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The Cuban Missile Crisis was a pivotal moment in the Cold War, and the events leading up to it began when Fidel Castro seized power in Cuba in 1959. The U.S. was concerned about the spread of communism and attempted to overthrow Castro in the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, which failed. In response, the Soviet Union, led by Nikita Khrushchev, began secretly deploying nuclear missiles in Cuba in 1962.

The U.S. discovered the missiles in October of that year and President John F. Kennedy immediately convened a group of advisors to consider options. They initially considered a military strike, but ultimately decided on a naval quarantine of Cuba to prevent any further Soviet shipments. The Soviet Union responded with a threat of military action if the U.S. did not remove the quarantine.

The situation escalated on October 27th, now known as Black Saturday, when a U.S. spy plane was shot down over Cuba and the U.S. military raised its readiness level to DEFCON 2, the highest level ever reached during the Cold War. At this point, both sides were on the brink of war and any misstep could have led to catastrophe.

Fortunately, the crisis was resolved through back-channel negotiations between Kennedy and Khrushchev, resulting in the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba in exchange for a U.S. promise not to invade Cuba and the removal of U.S. missiles from Turkey. The crisis had a profound impact on both countries and led to a renewed effort to improve communication and reduce tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.