Cuban Missile Crisis

Directions: Read the following information and complete the related questions.

Overview of the Cuban Missile Crisis

A major confrontation during the Cold War was the Cuban Missile Crisis which occurred between the former Soviet Union and the United States over thirteen days in October of 1962.

The event is regarded as the time that the Cold War became the closest to turning into a nuclear conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States.

Two events occurred which caused the Soviet Union to move missiles into Cuba. First, the United States had placed nuclear missiles in the countries of Turkey and Italy aimed at Moscow and other strategic locations in the former Soviet Union. Secondly, the United States conducted a failed attempt to overthrow the Cuban dictatorship government in May of 1962. This is now known as the invasion of the “Bay of Pigs”. The Soviet Union leader, Premier Nikita Khrushchev, surfaced the idea of placing nuclear missiles in Cuba to deter any future invasion of Cuba and also to send a message that the Soviet Union was not happy with the United States missiles aimed at them from the countries of Italy and Turkey.

Premier Nikita Khrushchev and the Cuban leader, Fidel Castro reached a then secret agreement in July of 1962 and construction soon followed on several missile sites in Cuba.

The United States intelligence saw these missile construction sites and on October 14, 1962 flew an United States Air Force U-2 aircraft over Cuba which obtained the photographic evidence that Soviet built medium range and inter-mediate range nuclear missiles were present in Cuba. The United States government discussed the possibility of attacking Cuba by sea and air. A second option was to block supplies to Cuba by using the United States’ navy and air force in order to blockade Cuba. The United States decided to proceed with a naval and air blockade for the purposes of blocking the delivery of any further missiles from the Soviet Union to Cuba. The United States demanded that Cuba and the Soviet Union remove any current missiles already in place and to return all missiles and their support systems to the Soviet Union.
The United States government under President John F. Kennedy believed that the government of the Soviet Union would not agree to the demands of the United States and expected a military confrontation of some sort over the issue.

On October 24, 1962 a letter from Premier Khrushchev to President Kennedy indicated that the United States blockade of navigation in international waters and air space constituted an act of aggression which would go down a path of a nuclear missile war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Unknown to the world, President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev had initiated secret communications which were conducted up to the conclusion of the crisis.

Soviet ships attempted to avoid the United States blockade of Cuba during the secret talks between the two countries. The United States Navy was given orders to fire warning shots at these ships and, if they did not stop, to then fire directly at them. October 27, 1962 a United States U-2 surveillance airplane was shot down by a Soviet missile crew stationed in Cuba. At this point international tensions were very high on all sides and this could have resulted in immediate retaliation from the United States which would have further escalated the crisis. President Kennedy decided to continue with negotiations in an effort to come to a peaceful conclusion.
On October 28, 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis ended when President Kennedy, Premier Khrushchev and the United Nations General Assembly leader, Mr. U Thant reached an agreement. Public statements were made that the Soviet Union is returning their missiles in Cuba to the Soviet Union and this would be verified by the United Nations. The United States agreed to never invade Cuba as well as to dismantle and remove their nuclear weapons which were deployed in Turkey and Italy.

The United States blockade of Cuba ended on November 20, 1962.

**Outcomes from the Cuban Missile Crisis**

The tense negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union pointed out the necessity of a quick, clear and direct communication link between Washington and Moscow. As a result, the hotline, (direct telephone contact), between Moscow and Washington was established.

Cuba believed that the Soviet Union had betrayed them, especially since Fidel Castro, the Cuban Leader, was not involved in any negotiations and the US Naval Base in Guantanamo, Cuba was allowed to remain in place.

In contrast though, Cuba was now protected from any invasion by the United States.

The compromise embarrassed Premier Khrushchev and the Soviet Union’s government. The Soviet Union was viewed as retreating from a circumstance that they themselves started. Nikita Khrushchev lost power and control of the Communist Party government two years later, partly because of the embarrassment brought on to the Soviet government by him beginning this crisis and his agreement with the United States. Some in the Soviet Union viewed what happened as a humiliation to their country’s prestige.
Directions: Complete the following by using the reading and images above.

1. According to the information, what two events caused the Soviet Union to want to place missiles in Cuba?

2. Explain how the United States discovered that the Soviet Union was attempting to place missiles in Cuba.

3. How did the United States respond once it was discovered that the Soviet Union was placing missiles in Cuba?

4. Explain how the Cuban Missile Crisis was resolved.
5. In the space below, identify and explain how each of the following were affected by the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis and its outcome.
   a. United States

   b. Soviet Union

   c. Cuba

6. What did the United States and the Soviet Union do to try to ensure that an event like the Cuban Missile Crisis did not occur again?

7. Why is the Cuban Missile Crisis significant as an event in...
   a. The Cold War?

   b. Human History?