The Cuban Missile Crisis
An Epilogue
From The Cuban Missile Crisis: Considering its Place in Cold War History
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Blockade!!!
- Oct. 20, President Kennedy decided on a blockade of Cuba
- He used the word “quarantine” instead of “blockade” because according to international law a blockade was an act of war
- Kennedy thought the “quarantine” would be the first step of a long conflict with the Soviets
- Blockade went into effect Oct. 24

Khrushchev was pissed!!!
- Khrushchev said U.S. was violating international law with the blockade
- Regarding Soviet missiles in Cuba he said the missiles were meant...
  “exclusively for defense purposes, in order to secure the Cuban republic from an aggressor’s attack.”
- Soviets threatened to sink any U.S. vessel that tried to prevent their passage to Cuba
DEFCON 2!!!

- U.S. government put its forces on DEFCON 2 ("defense condition" 2) alert for the first and only time in U.S. history
  - Battle staffs on 24-hour alert
  - All military personnel forbidden to go on leave
  - 183 bombers dispatched to 33 airfields
  - 1/8 of all B-52 bombers were constantly airborne
  - Additional bombers placed on alert on runways throughout U.S.
  - 90 nuclear missiles placed at heightened state of readiness

U-2 spy plane shot down!!!

- Oct. 27, Soviet forces shot down a U.S. spy plane over Cuba, killing the pilot, Rudolf Anderson
- Meanwhile, Soviets were working around the clock to make the missiles operational

Two letters!!!

- Khrushchev wrote two letters to Kennedy
  - 1st was received Oct. 26—Khrushchev said the Soviet Union would take its missiles out of Cuba in return for a U.S. pledge to not invade Cuba
  - 2nd was received Oct. 27—Khrushchev said Soviet Union would withdrawal missiles from Cuba only if U.S. removes its nuclear missiles from Turkey
- Kennedy decided to ignore the 2nd letter and only replied to the 1st offering "assurances against the invasion of Cuba" and prompt removal of blockade if Soviets agree to remove missiles from Cuba under international supervision. Soviets also had to agree to not place such weapons in Cuba again.
Meanwhile!!!

• Castro believed the U.S. was planning to invade Cuba and called on Khrushchev to launch nuclear missiles at the U.S. in response to the expected attack
• But Khrushchev basically ignored Castro and opted to deescalate the situation

Radio Moscow!!!

• Khrushchev needed to get a message to Kennedy quickly so he had it broadcast on Radio Moscow
• Radio Moscow announced that the Soviet Union was ordering the dismantling and removal of the missiles in exchange for U.S. guarantees of Cuban sovereignty
• Castro was pissed

Hotline!!!

• After the crisis the U.S. and U.S.S.R. established a hotline to ease communication between leaders in times of crisis
• Government leaders have reportedly used the hotline dozens of times, reducing risk of deadly conflicts
Why did any of this happen!!!?

- After the Bay of Pigs invasion both Cuba and the U.S.S.R. though the U.S. would continue to use force to destroy Cuba’s new government
  - That was a rational fear
- Missiles on Cuba would be in striking distance of many major U.S. cities, including Washington D.C., and military bases in the southeast
- Missiles on Cuba could be bargaining chips to negotiate U.S. withdrawal from Turkey and other NATO countries, or to pressure U.S. to leave West Berlin
- Castro thought the missiles would deter the U.S. from attacking Cuba again

It almost hit the fan!!!

- As many as 162 nuclear warheads had indeed reached Cuba in the weeks before the missile crisis erupted
  - They wouldn’t have reached the U.S. mainland but they would’ve been used against invading U.S. troops

“And where would it have ended?”!!!

- “It horrifies me to think what would have happened in the event of an invasion of Cuba!... It would have been an absolute disaster for the world... No one should believe that a U.S. force could have been attacked by tactical nuclear warheads without responding with nuclear warheads. And where would it have ended? In utter disaster.”
  - Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense