

To War or Not To War: Modern Presidential Decisions Lessons on the Cuban Missile Crisis, Iraq War, and Anti-Terrorism

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Overview:

Decisions in regards to matters of war policy pose difficult dilemmas for a president and his advisors. The following lesson plan explores that war dilemma. It is in three parts, and can be used as one cumulative lesson or can be used individually. The first lesson delves into the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the second lesson explores the 2002 Iraq situation, and the third lesson unpacks the Obama administration's policy in conducting the war on terrorism. Students are confronted with the issues, and invited to role-play as advisors to the president recommending the course they would choose. The ethical dilemmas of war, justifications for war, and the issue of security vs. liberty are presented in this three-part lesson plan.

Grade Level:

This lesson is designed for high school level and collegiate level (in which I have used it many times) for American history and government courses. It may be used for middle school students if the students' critical thinking and aptitude levels are high.

Time Frame:

The entire lesson plan will likely take three to four one-hour class periods, though each lesson used individually can be accomplished in a single one-hour class, which includes follow-up discussion.

Presentation type:

Small and large group discussion, role-play, debate, written assignment, A-V.

National Standards:

- NSS-C.9-12.1: Why are government and politics necessary? What purposes should government serve? What are the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited government?
- NSS-C.9-12.4: What is the Relationship of the United States to Other Nations and to World Affairs? How do the domestic politics and constitutional principles of the United States affect its relations with the world? How has the United States influenced other nations, and how have other nations influenced American politics and society?
- NSS-USH.5-12.9 ERA 9: Postwar United States (1945-1970s). Understanding how the Cold War and conflicts in Korea and Vietnam influenced domestic and international politics.
- NSS-USH.9-12.10 ERA 10: Contemporary United States (1968 to the present). Understanding recent developments in foreign and domestic politics.

Objectives:

- To learn the options available to President Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 as well as to President Bush in advance of the Iraq conflict in 2002.
- To comprehend the current issues relating to terrorism which face our country.

Enduring Understandings:

- To understand the complexities of political decision-making (so as to appreciate the varying points of view a president must consider in making a decision).
- To consider why or under what circumstances military action should be exercised, and the ethical dilemmas which go into such decisions.
- To evaluate the balance of protecting constitutional liberties while upholding security in an age of terrorism.

Procedures:

Lesson 1: Decision on the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962

- a. Step a: This lesson fits nicely either within a discussion of the presidency of John Kennedy or on the Cold War. No introduction needed, though a little background knowledge on the tension between the USA and the Soviets will be helpful. To make this lesson work effectively, do not yet discuss how Kennedy ultimately decided to avoid a nuclear war in 1962.
- b. Step b: Divide the class into groups comprised of about four students for each group. The number of groups in the class does not matter.
- c. Step c: Ask for a volunteer. That volunteer does not need to know yet what he/she will be doing, however that student will serve as President Kennedy.
- d. Step d: Inform the class that the setting is October 1962, and that they are advisors to the president. Shine on an overhead or PowerPoint the document entitled “Report to the President and advisors on the background to the current Missile Crisis in Cuba, October 17, 1962.”
- e. Step e: Tell the class: “Thank you to all of you for coming here on short notice. As you all serve as the president’s chief foreign policy advisors, we have called you today with grave urgency. Let me run down for you the recent events.” Then read over the “Report to the President and advisors...” document.
- f. Step f: Pass out the options sheet (page 2 of the “Report to the President...”). Tell them, “In your groups, you must decide on which option you think is best to present to the president on how to handle the missile crisis.” Give them time to discuss and answer any questions for understanding.
- g. Step g: Meanwhile, have the president sit in your desk chair or set up a desk with a chair or have a podium at the front of the room. Tell the student that his or her job is to listen to the opinions presented, then make a decision among the options presented. That student can have the options sheet for reference.
- h. Step h: Have each group take turns informing the president as his/her advisors of their preferred option, mentioning why they think it is a better option than the others. They might make this in the form of a speech if so desired. I have found that almost always every option will be selected by at least one group.

- i. Step i: When all groups have completed, announce, “Thank you advisors. The president is grateful for your opinions. Now, Mr. (or Madame) President, what will you do about the Cuba situation? The president then chooses an option.
- j. Step j: Inform the class of President Kennedy’s real decision (blockade) and why he chose that route. Have the class discuss why that may have been the best choice, and what possible results may have come of the other options.
- k. Step k: Show a clip from the movie *Thirteen Days* where Kennedy discusses the ethics of warfare and lessons learned from World War I. The clip on the DVD version is scene 17 from 1:05.45-1:12.50. The clip occurs before Kennedy made his decision on Cuba, and in the clip JFK discusses why he felt certain that quarantine was a much better option than the other options. It gets to the heart of the ethics of war. Discuss the clip and discuss overall thoughts on presidential decision-making.

Lesson 2: Decision on Iraq, 2002

- a. Step a: This lesson fits nicely as a follow-up to the previous assignment, or as a stand-alone lesson. This lesson leads into a discussion of why we went into Iraq in 2003. Previous discussion on the presidency either in a history or government class is helpful. Different from lesson 1, this lesson is designed as more of an individual assignment followed by large-group discussion, though it can be altered.
- b. Step b: Pass out “Should We Use Military Force to Unseat Saddam Hussein’s Government,” or post it online for them to read. Tell them the following in advance of doing the assignment: “Much of the public believes that invading Iraq in 2003 was a foreign policy blunder. You’re going to do an assignment which may confirm that in your mind, or it may change your mind. To do this correctly, you must pretend it is 2002. George W. Bush is president. The attacks of 9/11 occurred just one year ago. We then invaded Afghanistan to destroy terror camps there and to overthrow the terror-supportive Taliban government. We now turn our attention to Iraq. Read over the “Memo to the President” sheet. Read the arguments that were put forward to President Bush of why we should take action in Iraq, and then read over the arguments of why we should not do so. Remember, it is 2002 and we have not yet gone into the recent Iraq War. You are an advisor on Bush’s national security team. Write a “Dear President Bush” letter as an advisor. In the letter write to the president explaining why you think we should go using arguments from the paper, or write why you don’t think we should go also using arguments from the paper. The assignment will be due and discussed the next class day.”
- c. Step c: The next class day, just as in lesson 1, ask for a volunteer, who will serve as the president. (If you do this lesson following the previous one, ensure that a different student serves as president).
- d. Step d: State, “Thank you national security team for being here. As you know the situation in Iraq is a serious one. You have read the memo, and I’ve invited the president here to hear your counsel.” Have students take turns

summarizing what they have written. I have always had classes with mixed opinions on the invasion.

- e. Step e: Similar to lesson 1, have the president decide, “Should we ask Congress for authority to enter Iraq, or should we not consider invasion?”
- f. Step f: Discuss their conclusions. I always ask why the public generally believes that the Iraq invasion was wrong, yet so many of the students argued that position as a presidential advisor.
- g. Step g: As a follow-up, tell the students that Bush asked for approval from Congress before the March 2003 invasion took place. It might also be helpful to discuss what happened after the initial invasion all the way through the drawdown, and perhaps the varying opinions on how that may have led to ISIS.

Lesson 3: Security vs. liberty and the current issues in the War on Terror, 2015

- a. Step a: This lesson is appropriate in an American government class or current issues course where current counter-terrorism measures are discussed. Show the preamble of the Constitution on an overhead screen and have students read it. Have them discuss why these items are listed in the preamble to the Constitution (answer: they outline what the purpose of government is). Then have them call out what the purposes of government are according to the preamble. Hopefully they will arrive at the following:
 - Establish justice (i.e., creates a framework and system of rules)
 - Insure domestic tranquility (i.e., keeps order & peace within the country)
 - Provide for the common defense (i.e., protects us from outside our borders)
 - Promote the general welfare (i.e., provides general service to citizens)
 - Secure the blessings of liberty (i.e., protects rights & liberties)
- b. Step b: Have students debate which is the most important of the purposes of government. (You will get varying answers).
- c. Step c: Mention the attacks of September 11, 2001 forever changed both the role of government and the relationship of the government to its citizens. Show on a screen or write on the board the following quote from Bush’s attorney general John Ashcroft after 9/11: “We will take every possible action to make sure that this kind of injury and assault on America and on its freedoms does not happen again.” Ask them what they think that quote means and how it might change the role of government (answer: it expanded the power and purpose of government to provide for the common defense and to keep us secure). Then ask that if security increases, what other purpose of government might come into conflict with (answer: liberty). Inform them that even though Bush is no longer president, the same conflict of security vs. liberty remains.
- d. Step d: Despite his opposition to Bush’s policies when he ran for president in 2008, President Obama has actually strengthened many of those efforts that he once opposed. Either write on the board, on PowerPoint, or orally mention the following Obama’s policies:

- Drones – Since he took office, the Obama administration has dramatically increased use of drones overseas to kill suspected terrorists
 - Surveillance & spying - Obama extended wiretapping law, spying, and has allowed NSA officials to collect and store data about Americans
 - Secrecy - Despite his campaign pledge about “transparency,” the administration has tightly guarded information about its spying and drones, and has prosecuted “whistle-blower” leaks to media
 - Guantanamo Bay (Gitmo)- Despite his pledge to close Gitmo Bay, he has retreated after from Congress
- e. Step e: After briefly mentioning or writing on the board each item above, assign students or have them choose one of the above “Obama rules.” Assign them the following questions:
- Write a written report analyzing one of the policies by answering these questions:
 - Describe what the policy is and what it has entailed
 - Explain why Obama chose to use this policy, and how effective it has been
 - Provide criticisms of that particular policy from the courts, the public, political opponents
 - how that policy has changed over the course of recent years
 - Evaluate whether you think this is a good policy for the U.S. to be involved in, and judge both the ethics and the constitutionality of it.
- f. Step f: When the reports are due, have the class discuss what they found. This has never failed to produce a very passionate debate about our current anti-terrorism policy, about the power of government in the name of security, and the importance of protection of liberties.

Modifications to all lessons:

- As stated previously, one lesson or all three lessons can be used.
- For higher-functioning classes, the role-play or the written assignment in part 3 can be replaced by a debate.

Extension Activities:

- A questionnaire can be conducted interviewing people’s thoughts on the Iraq War or the Obama counter-terrorism policies.
- Invite a guest speaker (especially a recent war veteran).
- Read the Senate report on the CIA Detention and Interrogation Program and have them explore that document.
- Watch a movie that relates to waterboarding. *Rendition* or *Boys of Abu Grahیب* are particularly good, but extreme caution should be exercised as both are rated R for excess language and violence.

References:

- The Foreign Policy Research Institute (<http://www.fpri.org/>) has on their website many fabulous articles which relate to the current foreign policy issues in our country.

- Balancedpolitics.org (http://balancedpolitics.org/iraq_war.htm) is a great site on the pros and cons of many current issues.
- Tom Craughwell's book, *The Buck Stops Here: The 28 Toughest Presidential Decisions and How They Changed History* is a great reference for more on the many difficult decisions which presidents have had to face.

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Should We Use Military Force to Unseat Saddam Hussein's Government?

Memo To the President from the National Security Advisor: October, 10, 2002

Saddam Hussein has run a brutal dictatorship in Iraq for over 20 years. In 1991 he invaded neighboring countries of Iran and Kuwait, leading to the death of about 1.5 million. The Persian Gulf War of 1991 was a U.S.-led campaign to expel Saddam from Kuwait. U.N. (and U.S.) forces were able to defeat Saddam within a couple of months. Saddam was allowed to stay in power if he fulfilled a number of conditions, most notably, getting rid of all chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. 12 years and 17 resolutions later, he hasn't gotten rid of his weapons or fulfilled the conditions of the cease fire. On the contrary, it is believed that he has stockpiled more weapons, only to use them in mass against Iraq's neighbors or even the United States. With Saddam's history of connections to terrorism and his history of brutality & defiance, the U.S. and much of the Western world considers him a threat to world peace. A U.N. resolution was unanimously passed a few months ago mandating full disarmament. Saddam still appears to be defying the order.

Should We Act—Arguments For

Saddam's human rights record is among the worst in the world and in history. Saddam runs a regime in which he regularly tortures, rapes, mutilates, burns, starves, and murders political dissidents and anyone he arbitrarily decides is a threat to his power. He has even used chemical weapons to poison thousands of Kurds in northern Iraq. Saddam has tested his chemical & biological weapons on prisoners. Do we really want to trust someone with such a low regard for human life potentially with weapons of mass destruction? If allowed to continue, he will be no different than Hitler or Stalin who killed millions.

Saddam is a major threat to stability of the Middle East. Saddam is driven by power and conquest. He has attacked Iran and Kuwait in the past in an effort to monopolize much of the world's oil supply. He is obsessed with a movement to unite the Arab world into one power to oppose the Western world. The region always seems one step away from a large, destructive conflict. Saddam is just waiting for his chance to spark that conflict. Imagine how much worse it would be if Saddam had nuclear weapons to blackmail the West. Most international intelligence experts estimate Saddam will have nuclear weapons in 1-5 years. Wouldn't it be better to act before he does?

Saddam is connected with terrorists and may supply them with weapons of mass destruction. Saddam has had a history of connections with terrorism. He was tied to a foiled assassination attempt in Kuwait on the first President Bush. He publicly supplies \$25,000 payments to the families of any Palestinian suicide bomber. His government has threatened a wave of suicide bombers being sent to the U.S. if we attack. And given this man's history, can we really doubt he would use terrorism anywhere, anytime. What's particularly troubling is the possibility that he may give nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons technology to terrorists. Terrorists such as Osama bin Laden wouldn't hesitate to use these weapons if they got them. Saddam could attack the U.S. without us having the ability to trace it back to him.

A model democracy could be set up in the Arab world, possibly leading other Arab governments to follow suit. Virtually the entire Arab world is ruled by governments where power is concentrated in the hands of relatively few. Democracy and freedom of speech & religion are foreign concepts to them. Most of the press in the region is controlled by the government. By unseating Saddam, we have a chance to set up a model democracy with elections, 1st amendment freedoms, and a free market economy. We can show the Arab world how successful such a system can be, and this could be the beginning of democracy throughout the one part of the world that has resisted it the most.

Oil prices could dramatically drop with a short, successful campaign. More uncontrolled oil supply from this region could lead to dramatically lower oil prices.

The credibility of the U.S. and the U.N. is at stake. The idea of the new "Bush Doctrine" is to strike any nation that supports terrorism pre-emptively and discourage such actions in the future. We've spent most of the last year talking about forcing Saddam to disarm. If after all this talk and all this military buildup we decide to back down, no country will respect or fear us in the future. This is also a critical moment in history for the U.N. Saddam has made a mockery of the entire U.N. process. In his mind, the 17 U.N. resolutions passed against him are nothing, and that our word means nothing

Should We Not Act—Arguments Against

Many soldiers & innocent Iraqi civilians will be killed. No war is ever totally predictable, and in this case, the number of lives lost could be catastrophic. Saddam is likely to use his chemical and biological weapons. In addition to the number of potential soldiers killed, many unprotected Iraqi civilians could fall victim to the attacks. Saddam also is likely to try to draw U.S. soldiers into dangerous street fighting. Saddam may even deliberately kill thousands of his own people and blame the U.S. in an attempt to turn world opinion even more in his favor.

The financial cost of executing the war may be prohibitive. Paying soldiers, dropping "smart" bombs, launching Patriot missiles, etc. costs an enormous amount of money. Unlike the first Gulf War when countries such as Saudi Arabia and Japan picked up much of the tab, the U.S. will bear the brunt of the cost. Estimates of cost have ranged from 30 billion to the 100s of billions. And that's just the *execution* of the war. You also have to add in the cost of occupying & re-building Iraq. Can we really afford this?

Anti-American sentiment could grow in the world, creating new potential terrorist recruits. Anti-Americanism has been growing rapidly, as evidenced by the war protests and public opinion polls in the world. Any significant death & destruction in a war would likely be blamed on the United States. Hatred of the U.S. has already led to numerous terrorist attacks, and could produce more Osamas.

Hard evidence of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction still hasn't been found. Saddam has had weapons, and the technical capacity to mass produce more. However inspectors have yet to find them.

The post-Saddam Iraq situation could be unstable and destructive. The Iraqi people have never known democracy. It's very risky to assume they'll be able to form a functioning, efficient democracy. There's always the potential for civil war, power struggles, and other problems. It could trigger more insurgency terrorist uprisings in Iraq, and elsewhere, especially between the Sunni and Shiite Muslim sects.

A pre-emptive attack is against what the U.S. stands for. In past wars, the U.S. has usually been able to claim the higher moral authority. We've attacked only after first being attacked by others. A new doctrine of preemption would give credibility to those that describe the U.S. as an aggressive, imperialistic nation. This is a dangerous precedent when you're the most powerful nation in the world.

With the economic and domestic security problems we have, this is a bad time to go to war. The stock market is close to its lowest level in 5 years, unemployment is relatively high, and we will soon be generating record deficits. We also are on high alert for terrorist strikes from Al Qaeda. One has to ask if this really is the best time to go to war in Iraq, especially if Saddam isn't an *imminent* threat to the U.S.?

Report to the President and advisors on the background to the current Missile Crisis in Cuba, October 17, 1962

- After WWII hostility and cold tensions rose between the U.S. and the Soviets (Russia) over vastly different beliefs: democracy vs. communism, individual rights vs. totalitarian control, and Soviet domination of neighboring countries
- As a result of this hostility and mistrust, both U.S. & Russia began building their military strength to make itself so powerful the other country would not dare attack, including an escalating arms race of the atomic and hydrogen bombs
- Now, if war would break out, neither country would be able to prevent the other from killing most of that country, or even perhaps most of the world's entire population
- Since the 1950s both countries have developed bases nears its enemy in which to launch an invasion if it ever happened. The U.S. has developed a base and missile sites in Turkey, near the Soviet border in 1961
- The Soviets weren't able to find an ally close to U.S. shores until 1959 when Fidel Castro staged a communist revolution there in Cuba, and Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev has established close political and economic ties with Castro
- In response, the U.S. broke diplomatic relations with Cuba, and even staged an invasion of Cuba in 1961 which failed.
- In early October 1962, the CIA discovered medium range missiles in Cuba pointed towards the U.S., and Soviet ships were delivering parts to rapidly build more missiles
- On October 15, the CIA learned that Soviets needed only a few days to finish building the missile sites and launch an attack if they so choose
- There is a real probability that we are at the very brink of nuclear war. The Soviets do not know we know about the missiles in Cuba. How do we force them to back down?

Option 1:

Have President Kennedy send a representative to Moscow, Russia to talk with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. Inform Khrushchev privately that U.S. intelligence has learned about the missiles and firmly insist that the missiles must be removed immediately.

Why this is good: Secrecy. The Soviet could remove the missiles without having the rest of the world learn they have given in to the U.S. demands.

Possible consequence: Embarrassment to the U.S. The Soviets might make a public announcement about the situation, request an international conference be scheduled, and at that conference, state they will remove their missiles from Cuba if the U.S. removes its missiles from Turkey.

Option 2:

The U.S. should present its case before the United Nations. The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations should insist that the Soviets and the Cubans publicly explain their actions before the United Nations. The U.S. ambassador should also request the United Nations to order the removal of the missiles from Cuba.

Why this is good: The U.S. could get world public opinion and fear of Russia firmly on its side.

Possible consequence: The Soviets, who have a representative to the United Nations could veto any proposal. Also, by the time, the United Nations could act, the Soviets could complete installation of the missiles.

Option 3:

The U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force should launch a coordinated attack against Cuba. After the missile bases have been bombed and destroyed, U.S. troops should take over the missile sites, overthrow Castro, and establish a new government that is sympathetic to the U.S.

Why this is good: If successful, many concerns about Castro, Cuba, and communism next door would immediately end. Also, the missile bases would be destroyed.

Possible consequence: A coordinated attack would take a great deal of preparation and time. It would depend on the difficult task of a surprise attack. Many American lives would be lost and possible Cuban lives lost. Russia would be under strong pressure to fight back. Possibly world opinion would be against the U.S.

Option 4:

The U.S. should use its navy to surround Cuba, thus refusing to allow any Russian ships carrying supplies to Cuba to land there. This would include stopping any ships from other nations carrying military supplies.

Why this is good: The U.S. already controls the seas around Cuba and no other nation, including the Soviets, are powerful enough to challenge the U.S. The U.S. could determine what supplies allowed to enter.

Possible consequence: Other nations might become angry at the U.S. for interfering with trade. This could also inflame the tensions with Russia and provoke them towards war.