cargo and carriers. We are not at this time, however, denying the necessities of life as the Soviets attempted to do in their Berlin blockade of 1948.¹⁴

In response to the U.S. blockade, Khrushchev sent a telegram to Kennedy on October 24, 1962, proclaiming that Soviet ships bound for Cuba would ignore the naval blockade. He stated, "The Soviet government considers the violation of the freedom of navigation in international waters and air space to constitute an act of aggression propelling humankind into the abyss of a world nuclear-missile war."¹⁵

With the blockade in effect, negotiations emerged to resolve the crisis before tensions escalated to the point of nuclear conflict. The primary means of negotiating was a series of letters between Kennedy and Khrushchev. On October 26, Khrushchev sent a lengthy letter through the U.S. Embassy in Moscow to Kennedy condemning the naval blockade as "piratical measures." He challenged America's perception that Soviet missiles in Cuba were "offensive" in nature and argued that such missiles were "necessary for the defense of Cuba." Khrushchev included terms of negotiation stating, "We, for our part, will declare that our ships, bound for Cuba, will not carry any kind of armaments. You would declare that the United States will not invade Cuba with its forces and will not support any sort of forces which might intend to carry out an invasion of Cuba."¹⁶

The following day, October 27, 1962, Khrushchev issued a second letter to Washington, which Radio Moscow broadcasted. This letter increased the Kremlin's demands as Khrushchev decried America's missiles in Britain, Italy, and Turkey and called for removal of U.S. missiles in Turkey in exchange for the Soviets removing missiles in Cuba.¹⁷ ExCOMM members believed this change would result in a political disaster for the Kennedy administration. According to Bundy, removing missiles from

Turkey was equivalent to “trying to sell our allies for our own interests...that would be the view in all of NATO.”¹⁸

Ignoring Khrushchev’s second offer, President Kennedy replied with a letter of his own. In his response, JFK called for “the cessation of work on missile sites in Cuba and measures to render such weapons inoperable.”¹⁹ He also agreed in concept with Soviet terms, as he understood them: 1) The Soviets would remove missiles from Cuba under United Nations (U.N.) observation and halt further introduction of missiles into Cuba, and 2) The United States would agree to remove the naval quarantine and provide assurances against an invasion of Cuba.²⁰

The U.S. Attorney General and President Kennedy’s brother, Robert “Bobby” F. Kennedy (RFK), personally delivered JFK’s letter to Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador to the United States, on the evening of October 27. RFK and Dobrynin’s ongoing backchannel communication was perhaps the best informal communication method between Moscow and Washington. During their meeting, RFK discussed terms within the letter. He also explained that the America would remove its Jupiter missiles from Turkey “within four to five months.” However, Washington could not publicly commit to the agreement because the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had collectively decided to deploy the missiles to Turkey, and a unilateral decision, under pressure from the Soviets, to remove the missiles might cause the alliance to crumble.²¹

On October 28, 1962, Radio Moscow announced the Kremlin’s acceptance of Washington’s proposed solution confirming the removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba under U.N. supervision in exchange for America’s non-invasion pledge of Cuba.²² The dismantling of Soviet missile bases, transfer to Cuban ports, loading of missiles and

support equipment onto eight Soviet ships, and final departure occurred from November 5 to November 9. However, the blockade remained in place until November 20, 1962, once the Soviets removed their IL-28 bombers from Cuba.²³

The implicit strategy garnered from the Cuban Missile Crisis analogy is “coercive diplomacy.” This strategy contains three elements: 1) limited objectives—removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba, 2) use of coercive but limited means—naval blockade along with signaling of intent (e.g., U.S. military preparation for invasion of Cuba), and 3) inducement—U.S. willingness to remove Jupiter missiles from Turkey.²⁴ A strategy based on coercive diplomacy is also a sound approach for dealing with the North Korean threat.

Predicting the Chances of Success

Lessons from the Cuban Missile Crisis help predict the chances of success of the coercive diplomacy strategy recommendation. To appreciate this strategy, it is necessary to consider Kennedy’s decision to implement a blockade in light of other available options. By examining JFK’s alternatives during the Cuban Missile Crisis and then applying them to the current North Korean threat, one can draw additional insights into how the Trump administration could consider the situation it now confronts.

Do Nothing

The Do Nothing alternative accepted the fact that America was already vulnerable to Soviet nuclear missiles. Bundy initially argued for this option fearing that U.S. action would cause the Soviets to retaliate against Berlin. However, ExCOMM members believed that the domestic political repercussions of inaction with regard to Soviet missiles in the Western Hemisphere would be intolerable. If left unchecked,

allowing the Soviets to maintain offensive missiles in Cuba could lead to further aggression elsewhere in the world.²⁵

The Trump administration could also elect to do nothing regarding the North Korean threat. Like an anticipated Soviet response in Berlin, the DPRK could retaliate against Seoul if the United States chooses to act. However, U.S. citizens are unlikely to support long-term inaction by the Trump administration amid rising concerns regarding North Korea's nuclear program and ongoing missile tests. Allowing Kim Jung Un to develop ICBMs capable of delivering nuclear warheads to U.S. cities would represent an existential threat that could have catastrophic results for America if left unimpeded.

Diplomatic Pressures

The ExCOMM considered two forms of diplomatic pressure. First, Washington could provide Moscow an ultimatum to remove missiles from Cuba or face military action. If Khrushchev complied, then Moscow would not face public confrontation or a military response. However if the Soviets failed to remove their missiles from Cuba, then they would face a significant U.S. military response. A second form of diplomatic pressure attempted to negotiate with the Kremlin. In exchange for the Soviets removing their missiles from Cuba, U.S. concessions might include withdrawing forces from the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay or eliminating Jupiter missiles from Turkey and/or Italy. The drawback to diplomatic pressure alone was that the Soviets could continue to emplace and operationalize missiles in Cuba while diplomats met. Kennedy also worried that negotiating for American missiles in Turkey would cause NATO to splinter as Washington attempted to negotiate U.S. security at the expense of its allies.²⁶

In a similar fashion, Washington could provide an ultimatum to Pyongyang where North Korea will face military action if it conducts any additional nuclear or missile tests.

Such a “red line” would necessitate a U.S. response if the DPRK continues testing because inaction would cause the Trump administration to lose credibility with both domestic and international audiences. A failure to respond would also embolden other state and non-state actors to conduct actions, which might threaten U.S. national interests. It is unlikely that Kim Jung Un would succumb to such an ultimatum given the fact that North Korea has conducted both nuclear and missile tests since 2006 in spite of international pressure.

Washington could also attempt to negotiate with Pyongyang. In exchange for the DPRK freezing its nuclear and missile programs or abandoning them altogether, the North could demand a range of concessions: a peace treaty to replace the 1953 Korean War armistice, the end of U.N. and U.S. sanctions, the normalization of relations between Washington and Pyongyang, the reduction or termination of U.S.–Republic of Korea (ROK) joint exercises, recognition of North Korea’s status as a nuclear power, material and food assistance, or a combination of these concessions.²⁷ As was the case during the Cuban Missile Crisis, such negotiations are most likely to work in conjunction with a strategy that applies adequate pressure (e.g., naval blockade) to coerce Pyongyang to the negotiating table.

Lastly, negotiations with the DPRK could threaten U.S. relations with key allies in East Asia and elsewhere. Therefore, negotiations must consider the impact on nations like South Korea and Japan so as not to jeopardize relationships with them. Our allies must not perceive negotiations as an attempt to improve U.S. security at their expense.

A Secret Approach

The Kennedy administration also considered a secret approach to Castro by offering him a choice to “split” from the Soviets or “fall” to a U.S. invasion (i.e., regime

change). However, ExCOMM members did not believe Castro would agree to the offer, and the approach would only provide advance warning of U.S. intentions. In addition, Castro did not control the medium and intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Cuba; Soviet officials maintained firm control of them.²⁸ In essence, this approach attempted to coerce Castro, and thereby Cuba, to depart the Soviet sphere of influence, but this approach did not address the problem of Soviet offensive missiles in Cuba.

The United States could attempt a secret approach to halt North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. Such an attempt would proceed through an intermediary, such as China, which has the most influence on the Kim regime. To do so, Washington must first understand Beijing's interests in the Asia-Pacific region and its views regarding North Korea.

Invasion

The invasion option not only sought to remove Soviet missiles from Cuba but also aimed to overthrow Castro. The ExCOMM viewed this alternative as a last resort because it required a significant number of troops and risked bogging down U.S. operations in what General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called the "deep mud" of Cuba. The potential for escalation was sobering. Kennedy did not want to risk a nuclear exchange or a showdown with the Soviets over Berlin that might lead to nuclear war because of U.S. commitments to protect the city and its citizens from the Soviets and East Germans taking control.²⁹

America could also lead a large-scale invasion into North Korea in order to destroy or secure the DPRK's nuclear and missile capabilities as well as pursuing regime change in Pyongyang. However, such an invasion would at the very least

require a massive force and would likely result in the United States performing long-term stability operations on the Korean peninsula.

China would vehemently oppose such aggression and view it as a U.S. effort to force regime change and unify the peninsula. Beijing fears a large number of North Korean refugees flowing into China and views the DPRK as a necessary buffer between China and the U.S.-backed ROK.³⁰ Therefore, it is likely that China would intervene should the United States cross the 38th parallel to invade North Korea. The risk of the invasion escalating to include war with the People's Republic of China (PRC) is all too familiar considering China's intervention during the Korean War.

Air Strike

Initially President Kennedy favored a direct approach, using air strikes to destroy known Soviet missile sites in Cuba, however there were several downsides to this option. First, the air strike could not be limited solely to missile sites. An attack would also necessitate hitting air defense sites to protect attacking forces. Additional targets would include airfields where Soviet MiG-21 fighters and IL-28 bombers were located that could retaliate by bombing the southeastern United States. Second, an air strike would likely result in the death of Russian personnel, and possibly non-combatants, at the missile sites. Such deaths would invite Soviet retaliation on U.S. forces in Berlin or missile sites in Turkey. Third, the administration opposed an attack without providing advanced warning. In World War II, Washington accused Japan of failing to provide advance warning before its air raid at Pearl Harbor, and the ExCOMM wanted to avoid similar accusations. Finally, an air strike in Cuba might not successfully destroy all of the Soviet missile sites and would not prevent future deployment of Russian missiles. As Kennedy and his advisors discussed alternatives, this option became less attractive.

However, the decision to conduct an air strike remained an alternative should the blockade fail, and the Soviets continued to assemble and arm missiles in Cuba.³¹

A U.S. air strike option would likely target North Korea's nuclear production and storage infrastructure along with the associated delivery means. For example, a 2016 *Stratfor* scenario envisions F-22 fighters and B-2 bombers from the U.S. Air Force and hundreds of Tomahawk cruise missiles from the U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet conducting such an attack. In addition to nuclear infrastructure, attacks would aim to destroy the DPRK's emerging sea-based capability (i.e., submarines), H-5 bombers at its Uiju and Changjin-up air bases, and approximately 200 North Korean transporter erector launchers.³²

A U.S. air strike on North Korea would confront the same challenges that the Kennedy administration faced when considering an attack on Cuban missile sites. First, the "limited" strike would grow to include targeting air defense assets and airfields. Second, an air attack on nuclear facilities and delivery means would result in the death of both combatants and non-combatants inviting a North Korean military response. The DPRK would likely retaliate with a counteroffensive targeting Seoul with its artillery. Further, North Korea's Hwasong and Nodong missiles can range all of South Korea and U.S. military bases in Japan and can deliver chemical, biological, and nuclear munitions. Some estimate that the DPRK may already possess between two and five nuclear warheads, which would cause tremendous damage in terms of life and property and could cause Seoul to capitulate.³³ Third, the Trump administration would have to determine whether to provide advance warning of the attack. Such a warning would negate America's element of surprise, which is critical for such an attack. Finally, a U.S.

air strike could not guarantee the destruction of all of North Korea's nuclear production infrastructure, nuclear storage sites, and delivery means. Therefore, the suitability of an air attack to achieve the strategic objective of halting or setting back North Korea's nuclear and missile programs remains in question. In fact, such an attack would likely increase Kim Jung Un's resolve to obtain nuclear ICBMs if he survives the strike.

Blockade

The final option was a naval blockade to enforce an embargo on military shipments to Cuba. This alternative included two variants that coincided with those of the diplomatic option. One variant added an ultimatum to the blockade whereby Washington would refuse to negotiate with the Soviets until they removed their missiles from Cuba.³⁴ A similar ultimatum today is the U.S. precondition requiring North Korea to "cease missile testing [and] cap development of [its] nuclear program" prior to negotiations.³⁵ The second variant of the blockade considered during the Cuban Missile Crisis sought to "freeze the status quo," which would allow the Soviets to keep their missiles already in Cuba.³⁶ Today, such an approach would allow the DPRK to continue developing and testing nuclear weapons and missiles concurrent with negotiations.

A "blockade" of North Korea will look somewhat different from U.S. naval ships in the ocean surrounding Cuba, but the concept remains the same. The U.S. blockade during the Cuban Missile Crisis applied the necessary pressure to increase Khrushchev's willingness to negotiate, while not escalating the crisis to the point of war between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.). Existing U.N. Security Council sanctions could serve as a similar mechanism to coerce Kim Jung Un to the negotiating table.

Since North Korea's nuclear and missile tests in 2006, the United Nations Security Council has adopted numerous resolutions regarding North Korea. These resolutions prohibit U.N. member states from "direct or indirect supply, sale, or transfer" of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile materials and technologies to the DPRK.³⁷ They authorize member states to inspect North Korean cargo within their territory and to seize any prohibited items. The resolutions also prohibit any financial support that might contribute to nuclear and missile activities.³⁸

As North Korea continued to conduct nuclear and missile tests, later resolutions grew more comprehensive and far-reaching. They include sanctions to freeze assets and ban travel of designated North Korean individuals and entities. Furthermore, sectoral sanctions prohibit North Korean exports of minerals (e.g., copper, nickel, silver, and zinc). Sanctions also ban North Korean textile exports and prohibit member states from transporting natural gas to the DPRK. They place strict limitations on all refined petroleum products, including diesel and kerosene, to the North and limit the amount of crude oil exports from member states. Resolutions prohibit bulk cash transfers and restrict access to the international banking system.³⁹ In order to coerce Pyongyang to negotiate, U.N. member states, including China and Russia, must cooperate.

Evaluating Moral Rightness

When the U.S.S.R. emplaced ballistic missiles in Cuba, America had a moral obligation to intervene in order to protect America, its citizens, and its allies in the Western Hemisphere. Therefore, U.S. diplomats appealed to the Organization of American States (OAS) for legal justification, thereby aligning the quarantine with the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance of 1947 (Rio Treaty) which authorized the American Republics to "provide for effective reciprocal assistance to meet armed

attacks against any American state and...to deal with threats of aggression against any of them.”⁴⁰ The Soviet deployment of offensive missiles in Cuba was just such an act of aggression, so JFK waited until after U.S. diplomats secured OAS’s 19 to 0 vote of approval to implement the quarantine.⁴¹

Adlai Stevenson, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, also served a critical role in securing legitimacy for the U.S. quarantine. During an October 25, 1962, U.N. Security Council session, he confronted the Soviet ambassador asking, “Do you, Ambassador Zorin, deny that the U.S.S.R. has placed, and is placing, medium and intermediate range missiles, and sites in Cuba?”⁴² When Zorin refused to answer the question, Stevenson presented photographic evidence of Soviet missiles in Cuba to the U.N. Security Council, which effectively discredited Zorin who continued to deny the deployment of Soviet missiles to Cuba.⁴³

The United States is also seeking a multilateral approach for dealing with North Korea. As previously discussed, America is working through the U.N. Security Council to sanction the DPRK. By working through the United Nations, Washington has secured widespread support and legitimacy for sanctions targeting North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs.

Warning about the Dangers Associated with Available Options

The greatest danger during the Cuban Missile Crisis was the potential for a miscalculation leading to nuclear war. Two events highlight this point. On October 27, 1962, U.S. Air Force pilot, Major “Rudy” Anderson Jr., died when a Soviet SA-2 surface-to-air missile (SAM) destroyed his U-2 reconnaissance airplane. President Kennedy and his advisors assumed the attack was part of Khrushchev’s plan to escalate the crisis. So significant was the event that President Kennedy ordered RFK to deliver an ultimatum

during his October 27 meeting with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin. RFK's message was straightforward: "The Soviets should begin dismantling the missiles within 48 hours or the United States would strike."⁴⁴ Had Khrushchev not capitulated the following day, the crisis may have continued to escalate.

A second event on October 27 highlights the potential for miscalculation during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The U.S. Navy located four Russian submarines in the Atlantic Ocean responsible for securing Soviet ships in transit to Cuba. Soviet submarine B-59 carried a nuclear torpedo with a 10-kiloton warhead. According to Soviet regulations, the submarine had to receive coded instruction from Moscow in order to launch the nuclear torpedo. However, no physical or technical measures precluded the captain and officer in charge of the torpedo from launching the weapon. When the United States began dropping hand grenade-sized practice depth charges to signal the submarine to surface, the B-59 crew felt like being "inside a metal barrel that someone is constantly blasting with a sledgehammer." Although the U.S. Navy attempted to communicate its new procedure for signaling submarines to the surface, the B-59 crew never received Washington's message regarding the new U.S. Navy procedure. Exhausted and confused, B-59 captain Valentin Savitsky ordered the nuclear torpedo made combat ready. However, the chief of staff of the submarine flotilla, Vasily Arkhipov, was a visitor on-board the B-59 and refused to support Savitsky's plan to use of the nuclear torpedo. Arkhipov convinced Savitsky to surface his submarine thus averting the use of the nuclear torpedo.⁴⁵

In today's struggle between Washington and Pyongyang, the potential for miscalculation is a very real possibility. In August 2017, President Trump warned North

Korea, “any more threats to the United States...will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen.” In response, North Korea threatened to launch missiles to create “an enveloping fire” around Guam.⁴⁶ Two days later, President Trump tweeted, “Military solutions are now fully in place, locked and loaded, should North Korea act unwisely. Hopefully Kim Jong Un will find another path!”⁴⁷ Such brinksmanship has the potential to escalate an already delicate situation, and miscalculation on either side could lead to war.

Recommended Strategy for Dealing with the North Korean Threat

The Cuban Missile Crisis analogy reveals six lessons regarding the North Korean threat. First, America must not tolerate North Korea’s aggressive attempts to develop nuclear ICBMs capable of ranging the continental United States. Second, while the situation with North Korea has not reached a point of crisis whereby the DPRK poses an existential threat to the U.S. homeland, the stakes are vital to U.S. national security. Third, the implicit prescription for dealing with Pyongyang is coercive diplomacy. Next, this strategy has only a moderate chance of succeeding. Fifth, the United States has a moral right to intervene in order to protect America, its citizens, and U.S. allies. Lastly, the greatest danger is the risk of miscalculation leading to war or a nuclear exchange.

Congruence Test

By testing the congruence between the lessons of the Cuba analogy and the available options for dealing with North Korea, one can determine whether the analogy is suitable as an approach (see Figure 1 for the lessons).⁴⁸

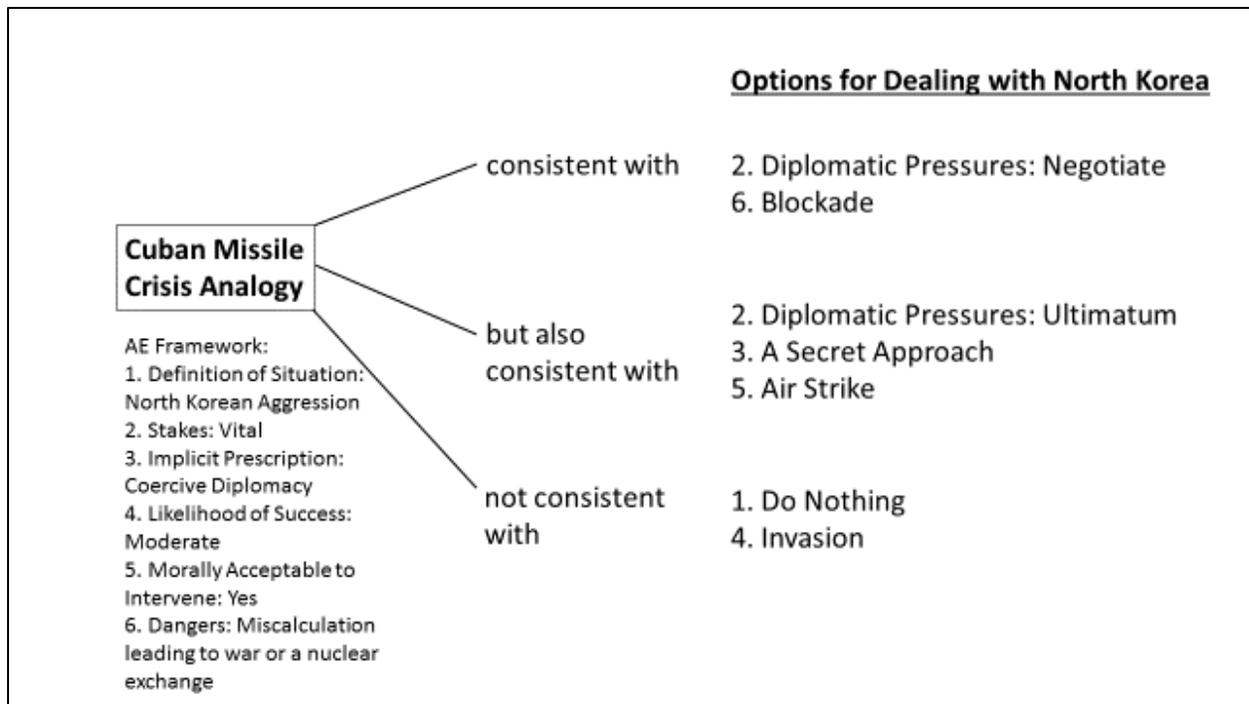


Figure 1. Lessons of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Recommended Option⁴⁹

The first option, do nothing, is at odds with five of the six lessons from the Cuban Missile Crisis analogy. They are: 1) The United States must not tolerate North Korea’s aggressive attempts to develop nuclear ICBMs capable of ranging the continental United States; 2) the stakes are vital to U.S. national security; 3) the implicit solution is a coercive diplomacy; 4) coercive diplomacy has a moderate chance of working; and 5) the United States has a moral right to intervene in order to protect America, its citizens, and U.S. allies. Washington is actively pursuing a diplomatic and economic pressure campaign to deal with North Korea.⁵⁰ Therefore, the Trump administration would have to abandon these efforts to embrace the Do Nothing alternative.

The fourth option, invasion, is consistent with lessons 1, 2, and 6. However, a U.S. led invasion of North Korea is not consistent with lesson 3 as coercive diplomacy “seeks to persuade an opponent to cease aggression rather than to bludgeon him into

stopping.”⁵¹ The invasion option does not support lesson 4 because this approach has a low probability of success. An attack seeking to secure or destroy North Korea's nuclear and missile infrastructure and to force regime change poses significant risk to the United States and its allies. This option would likely lead to Chinese intervention and substantial loss of life and destruction. The United States would also face a long-term obligation to stabilize the Korean peninsula following combat operations, if the invasion was successful. The invasion option is also inconsistent with lesson 5 because both domestic and international audiences would question America's moral right to conduct such an attack given likely collateral damage to civilian populations and infrastructure. While the U.N. Security Council approved multiple resolutions sanctioning the DPRK, it is likely that many U.N. member states would protest an invasion. Therefore, the U.S. would lose legitimacy by invading North Korea.

The implied recommendation, coercive diplomacy, is an approach combining the second option (diplomatic pressure to negotiate) and the sixth option (blockade) and is consistent with the six lessons from the Cuba analogy. However, the second option (diplomatic pressure by ultimatum), the third option (a secret approach), and the fifth option (air strike) are consistent with the lessons from Cuba.

Recommended Strategy for Dealing with North Korea

Consider Figure 2 that uses a timeline to depict a possible plan for implementing the recommended strategy for dealing with North Korea. The Trump administration began its term in office on January 20, 2017. If the president runs for a second term and secures the vote, then he will have an additional four years in office. However, the Trump administration is prudent in taking action now because it is unknown when the

DPRK will develop nuclear ICBMs capable of ranging the continental United States and whether the administration will have a second term.

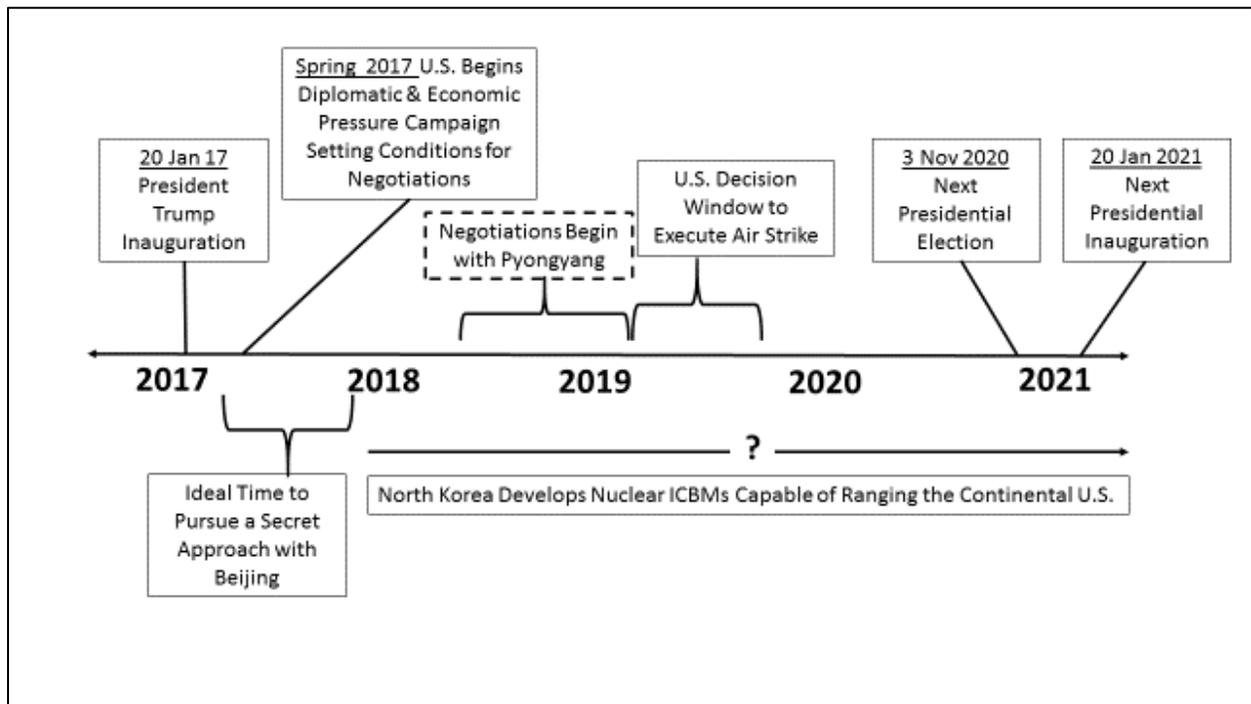


Figure 2. Implementing the Recommended Strategy for Dealing with North Korea

The implied recommendation from the Cuban Missile Crisis analogy is coercive diplomacy. This strategy is similar to America’s current diplomatic and economic pressurization campaign against North Korea that began in the spring of 2017 to compel Pyongyang to the negotiating table. This approach depends largely on U.N. Security Council sanctions having their intended effect. Therefore, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is also calling for increased pressure from Beijing and Moscow, which are not wholeheartedly enforcing sanctions. China must stop exporting crude oil to North Korean refineries, and Russia must not permit North Korean laborers to work within Russian borders in exchange for wages used to fund North Korea’s nuclear program.⁵²

On December 22, 2017, the U.N. Security Council, including China and Russia, adopted Resolution 2397, which specifically addresses Tillerson's concerns. In the case of China, the resolution limits the "supply, sale or transfer" of crude oil by member states to North Korea. Additionally, member states must report the amount of crude oil they provide to the DPRK every 90 days. In Russia's case, Resolution 2397 bans member states from providing work authorizations for DPRK nationals, requires member states to repatriate North Korean nationals earning income in their jurisdictions within twenty-four months from December 22, 2017, and specifies reporting timelines to the United Nations.⁵³ If China and Russia cooperate, then negotiations with North Korea could begin in 2018 or early 2019. Such negotiations could occur in a multilateral forum such as the six-party talks (negotiations consisting of the two Koreas, the United States, China, Russia, and Japan, which occurred from 2003 to 2009) or the United Nations, or Washington could elect for bilateral negotiations with Pyongyang.

Washington could also attempt a secret approach with Beijing in a parallel effort to the pressure campaign. The PRC will not support a U.S. policy of regime change in North Korea or a policy aimed at unifying the Korean peninsula.⁵⁴ Therefore, such an approach would require Washington to offer assurances that the United States is not seeking regime change in North Korea or unification of the Korean peninsula. Doing so might secure Beijing's full cooperation, as China likely prefers to remain the sole nuclear power in East Asia enabling it to pursue regional hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region. Assurances would also allow China to maintain North Korea as a buffer between it and the U.S.-backed ROK.

If these options fail to halt North Korea's nuclear and missile programs or cause Pyongyang to abandon them altogether, then America maintains the option to conduct an air strike targeting the DPRK's nuclear and missile infrastructure and storage sites. A September 2017 Gallup poll surveyed 1,022 U.S. adults and found that 58% favor military action against North Korea if the United States cannot accomplish its goals through economic and diplomatic efforts.⁵⁵ Therefore, a likely decision window for the Trump administration to conduct an air strike is sometime in 2019, after it has given its diplomatic and economic pressure campaign time to work. Ongoing diplomatic efforts in the United Nations will likely gain further legitimacy for a strike if the current approach is unable to produce an acceptable settlement. The timing of the strike option could accelerate depending on North Korea's development and testing programs. Even if the DPRK is able to develop nuclear ICBMs capable of ranging the continental United States, the Ground-based Midcourse Defense portion of the U.S. Ballistic Missile Defense System is capable of defeating threats from North Korea's nascent missile program.

Conclusion

The Trump administration should use the Cuban Missile Crisis as a historical analogy to inform its policy and develop a strategy for dealing with the North Korean threat. The six options considered by President Kennedy and ExCOMM for addressing Soviet ballistic missiles in Cuba provide realistic alternatives for President Trump. These options help form a comprehensive strategy that will empower the administration to effectively deal with Pyongyang during President Trump's first term in office. There is no easy solution for the DPRK threat, so Washington must carefully manage the North

Korean challenge as it continues to pursue nuclear ICBMs capable of reaching the continental United States.

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