

TOP SECRET BRIEFING C

To: ExCom members
From: President John F. Kennedy
Re: Our response and Soviet reactions

Since our last briefing by the U.S. intelligence community, you are well aware of the course of action that I have ordered: a naval blockade of the island of Cuba. I decided to blockade Cuba because I believe that a U.S. airstrike against Cuban missile sites might result in the death of Soviet soldiers in Cuba, and that loss would likely trigger World War III. As you know, however, the crisis with the Soviet Union over nuclear missiles in Cuba is far from over.

On Monday, October 22, I informed our citizens on television of my intent to begin a strict quarantine, or blockade, of all offensive military equipment being shipped to Cuba. I also stated that any missile launched from Cuba would be regarded as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, and would require our full retaliatory response.

On Tuesday, Khrushchev sent me a letter stating that the Soviet Union would not observe the blockade, which he called illegal. Later that day, U.S. ships stopped and boarded a Panamanian vessel full of Soviet goods that was headed to Cuba. As it contained no military material, it was allowed to proceed. On Wednesday, I learned that 25 Soviet merchant ships were steaming toward Cuba, accompanied by 6 Soviet submarines. Although these ships did eventually alter their course and remained outside the quarantine line, on Saturday morning one of the ships detached itself and began speeding toward Cuba in defiance of the blockade. More ominously, one of our U-2 spy planes was shot down over Cuba by a Soviet SAM missile early Saturday morning, and the American pilot was killed.

The military generals who form my Joint Chiefs of Staff have recommended an immediate airstrike on the missile sites, an action that would, I believe, very likely push us over the brink and into nuclear war with the Soviet Union. However, if I maintain the blockade despite the criticism of the military, I want to know what you think I should do in several situations that could arise. What do you recommend I do if

1. The Soviets fire on American naval vessels enforcing the blockade?
2. The Soviets attempt to break the blockade?
3. The Soviets wait it out for weeks or months until the crisis subsides?
4. Cuban commanders launch one of the missiles already in Cuba toward the United States?

Critical-Thinking Question C: You are a member of ExCom. Respond to the four situations the president might face, keeping in mind his goals for the crisis as outlined in Top Secret Briefing C. Then offer your recommendation for what the president should do now.