

*The*  
PRESIDENTIAL  
RECORDINGS  
  
JOHN F. KENNEDY

➔➔➔➔ *THE GREAT CRISES, VOLUME TWO* ➔➔➔➔

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SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 21, 1962

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Prince. He was back at the White House for only about 20 minutes before taking off for his previously scheduled political trip to Connecticut. He would return to Washington that night.

### **Thursday, October 18, 1962**

President Kennedy had spent most of the previous day on a scheduled campaign trip to Connecticut. After his return the previous evening, he was still concealing the crisis from the press and public by keeping to his regular schedule as much as he could. That schedule began on October 18 at 9:30 A.M. with an awards ceremony, followed by a Cabinet meeting to discuss the budget, a meeting Kennedy chose to record.

*10:00–10:38 A.M.*

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*We are, therefore, going to have to review . . . what is in the administration's program. . . . And we may very well end up by cutting back on some of the things that the administration has stood for. . . . [E]ven when we have done this . . . [t]he problem that the President spoke of, in presenting an expenditure increase, and a deficit, and a tax reduction proposal—all at once—will remain.*

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### **Cabinet Meeting on the Federal Budget for Fiscal Year 1964<sup>1</sup>**

Compared to the unfolding missile crisis, the Cabinet meeting may seem mundane. Kennedy is planning a tax cut to stimulate the economy. He expects opposition from conservative committee chairmen in Congress. So in this meeting he focuses on both current spending levels and trends and on his budget planning for fiscal year 1964. Anxious to propose new

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1. Including President Kennedy, David Bell, Anthony Celebrezze, J. Edward Day, C. Douglas Dillon, Najeeb Halaby, Walter Heller, Luther Hodges, Theodore Sorensen, Aubrey Wagner, James Webb, and Jerome Wiesner. Tape 30, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

programs and stimulate the economy with greater federal spending, the President nonetheless wants to present budgets that run only modest deficits and appear to be tightly managed products of surpassing frugality, budgets that can favorably be compared to those produced by his Republican predecessor.

This meeting offers a brief and unvarnished portrait of the budgetary politics that would come to dominate the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Embracing a "New Economics" that sought to boost the economy with some deficit spending and employ more presidential activism, President Kennedy at the same time feels drawn toward the older verities of political economy. Budgets and economic policies characterized by *laissez-faire*, fiscal austerity, and the smallest possible federal workforce remained popular with the public and the U.S. Congress alike. President Kennedy seems to know this, and perhaps even shares the sentiment.

**David Bell:** When you consider the portions of the budget that are essentially unchangeable . . . interest on the debt, payments to veterans under the compensation laws [and] other unchangeable commitments, then you will see that we have some substantial review work to do during this fall budget season.

You want me to continue, sir, while the photographers are here?<sup>2</sup>

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, sure . . . yeah, you can go ahead. [ *Unclear.* ]

**Bell:** Now there are two principal points to bear in mind. First of all, the President recognizes that the planning figures that we all reached last summer represent a sensible program for carrying forward the commitments the administration has made —

**President Kennedy:** You might as well wait, Dave.

*There is some mostly inaudible, quiet conversation, as some machine noise disturbs the discussion. To the listener it sounds like a workman's drill is being used on some construction in the West Wing of the White House. The following exchange can be heard.*

**President Kennedy:** This [ *unclear* ], I have learned, was designed by Mr. Jones for the . . . possibly the death of [ *unclear* ].

**Unidentified:** I thought the Vice President might want to give you this but since he's not here, here is the Sam Rayburn stamp.<sup>3</sup>

[ *Unclear exchange.* ]

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2. Photographers are taking pictures at the beginning of the meeting; they leave as it begins.

3. Sam Rayburn of Texas, then the Speaker of the House, died of cancer in November 1961.

**Unidentified:** On the stamp?

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear, but clearly a good punch line, followed by loud laughter.*]

**Unidentified:** All of this was done by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, right here.

*Mixed voices. An unclear exchange, perhaps about a donation or appropriation to a college, can be made out.*

**Unidentified:** It seems to me [*unclear*] make the request. I think we might [*unclear*]. Jim Farley talked to with me about it, [*unclear*].<sup>4</sup> You see he has [*unclear*].

Oh all kinds. You see, it's one of the world's great intellectuals. . . . I thought, then, maybe the college up there [*unclear*]. They're all qualified [*unclear*] come down here or something. He has it up there as a kind of a foundation and he has a full-time staff of people to take care of that sort of thing. [*Unclear exchange.*] [*Unclear*] ease into giving him some pictures [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear*] talk to the college about it.

[*Unclear exchange.*]

**Unidentified:** Well, I believe it's already turned over to this collection of [*unclear*] women's Catholic college, and [*unclear*]. [*Unclear exchange.*]

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear*] discussion of numbers.

**Unidentified:** Yeah, that's all they get.

**Unidentified:** Well I intend to pay for it out of my own pocket and get rid of any questions.

**President Kennedy:** Why don't you let me know how much it costs?

**Unidentified:** All right.

*The group settles down as David Bell restarts the meeting.*

**Bell:** Mr. President, I would mention the point that the President recognizes that to reduce the expenditure total, as he has asked us all to do, will necessarily require some cutbacks in program commitments that have been made, or that have been stood for by this administration, in terms of legislation that has been sent on to Congress or plans that we all have had in mind with his approval. We are, therefore, going to have to review, during the fall, not with the idea of limiting what we add to the administration's program, but reconsidering what is *in* the administration's program, and to some extent . . . And bringing to the President

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4. Jim Farley was Franklin Roosevelt's postmaster general from 1933 to 1940 and chairman of the Democratic National Committee from 1932 to 1940.

a series of issues. And we may very well end up by cutting back on some of the things that the administration has stood for.

Secondly, even when we have done this there will still be a substantial increase, necessarily, in the '64 budget on the expenditure side. The problem that the President spoke of, in presenting an expenditure increase, and a deficit, and a tax reduction proposal—all at once—will remain. And we're not going to be able to get him off that hook. But, obviously, under those circumstances, the budget should be rock solid.

I have a suggestion about procedure. It seems to me it would be unwise, at this point, to stop and ask all of you to reconsider the budgets you are submitting. Many of the budgets have already reached the bureau. Others are in the final stages. I suggest they come right on in. We will consider them and will be suggesting areas for considering possible reductions. And I suggest that you all—from this meeting on—direct your staffs to do the same thing. And we will then be, simultaneously the bureau and your own organizations—working on the question of what reductions can be made below the final figures we had previously agreed on.

With respect to policy, we have a few suggestions. It is clear that in nearly . . . well, I should probably say in every agency, it will be necessary to go below the planning figures. This is going to mean different things in different agencies. I suspect that, on the civilian side, the two agencies where we are going to have the most difficulty is Agriculture and Health, Education and Welfare. Those are the largest civilian budgets. They both have very volatile elements within them. They both have large legislative programs, to this point. Therefore, we will need to be spending a good deal of time.

And for the benefit of those two secretaries, may I illustrate the problem by saying, in preparing the planning figures, we had already agreed that the difference in view between us and the departments—in the case of Agriculture, of some 400 million dollars; in the case of HEW of some 200 million dollars. It now appears to me, that to meet the President's target it is likely to be necessary to cut below *our* figures, in the case of Agriculture by another 1[00] or 200 million dollars, and in the case of Health, Education and Welfare by as much as 2[00] to 400 million dollars.

**Anthony Celebrezze:** More?

**Bell:** Yes, sir.

**Celebrezze:** You mean 600 million all together?

**Bell:** Yes, sir. This simply illustrates the extent of the range of discussion that we're going to be engaged in during this next few weeks.

We do not think that it would be wise or appropriate to set arbitrary

figures or arbitrary rules. We do not, for example, want to propose a “no new starts” policy.<sup>5</sup> We think that some new starts are as urgent as anything that will be in the budget. Clearly, we will be proposing fewer new starts than we had in mind last summer. But we don’t think a flat, arbitrary rule of no new starts would be a wise thing to do.

Instead we want to apply—and you to apply—a priority sense across the whole range of what is now being done and what is proposed to be added. We will ask you to consider what is going to be done in 1963 that may have effect on ’64. For illustration, the Food Stamp Program is one which is expanding during this year.<sup>6</sup> The rate of expansion during this year will clearly have a significant impact on what is going to be the budget situation for next year. Therefore, in a case like that, we will be asking you to consider ’63 plans as well as ’64 plans.

We would ask you to be careful, especially during these next few campaign weeks, on specific commitments to figures or to projects or to programs. The glowing words should be used without figures attached, insofar as possible. We’ll have to ask that legislative proposals be reviewed. For illustration, the education proposals will obviously have to be reviewed. The urban mass transit proposal will have to be reviewed. The recreational land purchase program will have to be reviewed.

Finally, we would suggest that we all try to hit especially hard at increases in the number of employees. The State Department was, I think, the main agency which in the 1963 budget did not ask for increased employees. Now this made a very favorable impression on Capitol Hill and in the country at large and I think that the impression, the image, the public understanding of what this next budget will . . . represents will be substantially influenced by the degree to which it can be clearly, on its face, an extremely tight and restricted budget in so far as personnel increases are concerned. They may not involve, really, very much money, but the numbers of persons by themselves, the numbers of employees, are looked at, will be looked at. And in consequence, I think, they are worth very special attention.

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5. This refers to a hypothetical policy under which no new initiatives or programs would be entertained in planning the following year’s budget.

6. Adopted in 1939 and discontinued in 1943, the federal Food Stamp Program was adopted anew in 1961 as a pilot program in selected counties and municipalities. Changed fundamentally at this point from a program designed to distribute farm surpluses to one that focused more on improved nutrition, it grew markedly as it expanded to cover more people and a greater variety of foodstuffs.

**President Kennedy:** What has our personnel gone up since January '61, Dave? Do you know?

**Bell:** Yes, about—

**Luther Hodges:** 160,000, but—<sup>7</sup>

**President Kennedy:** How much?

**Hodges:** 160,000, but only 117,000 of that, Mr. President, could be called regular employment. The rest of them are seasonal. But, [at] the latest date 160,000 since January 31.

**President Kennedy:** Well, now how does that compare to the period of President Eisenhower's?

**Bell:** His first 18 months? I don't know.

**President Kennedy:** We don't know even his first 18 months? I heard that was quite a substantial increase.

**Bell:** Yes, sir, but during the first year or so of President Eisenhower's term, the employment in the Executive Branch was declining because of the closing out of the Korean War, and the—

**President Kennedy:** Well, let's just take the last two or three years. What was the ratio of his increases compared to the—

**Bell:** This would be substantially larger than what was happening in the closing years of the Eisenhower administration.

**President Kennedy:** It seems to me—

**Theodore Sorensen:** It's a lot more stable at that point, Mr. President, the last two years [of the Eisenhower administration].

**President Kennedy:** I think 160's quite a lot, even if you adjusted, say for—

**Bell:** Even take out the 70,000 that's seasonal, it is a lot, that's right.

**President Kennedy:** I think we ought to . . . I don't see, really, that we ought to approve every one of these from now on. Because I think that's the . . . one of the most obvious evidences of things not being completely in control.

**Unidentified:** It's fewer in total than it was ten years ago, though.

**President Kennedy:** The total of the whole federal government?

**Unidentified:** Yes.

**Bell:** The total, yes, that's correct. The total civilian employment is below what it was ten years ago . . . that was the time of the Korean War bulge, and there were a lot of—

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7. The total number of federal employees in 1962, including postal workers, was approximately 1.6 million.



**President Kennedy:** How much is the Post Office?

**J. Edward Day:** That's 584,000.

**President Kennedy:** What was that? How much of an increase have we had?

**Day:** It goes up about 15,000 a year.

**Hodges:** It's 28,000 over January '61.

**Bell:** That increase, Mr. President, the increase in Post Office is roughly comparable to the increases in the preceding years. The big jumps we've had have been in Defense, in Space, in Agriculture, and Interior, and scattered also to some extent in HEW reflecting the Old Age Survivors Insurance expansion.

**Unidentified:** I think the figure we ought to emphasize is the relation to population, of 19 out of 1,000 in '45. Now it's 13 out of 1,000 new federal employees.

**Bell:** Now these are points of defense, and they are good ones. Nevertheless, I think the President is correct. The impression in Congress and in the country, is that these are large increases in personnel. No matter how solidly they are justified, they look big. It would be hard to go along with that kind of increase and a budget presentation such as is necessary to be made.

**Sorensen:** On the other hand, you can show a great savings in personnel and not a savings in money by contracting out to a lot of workers.

**Unidentified:** That's right.

**Jerome Wiesner:** This is particularly true of space where we were likely to do a great deal in-house that we might have contracted out. Now that we've started on that course we can't really change it.

**Bell:** Especially since it is the preferable course.

**Wiesner:** Yeah.

**Bell:** That's all I had, Mr. President, but there may be some questions.

**President Kennedy:** Well, what's the next subject on the agenda?

**Sorensen:** Let's just say a word about welfare programs.

**Bell:** Excuse me, Ted, before you do that . . . Are there any questions?

**James Webb:** I'd just like to make one point, though, so that we don't leave the wrong impression. We spend 92 cents out of every dollar appropriated to us now, *outside* government. And have only enough in-house capability to manage this large enterprise. And our in-house personnel, Jerry, is not going up by anything like the magnitude of the outside. I just want to be sure that you know that we have elected to do in-house certain things that are quite important to us as a means of controlling the whole program, we still have got this 90:10 ratio.

**Unidentified:**<sup>8</sup> Well, we have determined that [*unclear*] basis for Indian projects. For example, there's a program with the objective of [*unclear*] that number. There aren't very many, but that's a policy decision.

**Douglas Dillon:** I would think one thing that might be of interest to all of you is . . . just happened. Just pure coincidence to come out at the same time—the *U.S. News and World Report*, in their current issue, dated October 22nd, has the lead article right across here on the front page: “Can the U.S. Support a Tax Cut in '63?”<sup>9</sup> And it's really a type of political problem that's illustrated here that the President and his director of the budget were referring to. We don't guarantee that previous goal, but this is the general problem we're up against. And I thought you might be interested in reading that.

**Day:** I need to be sure everybody knows about another aspect. The Pay Bill that has passed also provides that there might well be another pay increase next spring that would be indicated at least by—BLS [Bureau of Labor Statistics] statistics aside—from the two steps that are spelled out in the law.<sup>10</sup>

**Bell:** That's right.

**Day:** I think that's another thing a lot of people are going to wake up to, sort of at the last minute, and raise their hands in horror, once they find that out.

**Bell:** The postmaster general's referring to the fact that the new Pay Bill, which requires the President to submit annually recommendations for changes that would be necessary to keep federal pay levels comparable to those in private industry. There's an annual survey conducted by the BLS as to what the levels are in private industry. And the President then, each

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8. The presidential daily diary lists both Stewart Udall, secretary of the interior, and John A. Carver, Jr., assistant secretary of the interior, as being in attendance at this meeting. It is likely that one or the other is making this statement.

9. See “People of the Week: Byrd vs. Dillon, Differing Views on a Tax Cut,” *U.S. News and World Report*, 22 October 1962, p. 21. The opening line of this brief article reads, “Should the U.S. Government cut taxes without a cut in federal spending?” Harry F. Byrd, Sr., chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, answered by saying that to do so would be evidence of “unmitigated fiscal irresponsibility.” Dillon argued instead that the nation's growing infrastructure, training, and research requirements made the tax cut, without offsetting spending cuts, an absolute necessity.

10. Day was referring to H.R. 7927, signed by President Kennedy on 11 October 1962. This legislation mandated salary increases (of approximately 11 percent) for approximately 590,000 postal employees and (of approximately 10 percent) for approximately 1 million nonpostal federal employees. It also provided for a 5 percent increase in retirement benefits for all federal employees and included a postal rate increase, increasing first class postage from 4 cents to 5 cents. Its estimated costs were \$504 million in FY 1963 and \$1.049 billion in FY 1964.

spring, will be submitting to the Congress recommendations to keep federal pay levels in line with comparable levels of work in private activity.

At the same time that the President signed this bill, as you all know, he sent each of you a memorandum on manpower control and utilization. Our basic notion is that we should be able to offset, to a very large extent, the annual increases in pay levels by annual increases in productivity. As you know, as we, starting this fall, as we review the budget, we are going to try to be finding . . . trying to focus on the question of whether we cannot plan into each agency's program increases in productivity, so that we can program fewer employees where workloads stay level. And where workloads rise, the rise in employees would be less than the rise in workload. There's a long way to go before we can do this efficiently in each agency, but this is the effort on which we are now embarked, and we'll be discussing this with each of you during the fall.

**Najeeb Halaby:** Dave, does this effect in any way the acceleration of the public works impact programs that we've all been busily working on for immediate implementation?

**Bell:** Well, you'll recall, Najeeb, that the only public works, the only thing that is being accelerated, are those public works which are in the '63 budget—

**Halaby:** Yeah.

**Bell:** —and are supported by appropriations that the Congress has made. If there are any of those which seem to you to have substantial 1964 effects—and to be of relatively low priority—yes, indeed, they should be reexamined. If they are simply part of the '63 program, that should go ahead in any event, then the instruction stands from the President to get it done as quickly in the year as is possible then in order to assist the general economic situation.

**Aubrey Wagner:** If we have a choice, throwing an expenditure to fiscal '63 or fiscal '64, which way should we throw it, speaking generally?

**Bell:** To '63. [*Short pause.*]

**Sorensen:** I simply wanted to say that at the same time that we're preparing next year's budget, we must prepare next year's legislative program. For a variety of reasons, we will not make any decisions in that program until after the election, but some of them will be . . . aren't going to be able to be fully developed in that short period of time between the election and the first of the year when the President begins to present his message to the Congress. So, I would hope that if all of you already have been officially and formally contacted by the Budget Bureau as to whether you have any new legislative proposals, if you have any new proposals, if you would make sure that they are being staffed out in your department, that

they are being sent over to the Budget Bureau or to my office so that we will have them in plenty of time to think them through and to consider them for inclusion in the President's program.

Secondly, there is a great deal of the President's program which went to the 87th Congress which they simply didn't have time to consider. There are a few which they had time to consider, and which they didn't pass. I think that you ought to examine each of those proposals to see whether you want to make some change in the President resubmitting them next year, or whether they should be resubmitted at all. In any case, if the Congress altered them in committee or sent them for testimony or further experience, some change would be required. [*Dillon whispering in background.*] I hope you'll be making those changes and be ready to discuss them with my office and the Budget Bureau. I just wanted to make sure everyone was on notice that they would be having that work completed in a month or so.

**President Kennedy:** Anybody got anything else? Otherwise, Ted do you—

**Unidentified:** The Secretary of State will not be here, so there won't be—

**President Kennedy:** Right. I think we probably all got hung up in the . . .

I think it's tough on this budget. But I will say, just before we leave, that Ambassador Galbraith says that we'll never get a tax cut through anyway, and what the economy needs is expenditures.<sup>11</sup> And that, therefore, you shouldn't cut your programs, because that's the only way you're ever going to get the kind of spending which this economy needs to maintain a reasonable rate of growth.

But I figured you'd be doing that anyway. [*Boisterous laughter.*]

**Webb:** Mr. President, it looks like we're going to get the range of orbit 12–37.<sup>12</sup> If we can, it'll—

**Unidentified:** I think we [*unclear*]. Good job.

*At this point the formal meeting comes to a close as some participants*

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11. John Kenneth Galbraith, Harvard professor of economics, had been appointed ambassador to India by President Kennedy in 1961. Though he understood the primary political virtues of the tax cut proposal—the speed with which it could be implemented and its potential to attract support from the business community and from conservative politicians—Galbraith consistently pressed for increased public expenditures as a more appropriate alternative.

12. With Wally Schirra's recent Mercury orbit (3 October 1962), and two "secret" satellite launchings from Vandenberg Air Force Base also taking place in the month of October 1962 (9 October and 26 October), "range of orbit" speculations were, perhaps, a frequent part of Kennedy White House conversation, and in this case, it appears, an integral part of an inside joke.

*begin filing out of the room. Some remain and engage in less formal conversation for about another 20 minutes. With the exception of the following excerpts, most of these conversations are not distinct and are, therefore, difficult to comprehend. Douglas Dillon, Dave Bell, and chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers Walter Heller, who apparently came in late, are among the last to leave and can be heard more clearly over the last few minutes of the recording. Few of the fragments are meaningful until the following exchange.*

**Walter Heller:** I take it your fellows are getting together something on the growth side for next Monday, because that meeting a week from Thursday, the 26th . . .

**Dillon:** I've got that trip to Mexico [for an Inter-American Conference] and everything else, the EPC meeting. [*Unclear.*]

*Another unclear set of exchanges in overlapping conversations. There are several audible fragments, clearly referring to estimates of economic growth.*

**Heller:** Well, you know, what strikes me that we need to do, really . . . We're trying to get the administration to put out a statement on growth, and you know, in that statement, it could say that [*unclear*]. [*Background conversation ensues.*]

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear*] could be growth in your office.

**Unidentified:** No, no . . . I'm not talking about my personal office.

**Heller:** [*continuing*] Now then, if there is some easing, maybe the first step in growth policy should be to maintain the expansion, to sharpen expansion, to keep up, to try to get to the limits of potential. Something like that might be, you know, if we could get that in there, clearly, in the policy section, we *have* the statement you want.

[*aside, to Dave Bell*] Dave, before you get away, I wonder . . . we're going to have a problem in connection with the midyear review, aren't we, of how clean we come? Well, there are two problems.

**Bell:** Yes, we sure are.

**Heller:** There are two problems. One is: What are our internal figures going to be for GNP and so forth? And the second is: What is our stance? Last year, after all, we came awfully damn clean and said what our . . . I think we went on and said what our GNP estimates were for the first and second quarters of the ensuing year, because, in connection with the I & P.<sup>13</sup>

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13. Reference to income and product accounts and related National Income and Product Accounts budget. The latter refers to the method of budgetary accounting (unlike the standard

**Bell:** Well, all we've said so far is that there will be a release on this after the election. Now, your question is what's going to be in that release?

**Heller:** Yeah. That's right.

**Bell:** And—

**Unidentified:** We have [*unclear*] every day that we would need to put out the projections of GNP.

**Dillon:** If you want to put any out, the most I'd go is a projection—

**Heller:** For the fourth quarter for the year.

**Bell:** Well, presumably . . . we could presumably say our revenue estimates for the year will be such and such. How much you break down the revenue estimates remains a detail to be discussed—the extent to which you back it up with a GNP estimate. I had assumed we would have to put out the equivalent of a GNP estimate for calendar year '62.

**Dillon:** That's right.

**Heller:** Now, however, last year we, after all, went more heavily on to the I & P Accounts budget. That implied an estimate. . . . I don't know whether we . . . I think we specified . . . I may be wrong. Either in your press conference on it—

**Bell:** Yeah . . . now, remember, we're not going to publish a pamphlet this year. We're not going to do the whole thing in a press release.

**Dillon:** This could be a very brief [*statement*].

**Bell:** We'll get together as much—

**Heller:** At the midyear there's going to be no [*unclear*] budget review at all?

**Bell:** Nevertheless, I had assumed we would have some reference to the income and product figures.

**Heller:** Yes. Well, now, if you do—

**Bell:** Without going into any detail.

**Heller:** All right. But suppose they say, "Well now, your income and product figures for the year are so and so."

**Bell:** Yeah.

**Heller:** "Clearly, Mr. Bell, you must have some GNP figures underlying that for the first and second quarters of next year." What? You've got to be prepared for that.

**Bell:** Yeah.

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federal procedure known as the administrative budget) which includes trust fund receipts and expenditures (Social Security, highway grants-in-aid, unemployment compensation, and so on), omits government transactions in financial assets (federal loans, for example), and records liabilities when they are incurred (accrual basis) and not only when cash changes hands.

**Heller:** And . . . but that's the externals. And internally, we have a big unresolved difference for the first and second quarters of next year.

**Bell:** Well, internally, [unclear].

**Dillon:** Our basic thing on that was—

**Heller:** We'll have to resolve it towards the high side in order to make this [deficit?] thing seem—

**Dillon:** [apparently in a separate conversation] Also, our basic thing on that was that we wouldn't have said what the balance is if we didn't want to face this now. We could face it a lot better when we have to which is early December.

**Bell:** Early November, this is after the election.

**Dillon:** No, no . . . I mean for the next year . . . January 1st.

**Bell:** Oh yes, but the next . . . we will need some choice of figures.

**Heller:** Yes.

**Dillon:** Oh yes, [unclear] choice of figures for this thing. But the public, the basic thing, will feel much "solider" about it. And I don't think in our next choice of figures we necessarily have to resolve our thing about the first . . .

**Unidentified:** Well what have we got to do?

**Bell:** We'll have to . . . I don't know that we need to resolve the present figures, but we have to come down—

**Unidentified:** A single revenue figure.

**Dillon:** That can be just by ad hoc sort of thing. [*A few people chuckle.*]

**Bell:** Yeah, that's right. We don't need to resolve the substantive issue—

**Dillon:** Yeah.

**Unidentified:** The first and second quarter issue, well sure we'll get some tough questions. Well then we'll just have to, just have to . . .

**Bell:** Dance.

**Unidentified:** Well, I think this could be [unclear]. I'd rather do the dance than get my [unclear, laughs].

**Unidentified:** Oh, there, sure, sure.

*At this point, voices begin to fade as the remaining meeting participants leave the room. Minutes later, Evelyn Lincoln speaks to an unidentified male just before recorder is turned off.*

**Lincoln:** Are we coming here? Is the eleven [o'clock] meeting . . . is it in here?

**Unidentified:** Oh yes it is. I think it's a fine time to go back and . . .

11:10 A.M.—1:15 P.M.

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*Somehow we've got to take some action. . . . Now, the question really is to what action we take which lessens the chances of a nuclear exchange, which obviously is the final failure.*

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### Meeting on the Cuban Missile Crisis<sup>14</sup>

Sometime during the previous day, possibly before he left the White House for his scheduled political trip to Connecticut, Kennedy received a memo from Adlai Stevenson urging that Kennedy send personal emissaries to Khrushchev and Castro instead of taking any military action. Stevenson warned that any U.S. military action could lead to reprisals in Turkey or Berlin and could then escalate. "To start or risk starting a nuclear war is bound to be divisive at best," he wrote, "and the judgments of history seldom coincide with the tempers of the moment." While he said that he understood Kennedy's dilemma, he wrote with underscoring: "the means adopted have such incalculable consequences that I feel you should have made it clear that the existence of nuclear missile bases anywhere is negotiable before we start anything."<sup>15</sup> Stevenson then returned to his duties at the United Nations in New York.

That same morning of October 17 the Joint Chiefs of Staff reconvened to plan just the military action that Stevenson so abhorred. The Joint Staff had worked through the night to come up with plans for air strikes against five different sets of targets. Identified by Roman numerals I to V, these alternative plans were frequently discussed in the following days. They are given here, with associated numbers of sorties; the estimated sortie numbers continued to climb as planning continued.<sup>16</sup> The initial numbers were:

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14. Including President Kennedy, George Ball, McGeorge Bundy, Douglas Dillon, Roswell Gilpatric, U. Alexis Johnson, Robert Kennedy, Arthur Lundahl, Edwin Martin, John McCone, Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, Theodore Sorensen, Maxwell Taylor, and Llewellyn Thompson. Tapes 30 and 30A, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

15. Stevenson letter to President Kennedy, 17 October 1962; reprinted in *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*, eds. Laurence Chang and Peter Kornbluh (New York: New Press, 1992), pp. 119–20.

16. The sortie numbers were derived by examining a target and determining how many individual aim points should be hit in order to destroy it. Then planners used training experience to judge how many bombs would need to be dropped on an aim point to be fairly sure that one would hit it. From that, after incorporating attrition from enemy action or mechani-



I. Missile and nuclear storage sites only	52
II. Same as above plus IL-28s, MiG-21s	104
III. Same as above plus other aircraft, SAMs, cruise msIs, and msl boats	194
IV. All military targets but tanks	474
V. All military targets; prelude to invasion	2,002

The Chiefs still opposed any strike limited only to the missile sites. They continued also to view any blockade as merely a complement to, not an alternative for, an air strike. They assumed, in addition, that a blockade would require a formal declaration of war.

About 15 senior officials had met again for several hours the afternoon of October 17.<sup>17</sup> Almost all leaned toward taking some political action before launching an air strike. They reviewed a large number of possible courses of action and speculated about imaginable Soviet responses. McNamara and Taylor worried that any diplomatic efforts would alert the Soviets and thwart an effective strike. McNamara and Gilpatric belittled the significance of the Soviet MRBM deployments for the overall strategic balance. McCone and Taylor argued that the MRBMs did, indeed, change the balance. But this difference of opinion did not prevent general agreement that the United States could not allow the Soviet deployment to stand.

It was in this context that Kennedy's advisers, for the first time, discussed in detail the pros and cons of a blockade. Bohlen and Thompson continued to insist that Khrushchev's aim was to achieve something with regard to Berlin and that the U.S. government ought not to be diverted from that by concentrating its attention exclusively on Cuba.

Kennedy had invited former Secretary of State Dean Acheson to join his circle of advisers. Formidably self-assured and gifted not only with cutting wit as well as great ability in advocacy, Acheson participated in

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cal problems, planners could come up with sortie numbers. These numbers first grew because new targets were identified. They later grew because the staff began incorporating additional requirements for escort, air defense suppression, and poststrike reconnaissance. A few days later, exasperated by the latest revision, Taylor exclaimed to his JCS colleagues: "What! These figures were reported to the White House. You are defeating yourselves with your own cleverness, gentlemen." Notes taken from Transcripts of Meetings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, p. 6.

17. These meetings were attended (though not everyone was there all of the time) by Robert Kennedy, Rusk, McNamara, Taylor, Bundy, McCone, Ball, Gilpatric, Alexis Johnson, Charles Bohlen, Thompson, Theodore Sorensen, Martin, possibly Paul Nitze, and (late in the day for a shorter time) Dean Acheson.

these Wednesday meetings, calling for a prompt air strike with no attempt at prior negotiation. Before adjourning for dinner, the conferees had also reviewed the possibility of a blockade coupled with a declaration of war against Cuba.

During the dinner break Robert Kennedy and Sorensen drove to the airport to meet the President, returning from Connecticut. Sorensen gave him a written summary of the day's discussions, emphasizing how fluid matters remained. (It included a list of around twenty questions as yet unresolved.) President Kennedy decided to stay out of the discussions until the next day. Robert Kennedy and Sorensen then returned to the State Department. The meeting resumed at 10:00 P.M. and went until nearly midnight.

During this late-hour meeting, Rusk had endorsed and elaborated on the alternative of a strike against the missile sites with no prior negotiation. Taylor and McCone supported him, with McCone's mentioning Eisenhower's views. Bohlen still urged that an ultimatum be given before an attack. Thompson, Martin, and Gilpatric preferred a complete blockade with the declaration of war.

At the end of this meeting, Robert Kennedy summarized the major options that had been aired. They apparently were:

- An ultimatum to Khrushchev followed by a strike
- A limited strike without prior warning or negotiation, but with notifying key allies
- A political warning followed by a naval blockade and readiness for other actions
- A large-scale strike after some political preparation
- Proceeding directly to an invasion.

Sorensen's earlier note for Kennedy had a similar list. Various forms of political action and messages to Khrushchev were considered, as well as various kinds of strikes. Many questions were identified for further analysis, especially about likely Soviet responses.

During the night of October 17-18, a few officials wrote brief papers for the President summarizing their personal beliefs. Douglas Dillon submitted a memo stating opposition to negotiations of any kind with Khrushchev. He recommended a blockade coupled with intensive surveillance of Cuba and a demand that Cuba begin removal of the weapons forthwith. If the Cubans refused or the military pronounced the blockade infeasible, Dillon favored an immediate air strike. He said that the Soviet Union had "initiated a test of our intentions that can determine the

future course of world events for many years to come." He continued, "I . . . believe that the survival of our nation demands the prompt elimination of the offensive weapons now in Cuba."<sup>18</sup>

George Ball wrote a passionate memo arguing that the MRBMs made little strategic difference. Noting that "we tried Japanese as war criminals because of the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor," Ball argued that a surprise strike, "far from establishing our moral strength . . . would, in fact, alienate a great part of the civilized world by behaving in a manner wholly contrary to our traditions, by pursuing a course of action that would cut directly athwart everything we have stood for during our national history, and condemn us as hypocrites in the opinion of the world." Ball recommended a blockade that might ultimately cripple and bring down the Castro government.<sup>19</sup>

Bohlen, preparing to depart for Paris, also wrote a memo for Rusk, concisely explaining his preference for giving the Soviets an ultimatum before launching a strike. Though he had taken a different view, Rusk was impressed and apparently persuaded by Bohlen's memo and decided to share it with his colleagues and President Kennedy when they next gathered at the White House.<sup>20</sup>

On the morning of October 18, Sorensen noted for Kennedy that "two big questions must be answered, and in conjunction with each other." One was which kind of military action to choose, and the other was whether political action, such as a letter to Khrushchev, should precede any military move. The Rusk approach, he said, was for a strike without warning. The Bohlen approach was to approach Khrushchev first.<sup>21</sup>

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18. C. Douglas Dillon, "Memorandum for the President," 17 October 1962; reprinted in *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962*, Chang and Kornbluh, pp. 116–18.

19. "Position of George W. Ball," 17 October 1962, *ibid.*, pp. 121–22.

20. In their conversation at dinner on Tuesday night, October 16, Kennedy had asked Bohlen to postpone his highly publicized departure for Paris and help with the crisis. Bohlen worried about the notice his change of plans would cause but said he would try to come up with a cover story. The next day Bohlen discussed the matter with Rusk, who thought that Bohlen should proceed with his plans and that Thompson could provide the needed advice on the Soviet Union. Rusk called President Kennedy, and Kennedy called Bohlen and told him to go ahead with his departure.

On the morning of 18 October, Kennedy changed his mind, possibly after reading Sorensen's note highlighting Bohlen's advocacy. Just before the 11:00 meeting transcribed here, Bohlen was summoned (from the airport) to come to the White House. On the phone, Bohlen convinced the President to let him go ahead with his travel, since he was now expected at a public event that day in New York. Robert Kennedy later voiced bewilderment and anger about Bohlen's decision.

21. Sorensen to Kennedy, 18 October 1962, "Cuba—General: 10/15/62–10/23/62" folder, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Library. Dillon's approach—an ultimatum and block-

Meanwhile, intelligence analysts had pored over photos from the earlier U-2 flights. They found something new—evidence of fixed IRBM sites in addition to the MRBM sites that had already been identified. With twice the range of MRBMs (2,200 miles instead of 1,100) and warheads of roughly twice as much yield (up to 5 megatons), these missiles could menace all parts of the continental United States except the Pacific Northwest.

As officials received this new information on the morning of October 18, their attitudes hardened. McNamara called McCone to say that he now thought prompt and decisive action necessary. Taylor told the Joint Chiefs that the news tipped him toward supporting the maximum option—full invasion of Cuba. This then became the unanimous position of the JCS. These early-morning discussions of the new intelligence set the mood as officials filed into the Cabinet Room.

**John McCone:** . . . photography of one mission on Sunday, October 14, and two on Monday, October 15. These are quite completely read out. There were six missions run yesterday. We expect the initial readout to start late tonight and probably take 36 to 48 hours to complete the readout from the six missions.

**Dean Rusk:** Those missions involve any incident?

**McCone:** Not to my knowledge, no.

**President Kennedy:** They don't know what coverage they got, do they?

**Arthur Lundahl:** The weather picture has not yet emerged, sir. We're flying in clouds and we don't have the film yet in the National PI [Photographic Interpretation] Center [also known as NPIC]. It starts to come in this afternoon, shortly after lunch.

**McCone:** We think we got the entire island. What we didn't get because of clouds, we won't know until after we develop them.

I think you should know that these six missions involve 28,000 linear feet of film. And when this is enlarged, it means the Center [NPIC] has to examine a strip of film 100 miles long, 20 feet wide. Quite a job.

Go ahead, Art.

**Lundahl:** Yes, sir. Mr. President, gentlemen, the first and most important item I would seek to call to your attention is a new area hitherto never

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ade, then a strike—was thus close to Bohlen's. Ball's suggestion—a blockade followed by political pressure—was different.

seen by us, some 21 miles to the southwest of Havana, which we have at the moment labeled a probable MRBM/IRBM launch complex. The name of the town nearest is this [Guanajay]. It is there.

The two sites, sir, numbers one and two—are  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles apart. And enlarging this one, we look at it, and we see for the first time a pattern of medium/IRBM sites that looks like the things we have been seeing in the Soviet Union. There are two [launch] pads, here—and here. They are separated by 750 feet. There's a control bunker with cable scars [marks on the ground showing cable emplacements] going up into small buildings inboard of each of the pads. There's no equipment on the pads yet. They're under construction. The security fence has been superimposed around the place and on 29 August, the last time we went over this area, the ground had just scarcely started to be scratched.

At the same time,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles south of there is site number two. On 29 August, there were no scratchings on the ground at all and since that time, these scratchings have taken a form slightly different. There's this pattern 2-1-2-1-2, [which] is called the offset inline. They're slightly more inline in here. There looks like there's going to be a fourth one [pad] up in here, but the spacing is the same.

The orientation of the axis of the pads, 315 [degrees], which will bring you into the central massif of the United States. We call it M/IRBM, sir. We have never identified, irrevocably, the signature of the Soviet intermediate range ballistic missile which is estimatedly a 2,000-mile missile. But the elongation of the pads and the location of the control bunkers, between each pair of pads, has been the thing that has suggested to our hearts, if not our minds, the kind of thing that might accompany an IRBM.

So we have at the moment labeled it as such and let the guided missiles intelligence analysts come up, finally, with a true analysis of what the range of these missiles might be that are eventually accommodated on this set of pads.

If I may switch to the next one, sir.

**President Kennedy:** Let's take a look?

**Lundahl:** Yes, sir. For comparison purposes, Mr. President, I showed the other day, when I was here [Tuesday, October 16], the sites that we had described to you the other day, the three that we showed you were these down near San Cristobal. The one with erectors and missiles. The one here, just with the missiles and no erectors. And this one here at an early stage of construction, with tenting and encamping materials, but neither missiles nor erectors. The date of that photography was 14 October, and the impression of this third site is contained in this illusion

here, wherein I think you can see the equipment, the buildings and the housing, and so forth.

On the next day, and admittedly in better photographic cover, we see this same area that is shown in here with, now, missile erectors, probably off in here, vehicles, more vehicles, buildings, missile transporters, and a variety of equipment and additional things under construction. The impression one would gather is that there is some sense of speed with which they are proceeding in the construction of this particular base. May I pass that one over to you, sir? Thank you.

Also, earlier, Mr. President, we reported to you a number of what we call cruise missile sites, short-range coastal defense-type missiles starting out with the Banes site, with another one located at Santa Cruz del Norte, up here in the Havana area.<sup>22</sup> At the time of that reporting, there were two launchers at this position, here and here.

Since the coverage of that day, two more launching positions have been added outboard of those two positions. The launchers here—the [unclear] is uncovered. You can actually see the launcher itself and, down in this small revetment here, appears to be the winged kind of air-breathing missile which will go on it. It's a short stubby-winged fellow which conforms with the cruise type of missile that we have seen before. So our opinion of this thing remains the same. We now just would report two additional launching positions at that complex.

Finally, Mr. President, at the very westernmost tip of Cuba, the island, we have San Julian airfield, 7,000 feet by 150 feet, which has hitherto been barricaded. Rows of stones and other kinds of materials preventing this [from being able] to be used by anybody. Now we see the barricades being removed from the two runways. And in this hardstand at the edge of the tarmac, enlarged up in here, we find 22 of those crates, some 60 feet long, which we have interpreted from the deckside photography that the Navy had taken, to be, possibly, the crates that would accommodate the IL-28, or Beagle, type of aircraft. This field is long enough to accommodate those craft. I think they need something around 6,000 feet to take off. We have 7,000 feet. We definitely had not yet seen the Beagle IL-28. One fuselage has been taken from one of the boxes. It's up at this location. It's 58 feet long, which is about the length of the Beagle fuselage, and you can see the wing roots, but the actual wing tips have not yet been installed. We've just caught them, apparently, at the

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22. These briefings had been given on 7 September.

start of the assembly operation. And it would appear that San Julian, this hitherto unused airfield, may be the locus for IL-28 activity.

That's all I have at the moment, Mr. President.

**President Kennedy:** What percentage of the island have we got covered here?

**Lundahl:** In these separate missions, the one of Sunday, October the 14th, and two on Monday, October the 15th, [the coverage] represents a considerable percentage from north to south and from east to west. But the business of plotting the [areas obscured by] clouds has not been completely done, so I can't give you a good figure.

**President Kennedy:** But, in other words, from the information we have prior to the development of these new films, you would say there are how many different missile sites? As well as how many different launch pads on each site?

**Lundahl:** Well, sir, we had not found anything like the MRBM sites in any of the photography up to this 15 October bit. We had found, and added to it last night, one more surface-to-air missile site, so that made a total of 23, as of this location. However, one of them has been pulled up and moved away, at Santa Lucia. We don't know where they pull these things up and move them to, but we have seen 23 surface-to-air missile sites. We've seen three of these surface-to-surface cruise type of missile sites at Banes and up here over at del Norte, and then down on the Isle of Pines.

We have one other type of missile site up here north of Havana which we haven't been able to identify yet, as being either cruise or some other type of site, but which we're carrying [as] unknown.

And now we've added to this. In the briefings of the last couple of days we've added the field type of installation, this 650- or 1,100-mile missile as it probably is, near San Cristóbal with these three sites located here which we briefed on the other day [October 16]. And in the photography of Monday of this week, we've now added what looks like a more fixed type of site, conforming to a signature which we have seen—

**President Kennedy:** In other words, you have got five different missile sites?

**Lundahl:** Yes, sir.

**President Kennedy:** And how many pads on each site?

**Lundahl:** Well sir, at this location here we don't have pads, we have these erectors, these 60-foot long objects that lay on the ground. There were four erectors there. We have found three erectors not yet in position but lying around to be disposed here. And we had more erectors but

they're under the trees and we can't tell. But it would seem as though there are going to be four erectors at each of those locations, and it would appear that there are going to be four launch pads at each of those too. But these [new sites] will be firmer type of launchings. And these will be the portable field type of launching equipment.

**McCone:** The GMAIC committee made an estimate that between 16 and 32 missiles would be operational within a week, or slightly more.<sup>23</sup> This was an estimate that appeared yesterday.

**Maxwell Taylor:** Have any electronic emissions from the SAMs been picked up? I had a report they were showing life.

**McCone:** No. If they are, there are some SIGINT [signals intelligence] responses on Monday [October 15] that did not state conclusively that the radars were operational. However, we do estimate that some of these SAM sites will be operational within a week's time.

**President Kennedy:** If an unsophisticated observer . . . If we wanted to ever release these pictures to demonstrate that there were missiles there, it would not be possible to demonstrate this to the satisfaction of an untrained observer, would it?

**Lundahl:** I think it would be difficult, sir. By some eight years of experience in looking at the evolution in the Soviet Union, the signature emerges very clearly to us. I think the uninitiated would like to see the missile and the tube that it fits in.

**President Kennedy:** May I—

**McGeorge Bundy:** The implication is, if we go in by air [with a strike], we would have simultaneous low-level photography for this purpose.

**McCone:** That's right.

**Robert McNamara:** And there is a picture that is not here of what I call site number 1, of which I believe the uninitiated could be persuaded there were missiles.

**Lundahl:** I would concur on that, sir. The canvas coverings of all those missiles lying on trailers in there at lower level, particularly as Mr. Bundy says, could, I think, very clearly impact on people.

**President Kennedy:** Thank you.

**Lundahl:** Yes, sir.

**President Kennedy:** But when will we get the data, really, on the entire island, to the extent that we can?

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23. The abbreviation GMAIC stands for the Guided Missile and Astronautics Intelligence Committee, an interagency committee of the interagency U.S. Intelligence Board.



**Lundahl:** Sir, there are five missions coming in today, as Mr. McCone said, some 28,000 feet [of film], the first two of which are in slightly after noon. We would seek to read them out during the night. And then as the others come in, in the next two to three days, we will be going all out to read it on a 24-hour basis. But it is quite a volume of film to look at. We're trying to be accurate, as accurate as we possibly can. I would hope that, comes the weekend, we might have a fair grasp on all five [*McCone had mentioned six missions*], plus whatever number of additional ones Mr. McNamara will run between yesterday and the end of the week.

**President Kennedy:** Thanks.

**Lundahl:** Yes, sir. [*He collects his briefing materials.*]

**Rusk:** Mr. President, I think this changes my thinking on the matter if you have to [*unclear*] from the point of view of U.S. [*unclear*]. The first question we ought to answer is: Is it necessary to take action? And I suppose that there is compelling reason to take action here. For if no action is taken, it looks now as though Cuba is not going to be just an incidental base for a few of these things, but, basically an [*unclear*] with MRBMs, and IRBMs, and that sort of thing. Cuba could become a formidable military problem in any contest we would have with the Soviet Union over a threat in any other part of the world. I think our colleagues in Defense will want to comment on that very carefully because that's a very important point. But I do think that when the full scope of this becomes known, that no action would undermine our alliances all over the world very promptly.

On September 4th you said, "There is no evidence of any organized combat force in Cuba from any Soviet bloc country, or of military bases provided by Russia, in violation of the '34 treaty relating to Guantánamo, or of the presence of offensive ground-to-ground missiles; or other significant offensive capability either in Cuban hands or under Soviet direction and guidance. Were it to be otherwise the gravest issues would arise."

Now that statement was not made lightly at that time. These elements that were mentioned were pointing our fingers to things that were very fundamental to us. And it was intended as a clear warning to the Soviet Union that these are matters that we will take with the utmost seriousness. When you talk about the gravest issues, in the general language of international exchange, that means something very serious.

I think also we have to think of the effect on the Soviets if we were to do nothing. I would suppose that they would consider this a major back-down and that this would free their hands for almost any kind of adventure they might want to try out in other parts of the world. If we are

unable to face up to a situation like Cuba against this kind of threat, then I think they would be greatly encouraged to go adventuring and would feel that they've had it made as far as intimidation of the United States is concerned.

I think also that we have an almost unmanageable problem in this country getting any support for the foreign policy that we would need to pursue, if we are going to sustain the cause of independence of states and freedom in all parts of the world. We've got a million men in uniform outside the United States. We've got foreign aid programs. We've got a major effort we're making in every continent. And it seems to me that inaction in this situation would undermine and undercut the enormous support that we need for the kind of foreign policy that will eventually ensure our survival.

Now action involves very high risks indeed, and I think that this additional information, if anything, increases the risk because the challenge is much more serious and the counteraction, I would suppose, would have to be heavier than we have, in fact, been talking about. But we can expect you would have to have in the back of your own mind, with whatever decision you take, the possibility—if not the likelihood—of a Soviet reaction somewhere else running all the way from Berlin right around to Korea, and the possibility of a reaction against the United States itself. I don't think that you can make your decision under any assumption that this is a free ride, or easier, or anything of that sort.

I would suppose that with those first missiles that we were talking about, that a quick strike with quick success in the matter of a couple hours' time—with 50 to 60 sorties, that sort of thing, where it's obvious then that the matter is over and finished and that was the purpose of our engagement—that that would have a much more reduced risk of a military response on the other side. But getting these other installations and getting involved in various parts of the island, I think would increase the risk of a military response down there.

The action also has to be thought of in connection with alliance solidarity. There we're faced with conflicting elements. Unless we're in a situation where it is clear that the alliance is with us and understands the problem, then an unannounced, or unconsulted, quick action on our part could well lead to a kind of allied disunity that the Soviets could capitalize upon very strongly.

It's one thing for Britain and France to get themselves isolated within the alliance over Suez. But it's quite another thing for the alliance if the United States should get itself in the same position because we are

the central bone structure of the alliance. I think this is a different kind of problem that we have to think very hard about.

Now, I think that, as far as I'm concerned, I would have to say to you that if we enter upon this path of challenging the Soviets, the Soviets who themselves have embarked upon this fantastically dangerous course, that no one can surely foresee the outcome.

I was prepared to say when I came over here, before when I got this information, that even the 50-sortie strike would very probably move by specific steps into much more general action, at least as far as Cuba is concerned, and possibly in other situations.

Now, there is another fact, Mr. President, that bothers me considerably. I think the American people will willingly undertake great danger and, if necessary, great suffering, if they have a deep feeling that we've done everything that was reasonably possible to determine whether this trip was necessary. Also that they have a clear conscience and a good theory of the case.

The first point, whether this trip is necessary. We all, of course, remember the guns of August where certain events brought about a general situation in which at the time none of the governments involved really wanted.<sup>24</sup> And this precedent, I think, is something that is pretty important.

We had a clear conscience in World War II, the Pearl Harbor attack up against the background of Hitler's conduct resolved that problem. In the case of Korea, we had an organized large-scale aggression from North Korea, and we were doing it as part of a general United Nations commitment. Even with that start, the Korean aspect of it—the Korean war—got out of control as far as the general support of the American people were concerned, before it was over.

Now, these considerations that I've just mentioned would militate in favor of a consultation with Khrushchev and an implication that we will act because, in the first instance, there is the possibility, only a possibility, that Mr. Khrushchev might realize that he's got to back down on this. We can't be . . . I have no reason to expect that. This looks like a very serious and major commitment on his part. But at least it will take that point out of the way for the historical record, and just might have in it the seeds of prevention of a great conflict.

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24. Rusk was referring to events that preceded and immediately followed the outbreak of World War I in 1914, using the title of a well-known book recently published about this episode, *The Guns of August*, by Barbara Tuchman.

The Rio Pact is, I think clearly, our strongest legal basis for whatever action we need to take. The other possibility is a straight, is a straight declaration of war, which carries with it many legal privileges as a belligerent that would be extremely useful for us to have. But there is plenty of room in the Rio Pact for meeting this kind of threat, and I would suppose—Mr. Martin will have to comment on this—I would suppose there would be no real difficulty in getting a two-thirds vote in favor of necessary action.

But if we made the effort and failed to get the two-thirds vote at the time, which I would doubt would be the result, then at least we will have tried. And as far as the American people are concerned, we'd have done our very best on that.

Now, it seems to me, that the further information we have about the bases, other bases in other parts of the island, the buildup generally throughout Cuba, does raise the question as to whether a declaration of a national emergency and, if necessary, a declaration of war on Cuba may not be the necessary step here rather than spotty single strikes here and there around about the island. Because this could become a cops and robbers game, each strike becoming not only more difficult from a military point of view, but more difficult from your, from a political point of view, and it looks as though we have a larger problem to solve. And we may have to solve it in a larger way.

Now the principal alternative to that is, of course, to put in the short strikes, the brief strikes, and try our hand at getting it over with promptly as far as these particular installations are concerned. But these other bases, I think, create larger problems. Casualties go up a great deal and the challenge goes up a great deal. I think that the question is whether—I'd like to hear my colleagues comment on this—whether the action we would take, would have to take even in the most limited sense, would have to be large enough to involve the greatest risks in any event. Therefore we might as well solve the problem.

I would like to . . . Mr. Bohlen left a note last night after our meeting, wrote it out at about midnight or early this morning, just before he left. And I would like to read you certain paragraphs of this. He said:

The existence of Soviet MRBM bases in Cuba cannot be tolerated. The objective therefore is their elimination by whatever means may be necessary.

There are two means in essence: by diplomatic action or by military action.

No one can guarantee that this can be achieved by diplomatic

action, but it seems to me essential that this channel should be tested out before military action is employed. If our decision is firm (and it must be) I can see no danger in communication with Khrushchev privately, worded in such a way that he realizes that we mean business.

This I consider an essential first step no matter what military course we determine on if the reply is unsatisfactory. The tone and tenor of his reply will tell us something, but I don't believe that a threat of general nuclear war should deter us. If he means it, he would have so reacted even if the strike should come first.

My chief concern about a strike without any diplomatic effort is that it will eventually, that it will immediately, lead to war with Cuba and would not be the neat quick disposal of the bases, as was suggested. Furthermore, I am reasonably certain that the allied reaction would be dead against us, especially if the Soviet Union retaliated locally (in Turkey or Italy or in Berlin).

A communication with Khrushchev would be very useful for the record in establishing our case for action.

In general I feel that a declaration of war would be valuable since it would open up every avenue of military action: air strikes, invasion or blockade. But we would have to make a case before our allies to justify such a declaration of war. If we acted first and sought to justify it later we would be in a spat of great consequence.

Finally, I feel very strongly that the belief in a limited, quick action is an illusion and would lead us into a total war with Cuba on a step-by-step basis which would greatly increase the probability of general war.

That best course would be, he says, a carefully worded and serious letter to Khrushchev, before we take the action, the steps, and then followed by a declaration of war. We were talking about this last night. I think it is in this range of problems that we need to concentrate our attention, Mr. President. Otherwise we just . . . how we see the nature of the threat. I think our Defense colleagues ought to talk a moment about the actual military aspect of the threat itself.

**McNamara:** Mr. President, here is listed . . . there are a series of alternative plans ranging from Roman numeral I was about 50 sorties, directed solely against the known MRBMs, known as of last night, to Roman numeral V, which covers the alternative invasion plan.

All of these plans are based on one very important assumption: That we would attack, with conventional weapons, against an enemy who is not equipped with operational nuclear weapons. If there's any possibility

that the enemy is equipped with operational nuclear weapons, I'm certain the plans would have to be changed.

Last evening we were discussing the relative merits of these forms of military action, assuming that at some point military action was required. It has been the view of the Chiefs, based on discussions within the last two days, and it was certainly my view, that either Roman numeral I or Roman numeral II, very limited air strikes against very limited targets, would be quite inconclusive, very risky, and almost certainly lead to further military action prior to which we would have paid an unnecessary price for the gains we achieved.

And therefore the Chiefs and I would certainly have recommended last night, and I would recommend more strongly today, that we not consider undertaking either Roman numeral I, or Roman numeral II. In other words, we consider nothing short of a full invasion as applicable military action. And this only on the assumption that we're operating against a force that does not possess operational nuclear weapons.

**President Kennedy:** Why do you change . . . why has this information changed the recommendation?

**McNamara:** Last evening, it was my personal belief that there were more targets than we knew of, and it was probable there would be more targets than we could know of at the start of any one of these strikes. The information of this morning, I think, simply demonstrates the validity of that conclusion of last evening.

Secondly, when we're talking of Roman numeral I, it's a very limited strike against MRBMs only, and it leaves in existence IL-28s with nuclear weapon-carrying capability, and a number of other aircraft with nuclear weapon-carrying capability, and aircraft with strike capability that could be exercised during our attack, or immediately following our attack on the MRBMs, with great possible risk of loss to either Guantánamo and/or the eastern coast of the U.S.

I say great loss, I'm not thinking in terms of tens of thousands, but I'm thinking in terms of sporadic attacks against our civilian population, which would lead to losses, I think, we would find it hard to justify in relation to the alternative courses open to us, and in relation to the very limited accomplishment of our limited number of strikes.

**Robert Kennedy:** Bob, what about alternative number II, on the basis that you're going against offensive weapons? You're going to go against the missiles, and you're going to go against their planes. What are the arguments against that? I mean that would prevent them knocking our population.

**McNamara:** It is much to be preferred over number I, in my opinion.

It would have to be larger than is shown now because of the additional number of targets required, and it gets very close to alternative III, in terms of number of sorties. Number II [strike] was prepared before we had the additional information, of last night's [photo] interpretation. We showed a hundred sorties. I think it more likely that number II, with the information we now have, and the information we're likely to have today and tomorrow, would merge into number III, which is a 200-sortie strike. I doubt very much we could stop there.

**Taylor:** I would agree with that statement of the Secretary's, that really II is hardly possible now. We're really talking about III, you realize, because you'll have to take the SAM sites out, if you're going to go for all the airfield strikes. We're probably going out to the point where you're going to have to take other targets related to affecting [*unclear*].

**McCone:** I think that's particularly true if you expect to have any follow-on surveillance. The SAM sites will soon become operational and even though we take out, if we follow I and II, we are still going to have a requirement to know what's going on.

**Taylor:** We're going to have a prolonged air war, I would say, indefinitely either under I, II, or III, actually.

**Theodore Sorensen:** Well, under II, you don't need to take out the SAM sites before they become operational.

**Taylor:** They may be operational at any time.

**McNamara:** We have almost certainly added 2 more targets than are indicated here. There were 16 targets shown. We have at least 3 more targets from evidence since last night, and we will certainly have some more tonight and tomorrow. And, therefore, II merges very directly into III. If the SAM sites become operational, II becomes III because, in a very real sense, that's maybe the —

**President Kennedy:** Let me ask you this, Bob, what we're talking about is III versus V, isn't it?

**McNamara:** Yes, sir.

**President Kennedy:** Then the advantage of III is that you would hope to do it in a day.

**McNamara:** Yes, and it could be done in a day.

**President Kennedy:** And invasion V, would be seven, eight, or nine days, with all the consequences. . . .

**McNamara:** That is correct.

**President Kennedy:** The increase in tension.

Now, if we did III, we would assume that by the end of the day their ability to use planes against us, after all they don't have that much range, so they'd have to come back to the field and organized it right.

**McNamara:** Yes. You would assume, by the end of the day, their air force could be nearly destroyed. I say nearly because there might be a few sporadic weapons around.

**Taylor:** Yes, I would stress the point, Mr. President, that we'll never be guaranteeing 100 percent.

**McNamara:** That's right. That's right.

**President Kennedy:** But at least as far as their . . . except with nuclear. I would think you would have to go on the assumption that they are not going to permit nuclear weapons to be used against the United States from Cuba unless they're going to be using them from everywhere.

**McNamara:** Well, they could . . . I'm not sure they can stop it. This is why I emphasized the point I did. I don't believe the Soviets would authorize their use against the U.S., but they might nonetheless be used.

And, therefore, I underline this assumption, that all of these cases are premised on the assumption there are no operational nuclear weapons there. If there's any possibility of that I would strongly recommend that these plans be modified substantially.

Now I would go back just one second. I evaded the question Secretary Rusk asked me, and I evaded it because I wanted this information discussed first. The question he asked me was: How does—in effect—how does the introduction of these weapons to Cuba change the military equation, the military position of the U.S. versus the U.S.S.R.?

And, speaking strictly in military terms, really in terms of weapons, it doesn't change it at all, in my personal opinion. My personal views are not shared by the Chiefs. They are not shared by many others in the department. However, I feel very strongly on this point and I think I could argue a case, a strong case, in defense of my position.

This doesn't really have any bearing on the issue, in my opinion, because it is not a military problem that we're facing. It's a political problem. It's a problem of holding the alliance together. It's a problem of properly conditioning Khrushchev for our future moves. And the problem of holding the alliance together, the problem of conditioning Khrushchev for our future moves, the problem of dealing with our domestic public, all requires action that, in my opinion, the shift in military balance does not require.

**President Kennedy:** On holding the alliance. Which is going to strain the alliance more: This attack by us on Cuba, which most allies regard as a fixation of the United States and not a serious military threat? I mean, you'd have to . . . an awful lot of conditioning would have to go in before they would accept, support our action against Cuba, because they think that we're slightly demented on this subject.



So there isn't any doubt that whatever actions we take against Cuba, no matter how good our films are, are going to cause [problems] in Latin America. A lot of, a lot of people would regard this as a mad act by the United States, which is due to a loss of nerve because they will argue that, taken at its worst, the presence of these missiles really doesn't change the . . . If you think that, they're going to, certainly. With all the incentives to think the other way, viewing this as you do as an American, what's everybody else going to think who isn't under this gun?

**McNamara:** Aren't the others going to think exactly as I do?

**Taylor:** May I comment, Mr. President?

With regard to what we've just seen in intelligence, it seems to me three things stand out. The first is the very rapid . . . the energy with which they are developing the mobile missiles. In the course of 24 hours since Sunday [October 14, the day of the U-2 flight that first photographed the MRBM sites]. They are moving very fast to make those weapons operational.

Whether they're operational today? I would agree with the Secretary that probably not, but I don't think anyone can assure you. At any time at least one or more of these missiles will become operational.

Now, number two, the IL-28s. We've been expecting this. But now they've turned up in a very plausible location, I would say, and they're lying there inviting attack—an ideal time to take them out.

Now third, the IRBMs really put a new factor in, as I look at it. Yesterday, when we looked at this we had only a few of the mobile type [MRBMs]. I was far from convinced that the big showdown would be required. Today we're getting new pictures, and the vision of an island that's going to be a forward base, can become a forward base, of major importance to the Soviets.

Also, the targets that we're seeing, however, the kind of air attack we're talking about means nothing. We can't take this threat out by actions from the air. So that we have argued more and more that if, indeed, you're going to prevent that kind of thing, invasion is going to be required.

**Bundy:** But you don't mean that you can't prevent it in the sense of stopping it from happening the next day. You mean that for the long pull you're going to have to take the island.

**Taylor:** Yes, you can't destroy a hole in the ground. We can't prevent this construction going ahead by any air actions. Conceivably diplomatic action might stop it, but only diplomatic action, or occupation as far as I can see, can prevent this kind of threat from building up.

Now, if those statements are roughly correct, then what does it mean

in terms of time? Well, it means that, insofar as getting the mobile missiles out, time is of the essence. But the faster the better, if it's not already too late. And I would say that, again, we're not sure that it is not too late, with respect to one or more of the missiles.

With the IL-28s, our air people think it would be two to three weeks before they're ready to fly. So that would give us considerably more latitude in terms of time.

The MRBMs give us a rather complete time because, the experience in the Soviet Union is an average of about six months to get these ready. And these started about the first of September.

**President Kennedy:** You say MRBM. That's—

**McNamara:** It's the fixed site, yes [that had been identified as a probable IRBM, not MRBM].

**President Kennedy:** That [missile] gives an extra 800 miles [of range], gives them an extra—

**McNamara:** It makes it 2,000 miles [range]. An extra 1,000 miles [over the MRBMs].

**Taylor:** So that there is no pressure of time from that point of view even though it's the more egregious danger in the long run. So that's about the thoughts that arise in my mind, and I think the Chiefs will join me in that.

There is one factor we talked about at length yesterday. It's the political actions which Mr. Bohlen recommends, and many others think must be done. Certainly militarily that is undesirable, if we really have in mind the urgency of taking out by surprise the missiles, and the IL-28s.

On the other hand, if we consider it politically necessary, it's quite true that an offsetting [*unclear*] if we could be making military moves of readiness to reinforce the political action, and actions that can shorten the time of our reaction.

**President Kennedy:** Let me ask you: If we gave, say, this 24-hour notice, getting in touch with Khrushchev, or taking the other actions with our allies, I would assume that they would move these mobile missiles into the woods, wouldn't they?

**Taylor:** There's is a danger, Mr. President. If you're talking in terms of 24 hours I would doubt it. But the more you add on—

**President Kennedy:** [*Unclear*] carry them away?

**McNamara:** Mr. President, I don't believe they're equipped to do that. I say that because if they are equipped to do that, they would have been equipped to erect them more quickly. I think that it's unlikely they would move them in 24 hours. If they were to move them in 24 hours, I think we could keep enough reconnaissance over the island during that

period to have some idea of where they moved. I have every reason to believe we'd know where they were.

**McCone:** It would take a little longer though.

**McNamara:** What?

**McCone:** It would take a little longer and take very careful reconnaissance to know where they are.

**Bundy:** Why are you so confident that they couldn't hide them or get them in immediate readiness in 24 hours?

**McNamara:** Well, I'm not confident. I didn't say they couldn't get them in immediate readiness in 24 hours, Mac. I don't believe that we would lose them with a 24-hour discussion with Khrushchev.

**President Kennedy:** How quick is our communications with Moscow? I mean, say we sent somebody to see him, I mean he was there at the beginning of the 24-hour period, to see Mr. Khrushchev, how long would it be before Khrushchev's answer could get back to us, just by communication?

**Llewellyn Thompson:** I think it would have to go in code. Probably . . . what, five to six hours, I guess.

**President Kennedy:** Well, you can—

**Thompson:** You could telephone, of course.

**Robert Kennedy:** It wouldn't really have to go in code, would it?

**Thompson:** Well, you would shorten the time a lot by not putting it into a highly confidential code [*unclear*].

**President Kennedy:** That would be a couple of hours?

**Thompson:** Yes.

**Rusk:** I think the quickest way might be, actually, not to run into any delays on their end, would be to give it to Dobrynin here in an actual text, and let him transmit it, because that would get to Khrushchev straight away, whereas somebody else might have the problem of setting up an appointment.

**McCone:** I think more importantly—

**President Kennedy:** What?

**McCone:** I think the one point on this that ought to be . . . bear in mind—this was brought up in the [U.S.] Intelligence Board meeting this morning rather forcefully, that, so far as we know, there is no stated relationship that makes these Soviet missiles or Soviet bases. The attempts that Castro made to ally himself with the Warsaw Pact, or to join the Warsaw Pact, or even to engage in a bilateral [defense treaty] with Moscow, apparently either were deferred or failed. He sent Raul [Castro] and Che Guevara to Moscow a few months ago, apparently for that purpose, that and his other purposes.

Hence, if we were to take action with this present status, the Soviets would have some latitude as to how they might want to respond if they did at all.

On the other hand, if as a result of a warning, or of a communication with them, they declare these their bases, then we would have a different kind of problem because it would be the problem of committing an action against a stated base of theirs. And this might mean a war of different proportions.

**President Kennedy:** The question is really whether the Soviet reaction, and who knows this, would be measurably different if they were presented with an accomplished fact days after, I mean one day, not the invasion [*unclear*] just the accomplished fact. [The question is] whether their reaction would be different than it would be if they were given a chance to pull them out.

If we said to Khrushchev that: "We have to take action against it. But if you begin to pull them out, we'll take ours out of Turkey." Whether he would then send back: "If you take these out, we're going to take Berlin" or "We're going to do something else." And then we'd be . . .

**Thompson:** An important factor there is, if you do this first strike, you'd have killed a lot of Russians and that doesn't . . . inevitable reaction. On the other hand, if you do give him notice, the thing I would fear the most is a threat to Turkey and Italy to take action, which would cause us considerable difficulty [*unclear*].

**President Kennedy:** You mean if . . .

**Bundy:** What is your preference, Tommy?

**Thompson:** My preference is this blockade plan. I think this declaration of war and these steps leading up to it. I think it's very highly doubtful that the Russians would resist a blockade against military weapons, particularly offensive ones, if that's the way we pitched it before the world.

**President Kennedy:** What do we do with the weapons already there?

**Thompson:** Demand they're dismantled, and say that we're going to maintain constant surveillance, and if they are armed, we would then take them out. And then maybe do it.

I think we should be under no illusions; this would probably in the end lead to the same thing. But we do it in an entirely different posture and background and much less danger of getting up into the big war.

The Russians have a curious faculty of wanting a legal basis despite all of the outrageous things they've done. They attach a lot of importance to this. The fact that you have a declaration of war. They would be running a military blockade legally established. I think it would greatly deter them.

**President Kennedy:** In other words . . . what?

**Robert Kennedy:** Could you maybe just run through it? Because he hasn't heard the explanation of the blockade, what that entails.

**Roswell Gilpatric:** There is a paper there on that, the course number two there, Mr. President, in front of you. There is a concept for this.

**President Kennedy:** In other words, under this plan however, we would not take these missiles that they now have out, or the planes they now have out.

**Thompson:** Not in the first stage. I think it would be useful to say that if they were made operational we might, or would—

**President Kennedy:** Of course then he would say that: "Well, if you do that, then we will . . ."

**Thompson:** As Chip [Bohlen] says, I agree with him, that if they're prepared to say: "All right, if you do this, then this is nuclear world war," then they would do that anyway. I think he [Khrushchev] would make a lot of threatening language but in very vague terms in keeping his—

**President Kennedy:** Yeah. I would think it more likely he would just grab Berlin. That's the more likely.

**Thompson:** I think that or, if we just made the first strike, then I think his answer would be, very probably, to take out one of our bases in Turkey, and make it quick too and then say that: "Now I want to talk."

I think the whole purpose of this exercise is to build up to talks with you, in which we try to negotiate out the bases. There are a lot of things that point to that.

One thing that struck me very much is, if it's so easy to camouflage these things or to hide them in the woods, why didn't they do it in the first place? They surely expected us to see them at some stage. That, it seems, would point to the fact their purpose was for preparation of negotiations.<sup>25</sup>

**Robert Kennedy:** Maybe they have some in there.

**Thompson:** They may.

**Taylor:** May I ask whether military moves in this five day period would be acceptable from the point of view of the State Department?

**Alexis Johnson:** Oh yes, certainly.

**George Ball:** I think it would be helpful, certainly be helpful—

*Sentences unclear; Thompson refers to "credibility."*

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25. In fact it is not at all easy to hide even the MRBMs in the woods and of course not the fixed IRBM sites. But Thompson is relying on the assumption that was then prevalent, if unexamined.

**Alexis Johnson:** Now, of course, Mr. President, there are obvious counters to the blockade. The obvious one being in Berlin.

**President Kennedy:** Yes.

**Robert Kennedy:** And also the argument against the blockade is that it's a very slow death. And it builds up, and it goes over a period of months, and during that period of time you've got all these people yelling and screaming about it, you've got the examination of Russian ships and the shooting down the Russian planes that try to land there. You have to do all those things.

**President Kennedy:** Submarines.

**Edwin Martin:** Since we're all clear on the Soviet reaction, if as Tommy and Chip predicted the Soviets would not try to run the blockade, then they would have deserted their friends in Cuba. And I think there would be considerable political chaos in Cuba, if the Soviets deserted them before our conference.

**Thompson:** Also, I would assume you would be in negotiations directly with Khrushchev.

**Taylor:** In the case of any of these attack plans, in all logic we would have a blockade concurrently. In other words, in my judgment all of these military actions imply also the blockade.

**Bundy:** I agree.

**Ball:** Oh yeah, sure, sure. But what would you do about a declaration of war as a military action? Do it?

**Bundy:** Simultaneously, it seems to me you declare that a state of war exists, and you call the Congress.

**Thompson:** I think Khrushchev will deny that these are Soviet bases. [*Unclear.*] I think that what he'd say is: "What are you getting so excited about? The Cubans asked us for some missiles to deal with these emigre bases that are threatening, have attacked and are threatening attack." And that: "These are not missiles other than defensive. They're much less offensive than your weapons in Turkey. You've got these armed with nuclear warheads. We haven't given any nuclear weapons to them. These are simply to deal with the threat to Cuba." That would be his general line.

**Rusk:** Well, that would be patently false on its face because of the nature of the weapons. [*Mixed voices.*]

**Bundy:** If we act, they'd better be Cuban missiles, surely.

**Rusk:** I think our action is aimed at Cuba just as much as possible in this situation.

**Thompson:** You want to make it, if you do any of these steps, make it as easy as possible for him to back down.

I think almost certainly it leads to . . . his answer would be also: "This

is so serious, I'm prepared to talk to you about it." We could scarcely refuse then. That's if you have world war being threatened. So I think you'd just immediately assume the next step. That's why I think that the Attorney General's point, while certainly valid, is somewhat weakened in that during this period you would be negotiating out this thing.

**Rusk:** But if he were to say: "Let's talk." Then you'd have to say to him: "Stop immediately all activities on such and such fields, sites and so forth."

**Thompson:** I'd impose a blockade while you do it.

**President Kennedy:** The blockade wouldn't be sufficient. Because he could go on developing what he's got there. We don't know how much he's got there.

**Alexis Johnson:** Yeah. But he would—You impose the blockade on Cuba, and he imposes the blockade on Berlin. And then you start to talk. And he would trade these two off.

**Rusk:** That's what he would figure.

**Alexis Johnson:** That's what he would figure, yes.

**Thompson:** Seems to me that one point on this—there are a lot of little signs—but I was always curious as to why he [Khrushchev] said he would defer this [a renewed confrontation over Berlin] until after the election. It seems to me it is all related to this.

**McCone:** I'm sure he was waiting for Berlin to ask.

Mr. President, you might be interested in General Eisenhower's reaction to this. I talked to him at your request.

I briefed him, showed him the photography and all the rest of this. He was careful, I think, not to take a position, because I had no position and I was very careful not to indicate to him your position, as agreed in our telephone conversation.

However, I can report that the thrust of his comments would indicate that he felt first that the existence of offensive capabilities in Cuba was intolerable from the standpoint of this country.

Secondly, I think he felt that limited actions such as strafing, as anticipated in I, or II, or even III, in this paper, would *not* be satisfactory. It would cause the greatest fear and concern with our allies and in all areas of the world where the Soviets might take similar action against installations—the United States installations that were in jeopardy with others such as Turkey or Pakistan or elsewhere.

He felt really that if a move was made—and I think if I pinned him down he would recommend that—it should be an all out military action. He talked of conceiving it to go right to the jugular first, not an invasion that involves landing on the beach and working slowly across the island. But a concentrated attack right on Havana first and taking the heart of the

government out. And he felt if this was done, probably the thing would be in disarray, so it could be done with a minimum loss of life and time.

Now he said that without the benefit of specific knowledge of troop deployments, and equipment deployments, and so forth of the Soviets, or of the Cubans, but I thought this would be of interest to you.

**Rusk:** Mr. President, one thing that would have to be considered: There would be a number of steps that you would have to take on which you would need the authority of a national emergency or a declaration of war, some of the defense steps and some of these kind of steps would bring in additional manpower and there are other powers that the attorney general would know about that could be important here.

**Thompson:** One other point that maybe . . . seems to me might be missed, that is since Castro's gone this far in conniving, I suppose—assuming that he didn't protest at putting these things in there—it seems to me that in the end it does lead to the fact that Castro has to go.

But if we did this blockade, and any of these steps, and Castro attacked Guantánamo and so on, you've got a much better position in which then to go ahead and take him out than if it's started by some surprise attack by us. I gather it's fairly likely that Castro would do something there to—

**Taylor:** Certainly, if we take any of these military actions, I think we have to assume a reaction against Guantánamo.

**Douglas Dillon:** Mr. President, what is the whole idea, I'm not quite clear, of talking to Khrushchev ahead of time? What could he do that would remove this danger that we have from these MRBMs that are present and already there? What could he do that would satisfy us? It seems to me very difficult to see any action you can take that he might say: "Sure, I'll take them out sometime," and then do the opposite their old way.

I can't quite understand how we achieve anything. We may achieve something in sort of . . . for history in showing we've done something. But that's a different argument than the argument of really trying to achieve anything. I don't see how we really achieve anything with them.

**Rusk:** Yes, sir. There are the two alternatives. In general, he might reduce his involvement. He might step it up in his reply.

**Dillon:** But you can't believe his reply, whatever it is.

**Rusk:** But you can check his reply.

**Thompson:** I think the most he'd do in the way of concession would be to say that he will not take any further action while these talks go on. Meantime, we've said that we were going to keep an eye on him, and the problem is that if they become operational, they might be turned to the Cubans. [*Unclear.*] But I don't think he'd ever just back down.



**Unidentified:** As Bob said, they are operational, or they will be next week. Nothing's going to stop that.<sup>26</sup>

**Ball:** No, I think that your position with the rest of the alliance is going to be stronger if you have given Khrushchev a chance to do something.

**Bundy:** It depends what he says and does, George, it seems to me.

**Ball:** Well, if he makes a threat you go ahead, I mean you can't be stopped. But that seems to me to be very much—

**Bundy:** He must have that speech all figured out. The one thing that he [Khrushchev] must know is that he's going to have to say something to us about this at some point. I think there's a reasonable chance Gromyko's going to make the speech [in his meeting with President Kennedy] this afternoon.

**Thompson:** He gave [U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union] Foy [Kohler] some indication of it, what he plans, I think [*in a conversation on October 15*].

**President Kennedy:** Well what did he say, how do you mean—yeah.

**Taylor:** Well, I presume that our communication with Khrushchev could be in such terms that it wouldn't indicate the detail of our knowledge of these weapons, in other words, make him feel the American eye is right on this particular site. Think we can convey that message without giving it away?

**McCone:** I don't think he can believe that we don't know all about this. It's done in a semiovert way. These convoys have moved. People have observed them. We've got refugee reports, gossip of all kinds. All that we know doesn't come from our aerial photography, by any manner or means.

I'm inclined to think that if we were . . . I think the board studying this would agree that there would be a . . . that Khrushchev would engage us in some type of a negotiation, that we'd be locked into [it] and couldn't move.<sup>27</sup> I don't think there would be an answer that would be so negative that it would give us freedom of action. Hence, it would be somewhat like the Geneva test suspension business. We got into it and we couldn't get out of it!

**President Kennedy:** The only, to me—

**McCone:** The [*unclear*] thing would be built up right under our—

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26. At this point Tape 30 ends and Tape 30A begins, in the John F. Kennedy Library cataloguing system.

27. The Board of National Estimates at the CIA was then preparing a Special National Intelligence Estimate, distributed the next day, on "Soviet Reactions to Certain U.S. Courses of Action on Cuba."

**President Kennedy:** The only offer we would make, it seems to me, that would have any sense, according to him, would be the . . . giving him some out, would be our Turkey missiles.

**Bundy:** I believe, Mr. President, that that is equally valid if we make the sudden strike. Now, I think it may well be important to have a message in Khrushchev's hands *at that moment*, saying that we, among other things, all the wicked things that have led to this, but also that we understand this base problem and that we do expect to dismantle our Turkish base. That has one small advantage, which is that if he strikes back, we will have at least given him a peaceful out on that.

**President Kennedy:** You see, Berlin is—

**Bundy:** I don't think we can keep that Turkish base in this counter [-move].

**Dillon:** I think you get your same point by doing this thing simultaneously. That way as you do by the other thing [*unclear*].

**Rusk:** A direct exchange though that seems to be a Cuba-Turkey exchange, would be quite serious. Now it's true that we have talked with the Turks a year ago about getting those, taking the Jupiters out of there for other reasons.<sup>28</sup>

**Bundy:** No, no, I don't . . . to advance it is good, but as simply one way of reducing your costs and controlling your dangers.

**Alexis Johnson:** What you want is to talk to the Turks as if you were going to put a Polaris or two in those waters.<sup>29</sup>

**Bundy:** Yeah. Which should make everyone feel better. We have Soviet submarines are going to be in the Caribbean. I mean this is a political not a military problem.

**McNamara:** If there is a strike without a preliminary discussion with Khrushchev, how many Soviet citizens will be killed? I don't know. It'd be several hundred at absolute minimum.

**Bundy:** Killed, as in casualties?

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28. The Kennedy administration had considered abandoning the delayed deployment of Jupiter missiles to Turkey and had discussed the possibility with Turkish officials in the spring of 1961. The Turks wanted the missiles. Before top administration officials resolved the problem, the confrontation in Vienna between Kennedy and Khrushchev over Berlin intervened. After Khrushchev's intimidating rhetoric in Vienna, the administration agreed that the Turkish deployment had to proceed, since canceling the deployment might then be mistaken as a sign of U.S. fear or weakness.

29. The principal idea then being considered for the replacement of Turkish and other obsolescent land-based ballistic missiles deployed in Europe was to offer some sea-based substitute for them, possibly linked to the Polaris nuclear missile submarines then entering service.

**McNamara:** Killed. Absolutely. We're using napalm, 750-pound bombs. This is an extensive strike we're talking about.

**Bundy:** Well, I hope it is.

**McNamara:** I think we must assume we'll kill several hundred Soviet citizens. Having killed several hundred Soviet citizens, what kind of response does Khrushchev have open to him?

It seems to me that it just *must* be a strong response, and I think we should expect that. And, therefore, the question really is are we willing to pay some kind of a rather substantial price to eliminate these missiles? I think the price is going to be high. It may still be worth paying to eliminate the missiles. But I think we must assume it's going to be high—the very *least* it will be to remove the missiles in Italy and Turkey. I doubt we could settle [the problem] for that.

**Dillon:** Well, I think they'll take Berlin.

**Ball:** Mr. President, I think that it's easy sitting here to, to underestimate the kind of sense of affront that you would have in the allied countries within—even perhaps in Latin America, if we act without warning, without giving Khrushchev some way out. Even though it may be illusory, I think we still have to do it because I think that the impact on the opinion and the reaction would be very much different.

A course of action where we strike without warning is like Pearl Harbor. It's the kind of conduct that one might expect of the Soviet Union. It is not conduct that one expects of the United States. And I have a feeling that this 24 hours [warning] to Khrushchev is really indispensable.

**President Kennedy:** And then if he says: "Well if you do that, we're going to grab Berlin." The point is, he's probably going to grab Berlin anyway.

**Ball:** Sure. We go ahead.

**President Kennedy:** He's going to take Berlin anyway.

**Alexis Johnson:** We pay that price.

**McNamara:** I suspect the price we pay to Khrushchev will be about the same, whether we give him the advance warning or don't give him the advance warning. The advance warning has the advantage of *possibly* giving him an out that would reduce the requirement that we enter with military force. That's a bare possibility, not great. It has the advantage George has mentioned of causing less friction with the rest of the world.

It has some disadvantages: a reduction of military surprise, but the disadvantage of that is not very great.

It carries with it, however, I believe, the great disadvantage that once you start down that course he outmaneuvers you.

**Dillon:** Well, the only advantage I see to it is the one you say, George, and that is that if you decide to do this, and you want to put yourself in the right position with the world, you [do this] as part of a [military] program that never stops. You have 24-hour notice. But you're under no illusion that anything he says is going to stop you.

You go ahead and do it [the strike]. You're not doing it for the purpose of getting him to come up and do something. What you're doing is to set the stage. That makes some sense.

**Alexis Johnson:** If you go the blockade route, you could take more time in these steps; on the other hand, you hold the danger of his outmaneuvering you.

**President Kennedy:** If he grabs Berlin, of course. Then everybody would feel we lost Berlin, because of these missiles, which as I say, do not bother them.

**Thompson:** My guess is that he would not immediately attack Berlin, but he would precipitate the real crisis at first, in order to try to sap our morale and—

**Dillon:** The difference is that in Cuba we've shown that we will take action, at a point which nobody knows. That's the great danger, now, to us; they think we will never take action. So I think our position has [unclear] possibility [unclear].

**Bundy:** I think he [Thompson] and I agree. I think the precipitation of a Berlin crisis is just as bad, if we've let this happen to us, against all our promises to ourselves.

**Dillon:** Worse.

**President Kennedy:** You mean, in other words, in late November when he [Khrushchev] grabs Berlin?

**Robert Kennedy:** What do we do when he moves into Berlin?

**Bundy:** If we could trade off Berlin, and not have it our fault. [Chuckles.]

**Dillon:** Well, that's the danger. To have already acted in Cuba and—

**McNamara:** Well, when we're talking about taking Berlin, what do we mean exactly? Does he take it with Soviet troops?

**President Kennedy:** That's what it would seem to me.

**McNamara:** Then we have . . . I think there's a real possibility. We have U.S. troops there. What do they do?

**Taylor:** They fight.

**McNamara:** They fight. I think that's perfectly clear.

**President Kennedy:** And they get overrun.

**McNamara:** Yes, they get overrun, exactly.

**Unidentified:** Well, you have a direct confrontation.

**Robert Kennedy:** Then what do we do?

**Taylor:** Go to general war, if it's in the interest of ours.

**Unidentified:** It's then general war. Consider the use of . . .

**President Kennedy:** You mean nuclear exchange? [*Brief pause.*]

**Taylor:** Guess you have to.

**Bundy:** I do see your . . . If you go in at the same time that you do this [attack on Cuba] and you'll say to him: "Berlin still means general war." I don't think he will do it that way.

**Unidentified:** I doubt whether he would . . . I don't think he'd [*unclear*].

**Rusk:** You'd have to start at least with tactical nuclear weapons if he tried to attack Berlin [*unclear*] a blockade.

**Taylor:** I think they'd use East German forces, rather than bringing their own troops in.

**President Kennedy:** Let me ask you. It seems to me we have been talking about the alliance, you've got two problems. One would be the problem of the alliance when we say to them that the presence of these missiles requires a military action by us. There's no doubt that they will oppose that, because they'll feel that their risks increase, and this is a risk to us. They'll argue what is Secretary McNamara's point.

If we don't take any action, then of course there will be a more gradual deterioration, I suppose. Isn't that the argument?

**Rusk:** I think that will be very fast.

**Dillon:** Very rapidly.

**Bundy:** Very rapid.

**Dillon:** Very rapid.

**President Kennedy:** After my statement, and then, I mean . . . Somehow we've got to take some action because we couldn't . . . Because the alliance would disintegrate.

Now, the question really is to what action we take which lessens the chances of a nuclear exchange, which obviously is the final failure. That's the obvious direction. . . . so that . . . And at the same time, maintain some degree of solidarity with our allies. Now, if you want that to be the course, then it would seem to me that II might [*unclear*].

**Dillon:** From the point of view of our allies, they think that certainly this strong setup in Cuba, this sort of weakens our ability to help them everywhere. So it is in the interest of the alliance to have this thing eliminated even though it does create some dangers.

**President Kennedy:** Now, to get a blockade on Cuba, would we have to declare war on Cuba with a blockade?

**Bundy:** Yes, we do.

**Alexis Johnson:** Yes, we do. This contemplates a declaration of war as well.

**Bundy:** We don't have to, in the sense that . . . but it makes it easier, and better.

**Ball:** Well, it makes it legal. Otherwise, we'd have great difficulty with our allies if we didn't have a declaration of war, in my judgment.

**Alexis Johnson:** [ *Unclear* ] under the Rio Pact, under the [ September 20 ] resolution that was passed by the Congress.

**President Kennedy:** I think we shouldn't assume we have to declare war. The declaration of a state of war is a . . . Because it seems to me if you're going to do that, you really—it doesn't make any sense not to invade. I think we ought to consider whether we do need the . . .

At least let's just think with this a minute. We do the message to Khrushchev and tell him that if work continues, etcetera, etcetera. We at the same time launch the blockade. If the work continues, that we go in and take them out.

We don't declare war. It doesn't seem to me that a declaration of war . . . Then I think you have to get into an invasion. What do you do—when he—?

**Ball:** The great difficulty of a blockade without a declaration of war is that it is an illegal blockade, that it will be very difficult—

**Bundy:** It is an act of aggression against everybody else.

**Ball:** Everybody. Including our allies.

**Rusk:** What? You could have a blockade imposed under Article 8 of the Rio Treaty. After all, this is within the territorial framework of the Rio—

**President Kennedy:** None of our allies. I don't think anybody who gets excited because their ships are stopped under these conditions. They're not very much help to us anyway. What does Article 8 say?

**Rusk:** Article 8 is—

**President Kennedy:** [ *reading from Article 8* ] "For the purposes of this Treaty, the measures on which the Organ of Consultation may agree will comprise one or more of the following: recall of chiefs . . . breaking of . . . breaking of consular . . . interruption of [economic relations or] of rail, sea, air. . ."

Under what authority would we—

**Rusk:** [ *quoting the last phrase of Article 8* ] "use of armed forces."

**President Kennedy:** Yes, but we can't unilaterally . . .

**Rusk:** No, but I mean in the Organ of Consultation [of the Organization of American States]—

**President Kennedy:** That would take a week, wouldn't it?

**Rusk:** No, I don't think it would. Ed, how quickly could they—?

**Martin:** I think two or three days it could be done. But I don't think . . .

**Unidentified:** I doubt it that quickly. I don't think you would do it so fast.

**Robert Kennedy:** How many votes [in the OAS] would you have against it [a blockade]?

**Martin:** Probably four for sure.

**President Kennedy:** Mexico. Brazil. Chile.

**Martin:** Cuba and Bolivia.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah. Probably Ecuador.

**Martin:** No, Cuba's not in it. Ecuador I think we might get.

**Rusk:** Bolivia might not come.

**Martin:** Bolivia might well not attend. So you would have three sure.

**Rusk:** Because they're temporarily out of the OAS.

**President Kennedy:** Now, obviously, knowing the Soviets and the way Khrushchev reacts always, I don't think that we could assume that he's going to stop working.

I'm not sure exactly what we get out of this particular course of action, except that it doesn't go quite—it doesn't raise it [the escalation] immediately as high as it would be under ordinary, other conditions.

**Ball:** Mr. President, I would like to suggest that if you have a blockade, without some kind of ultimatum, that work must stop on the missile sites or you take them out. That you'll have an impossible position with the country, because they will not sit still while work goes on making these things operational. And I think this is one of the real problems of the blockade, is that it's a rather a slow agony and you build up all kinds of fears and doubts in the minds of people here.

Now on the question of the blockade, I think that it is Tommy's view that even the Soviet Union would be influenced by the question as to whether there was a declaration of war or not.

**Thompson:** Yes, I think so. You might be able to frame it in such a way that if your world postures were going to prevent this threat to us from these offensive weapons, and therefore, you were surveilling properly, if they . . . if work goes on, then we will stop any further supplies coming in. And for that reason, and to that extent, we are in a state of war with Cuba. It's a little different from saying we're going to war to destroy them. That's really the thing to make you . . . At least your world posture isn't [*unclear*].

**Bundy:** It seems to me that's your whole posture. Even if you go in with a strike, your posture is simply that this man has got entangled in the notion of doing unacceptable things, from the point of view of the

security of the hemisphere. That has to be your posture. And if those stop, we're not concerned with what there is, the freedom of Cuba.

You will, in fact, get into the invasion before you're through, I'm sure. Either way.

**Thompson:** Well, I think you probably will the other way too, in the end, very likely.

**Alexis Johnson:** On the other hand, if you do declare a blockade, and the Soviets do observe it, this could very quickly bring down Castro within Cuba, very quickly. If they in effect appear to be deserting him. This is the problem of course in their [the Soviets'] observing it.

**Ball:** And Khrushchev's ability to observe it would be greatly helped if there were a legal basis.

**Alexis Johnson:** Yes, yes.

**McCone:** Don't you think that it would be an almost impossible thing for him to accept?

**Dillon:** Well, except this is the confrontation with them rather than Cuba.

**McCone:** With his prestige at stake. I don't think he would recognize a blockade. I think he would tell you [*unclear*] was his right and he would go right through.

**Taylor:** Well, John, I don't think you have to have a blockade in any of these military situations. Certainly if we invade, we're going to blockade.

**McCone:** I'm not talking about what we have to do. I realize that. I'm talking about his observance of it, or recognition of it, or respect of it. I don't think he'd do that.

**Thompson:** I don't think he'd want to take military action around Cuba. He's too much at a disadvantage there. It would be more dangerous than somewhere else. That's why I think he might respect it, or maybe he takes the big action in Berlin which is this gamble which he's shown for four years he's reluctant to take.

I think he's building up now to, and probing to see whether or not he could do it [Berlin]. The strongest argument to me for a strike, is that that would be very convincing and dangerous to him in Berlin.

**Rusk:** I think that this is the other part of the coin. He may feel he has to respond. But he knows that he's dealing with people [the American government] who are going to respond to him. [Khrushchev thinks:] Or maybe he's a little crazy and you can't trust them.

**Taylor:** I would think the credibility of our response in Berlin is enhanced by taking action in Cuba, rather than being diminished.

**Bundy:** I think this could be right. [*Mixed voices murmuring agreement.*]

**Taylor:** If he's going to blockade Berlin, he'll do it regardless of the . . .



**President Kennedy:** Let's say the situation was reversed, and he had made the statement about these missiles similar to the ones I made about [Cuba]. Similar to the ones about our putting missiles in Turkey. And he had made the statement saying that serious action could result if we put them in, and then we went ahead and put them in. Then he took them out [attacked them] some day.

To me, there's some advantages of that if it's all over. Hungary.<sup>30</sup> It's over so quick, supposedly, then really . . . almost the next move is up to him. Now, he may take these moves, but . . .

**Dillon:** I think that's entirely right.

**Thompson:** I gather, it's the military view that this would lead, in the end, to an invasion. It wouldn't be over quickly. We'd bomb and the whole deal. And you'd have to have air cover over these people and block the planes as they come out.

**McNamara:** I would think so.

**Taylor:** I think we'll get into this air gambit regardless, Mr. President.

**President Kennedy:** The invasion?

**McNamara:** Invasion.

**Taylor:** Because [of] actions against Guantánamo, for example. And our surveillance requirements will get us into dogfights over the island. We'll be threatened by—

**President Kennedy:** No, but we'll be taking out their planes—

**Taylor:** —I think sooner or later, we'll be—

**President Kennedy:** Well, that's what I meant. We go ahead. Let's just say this is a prospective course of action.

And tomorrow afternoon [Friday, October 19] I'd announce these [unclear] and the existence of these missiles, and say that we're calling Congress back, and when we consider this Saturday morning, so everybody knows about it. It isn't Pearl Harbor in that sense. We've told everybody.

Then we go ahead Saturday [October 20] and we take them out, and announce that they've been taken out. And if any more are put in, we're going to take those out.

**Bundy:** And the air force.

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30. President Kennedy was referring to the rapid Soviet suppression of the revolt in Hungary during November 1956 and the perceived Western inability to organize an effective response, especially because of the simultaneous distraction of the Anglo-French-Israeli military action against Egypt arising from the Suez crisis.

**President Kennedy:** And the air force. And that we don't want any war, and so on and so forth, but we're not going to permit this, in view of the fact that—

**Taylor:** We would take the air force out tomorrow, too? I mean, that's a little too fast for us—

**President Kennedy:** On Saturday.

**Taylor:** On the 21st [Sunday] we could get this [attack] out.

**President Kennedy:** Sunday has historic disadvantages [*referring to memories of Pearl Harbor*]. [*Bundy laughs*.]

**Taylor:** Any additional time at all is good.

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Taylor:** Any additional time at all is good.

**President Kennedy:** The race is against these missiles, but obviously Sunday or Monday. To announce, the day before, the existence of these. We won't announce what we're going to do. But we are going to call the Congress back. Then we go ahead and do it the next morning.

**Robert Kennedy:** Even if you announce pretty much, you can almost hint that you're going to have to take some action.

**President Kennedy:** Well, we don't . . . We can decide exactly how far we'd go.

**Taylor:** Of course, a public announcement, militarily, is more disadvantageous than just talking to Khrushchev.

**President Kennedy:** Well there's no doubt they'd move the planes and so on . . . Wouldn't they?

**Taylor:** They would make every effort to, yes.

**Sorensen:** Mr. President, what is the advantage of your public announcement?

**Rusk:** He can simply announce what is there.

**Sorensen:** What is the advantage of that?

**President Kennedy:** The advantage of calling Congress back is only that we don't launch . . . as I can see the only advantage, is that everybody gets the information that they are there before we attack. Whatever solidarity that that may induce. And it wouldn't put us quite in the position of almost acting in such a bad way. But I—

**Taylor:** Would a few hours do rather than 24 hours, Mr. President?

**President Kennedy:** Well that's what I—

**Bundy:** U.S. solidarity is the least of our problems.

**President Kennedy:** What did you say?

**Bundy:** U.S. solidarity—

**President Kennedy:** Oh, I meant the solidarity—

**Robert Kennedy:** I think George Ball—

**Sorensen:** A simultaneous announcement would do that really, Mr. President.

**Robert Kennedy:** I think George Ball has a hell of a good point.

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Robert Kennedy:** I think just the whole question of, you know, assuming that you do survive all this, we don't have, the fact that we're not . . . what kind of a country we are. The fact that you just don't [*unclear*].

**Rusk:** This business of carrying the mark of Cain on your brow for the rest of your lives is something [*unclear*].

**Robert Kennedy:** The fact that they'll be mad. We did this against Cuba. We've talked for 15 years that the Russians being [planning for] the first strike against us, and we'd never do that. Now, in the interest of time, we do that to a small country. I think it's a hell of a burden to carry.

**Thompson:** By far the strongest argument against this is that, killing the Russians, which to my mind means you are going to end up the whole way, and [*unclear*].

**McNamara:** Yes, this is why I don't believe we can stop with a large air strike. If we've killed Russians, we're going to have to go in. They can't stop. That's the main reason we have to go on.

**President Kennedy:** Let's just say, wait a second Bob, but if we make this announcement. Say, the afternoon before we send a message to Khrushchev, saying that: "We said that we'd have to do it. We're going to have to do it, and you ought to get the Russians out of there within the next 12 hours."

Now that . . . we lose a good deal of advantage as far as surprise. But what, of course, we are trying to do is to get these missiles. I'm not so worried about the air. If they [the aircraft] have got atomic bombs, they can get a couple of them over on us anyway, but at least the air you can take out, can't you? After all they don't maintain their position over that island each time a plane takes off. There are not that many, after all.

**Alexis Johnson:** You get a denial out of Gromyko this afternoon, that they have any bases there, that the Russians are establishing anything there. . . .

**Taylor:** He might deny the Russians are in.

**Alexis Johnson:** He might deny there are any Russians there.

**Bundy:** He won't do that.

**President Kennedy:** They've said there are Russians.

**Bundy:** They've said there were Russians, in the TASS statement [of September 11].

**Alexis Johnson:** Yes. As far as these bases are concerned, then you're

striking against Castro. Nobody could be more surprised than we were to find Russians there, because we've been told there were none and that it was not a Russian base.

**Rusk:** If the military situation doesn't require it, if you took just a little more time before you actually hit, and you let the several public opinions know about this in Cuba, as well as in the Soviet Union. It would be more difficult in the Soviet Union to get really informed. But if people realize that this is a major thing coming, then something may crack.

**Thompson:** There's one important related point to that, on which we have the first varied information. That is that Khrushchev got himself into this aggressive posture in Berlin and everything on his own. I mean, he's taken credit for it time and time again.

And the advantage that hasn't been mentioned about the notification to him is that he would have to show it to his colleagues, and there is a possibility of restraint there. I think there was some indication that in the abortive Paris summit meeting, that he was under strict instructions to break that up because they were afraid to go down the course he was following.<sup>31</sup> There is some chance that this could happen.

I mean we haven't had any solid information on this. But I can cite very minor things that happened at the time of the U-2 [shootdown] where the military, who normally never talk to me, came over and tried to calm me down, that sort of thing, and showing that they were concerned that Khrushchev was being impetuous and running risks.

Although there are advantages and disadvantages, I feel strongly about some notification to him.

**President Kennedy:** Now, what is it we ask him to do under that notification?

**Thompson:** We have a draft letter there, in which . . .

**Rusk:** Got to get him to provide some [*unclear*] to the United Nations.

**Thompson:** It would have to be changed, that's right.

**President Kennedy:** What is it we'd be trying to get out of him?

**Sorensen:** I think you would have to say, perhaps with high-level representation, that only . . . and his instructions would [be] that the only satisfactory answer he could return with, or report to you, would be Khrushchev's

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31. Thompson was referring to the planned Paris summit between Eisenhower and Khrushchev in May 1960. After the shoot-down of a U.S. U-2 over Soviet airspace and after Eisenhower took personal responsibility for authorizing such flights, Khrushchev canceled the summit shortly before it was to take place. At the time Thompson was the U.S. ambassador in Moscow.

agreement that he was going to begin immediately to dismantle these bases and we would do the same in Turkey—

**Rusk:** We're asking, that in order to keep the fig leaf—

**Sorensen:** —and a summit meeting.

**Rusk:** —in order to keep the fig leaf on for the President, we'd tell him that we expect him to use, tell Castro—

**Bundy:** Castro to do it.

**Rusk:** —to stop these bases. And we'd urge him to let us know that any Russian missile technicians are being withdrawn.

**Sorensen:** And the message or messenger would have to make clear that any other answer, whether it's delay or other counterproposals, is unsatisfactory.

**Thompson:** Well I think that's worth a little bit of discussion if there is the possibility, and I don't know about a deal for the bases for Turkey. And we substitute Polaris for the missiles we've got there. It seems to me in negotiations this isn't entirely to be rejected. Negotiations with him over this whole broad complex of questions. We've got to have it eventually or else have war.

And there's some advantage even in our proposing it. Say: "This won't wait for your trip in November, come on over."

Because these other paths, it seems to me, you're playing Russian roulette. You're flipping a coin as to whether you end up with world war or not.

**President Kennedy:** The only question is whether, giving him the time, whether he makes a guarantee. Now, as I say, he's not going to be any more happy about this than we are, I assume. Though the only thing is, he seems to be happier with the fact that he's taking much more of a risk than perhaps we would have taken.

But . . . if he responds, giving us an ultimatum in a sense, the question really is whether we're worse off then. There is an argument that we are worse off, if . . . in that . . .

He might accept something when it's accomplished, just like we might. [As] in the case of Hungary. He wouldn't accept it perhaps so much in advance.

**Thompson:** I think Mr. McCone's right. If you approach him, you are almost certainly going to have to get into negotiations.

**Rusk:** Well you may have a negotiation proposal, that doesn't mean that you have to get into it. Because the condition of it might be: You stop this work on these missiles—

**Thompson:** But if this is accompanied with this notification that we are going to bomb Cuba if the work goes on in this. And if it's accompa-

nied with the blockade on any further supplies of this sort, this is a strong action.

**President Kennedy:** No, I feel that there's a difference in our action, and therefore in their response, between our knocking out these missiles and planes, and invading Cuba.

**Thompson:** I think there is.

**President Kennedy:** Obviously, if he knocked out our missiles . . . If he had said that he that was going to knock out our missile sites, and went and did it one afternoon in Turkey, it would be different than if the Russian army started to invade Turkey. Face it: there's a ten-day period of shootings.

And nobody knows what kind of success we're going to have with this invasion. Invasions are tough, hazardous. They've got a lot of equipment. A lot of—thousands of—Americans get killed in Cuba, and I think you're in much more of a mess than you are if you take out these . . .

I mean, this is all presumption, but I would think that if he invades Iran, it takes ten days and there's a lot of fighting in Iran. We're in a much more difficult position [with an invasion] than if he takes out those bases out there. It may be that his response would be the same, nobody can guess that, but by stretching it out you increase the . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** I don't think you have to make up your mind if you're going to invade. Even in the first 24 hours, 48 hours—

**Taylor:** We can't invade that fast, Mr. President. It will take at least seven days, unless we have some advance preparations that we can't make now.

**President Kennedy:** Why is that? Why? You mean, getting these people into there?

**Taylor:** Getting in position. We're now not making any moves that could give away our intentions.

**Robert Kennedy:** So I think you can always hold that out.

**President Kennedy:** The only question is Guantánamo. I would think Castro's reprisal would be against Guantánamo, wouldn't it?

**Taylor:** That's right. And we can immediately jump in there and defend Guantánamo.

**Rusk:** Is this quite clear, would it not be well to bring the dependents out?

**Taylor:** We have that—that could be done very quickly [*four seconds excised as classified information*—will be there, all during this period. We'll keep shipping there.

**Rusk:** I just think if we reinforced Guantánamo and simply explained at the moment, do this as quick as possible, that we are pulling the dependents out only to make room for the reinforcements.

**Taylor:** Well, you could do that if that is acceptable. We'd like to do that if that's acceptable to you.

**President Kennedy:** How many dependents are there?

**Taylor:** Twenty-two hundred plus.

**President Kennedy:** Now, what about holding Guantánamo itself? Shouldn't we, really, if we're considering taking some action on Sunday, shouldn't we really be having some ships and troops off of there?

**Taylor:** We have—

*One minute and forty-nine seconds excised as classified information.*

But they can leave under the guise of going to the Pacific, if you want to.

**Alexis Johnson:** Wouldn't you, at the same time you make your approach to Khrushchev, wouldn't you immediately start evacuation of dependents?

**Taylor:** Anytime you can give us the word *go*—

**President Kennedy:** Obviously, yeah. [*Others agree.*] But I'm just wondering about whether . . .

Obviously Castro's response wouldn't be against Guantánamo. If he overruns Guantánamo, we're going to have to invade. But . . .

**Taylor:** He won't overrun Guantánamo, I'll tell you. We may have a big fight around the place. But by the time we get the Marines in, with the carrier-based aviation, we can hold Guantánamo.

**President Kennedy:** Now, there isn't anything we ought to be doing in the next three or four days, as far as the Navy?

**Taylor:** Many things, sir, but all of them have a certain visibility.

The great bottleneck in this invasion plan is the assembly of shipping. The shipping and moving of heavy equipment such as the tanks out of Fort Hood. So that anything that we do in that field will tend to contract the time. Thus if you do decide that you have to have a period of discussion, if we could be doing those things in that period of time, then we'd reduce the reaction time.

**Rusk:** Well, some of this surfacing it wouldn't be bad if the time [*unclear*].

**McNamara:** Very good. Mr. President, I would suggest that we not consider the actions we might take here which would surface, or in any way might surface, until you've decided: One, when you want to make this information available to our public. Because we're sitting tight on all this at the present time and any of these actions are likely to cause—

**President Kennedy:** Let's start going through now what—

**Robert Kennedy:** Can I just ask a question?

**President Kennedy:** Yes.

**Robert Kennedy:** How much time . . . ? For instance, the President goes on Sunday [October 21], say you had the attack on Monday [October 22], the air attack. How many days after that would you be prepared to invade, if that was necessary?

**McNamara:** Seven to ten days.

**Taylor:** There are two ways to do it—

**Robert Kennedy:** Get these fellows [the Marine units] around from the West Coast?

**Taylor:** There are two ways to do it, Mr. President, while we're on the subject. One is a quick reaction to landing which gets troops in seven—[ *Twelve seconds excised as classified information.*]

The second is certainly preferable militarily. On the other hand, if that length of time doesn't fit into the overall plan, we could do it the other way.

**Rusk:** Mr. President, on the declaration of war point, on the invasion side of things, [if you made the quick strike against these Cuban installations, you could at that point say that any reaction against the United States or Guantánamo]<sup>32</sup> would bring about a state of war with Cuba. Then you've put considerable pressure on them to stop it right there.

**President Kennedy:** Well, now, as I said, the advantage of giving Khrushchev notification—if we're going to give Khrushchev notification we might as well give everybody else—is to get his Russians out of there if we want to, or to back down if he wants to?

**Thompson:** I think the first [advantage] is the point about our allies. If we eventually face the crunch on Berlin that we would have some of them still with us.

Secondly, to give him a chance to back down or at least to . . .

Thirdly, to get a negotiation with him.

**President Kennedy:** What is the suggested method if we are going to communicate with Khrushchev? Dobrynin? Or send somebody?

**Thompson:** I'd be inclined to telegraph to Foy [Kohler, in Moscow] to . . .

**Rusk:** I'd do it simultaneously. I'd do it [*unclear*].

**Robert Kennedy:** What do you think about a personal emissary from the President? I think it would be somebody who could go in and just . . . as well as having a letter, be talking to him about it.

**Rusk:** Well you'd . . . you'd almost have to announce at the same time what the situation is in Cuba.

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32.The bracketed clause was transcribed from the sound segment that is missing from our current copy of this tape.



**Bundy:** Yeah.

**Rusk:** Because unless you send someone that has no visibility . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, I think you can get somebody on a plane.

**President Kennedy:** It might take you a couple of days to get an appointment with Khrushchev and so on.

**Rusk:** I just think a written message through Dobrynin is probably . . .

**Dillon:** A written message to which he has to reply in writing is . . .

**Thompson:** Otherwise you get a fuzzy conversation in which it's very hard to . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** How do you handle the letter?

**Thompson:** He's pretty adept at these matters.

**Rusk:** Adlai Stevenson thinks a special emissary might be very advisable.

**President Kennedy:** Let's say we ask Mr. Robert Lovett to go over there, with a letter. You'd have to put him on a plane; you'd have to send him to Moscow; you'd have to make an appointment with Khrushchev; all that would take . . .

**Rusk:** You'd have to wrap up the Soviet pilots, get a special plane.

**Thompson:** You'd have to fill him in pretty completely on the background. I don't know how he would handle the conversation.

**Bundy:** You're going to have to do that with Foy. He doesn't know much.

**Thompson:** I wouldn't suggest he necessarily needs to deliver it personally. You can just send it around. I would think just getting it to Khrushchev is . . .

**President Kennedy:** What does that do for us though, Tommy? I mean, do you think that there's a chance that he might—do what with the . . .

**Thompson:** What Khrushchev will do?

**Bundy:** Khrushchev will call for a summit.

**Thompson:** I think that's almost certain.

I think it's quite possible that he would say that: "I'm prepared to take no further action in Cuba pending these talks." And in the meantime if we made this announcement there, would then make the announcement: That we will knock these things off; if there were any further work done on them. And stop any others from coming in.

In the meantime, the military makes their moves in preparation for an invasion. So I don't think [*unclear*]. The Russians would know this, and this is a strong warning to them. In some ways . . .

**President Kennedy:** Well, if we ever get to a summit, then he's going to be talking about Berlin.

**Dillon:** Well the only point in talking to them is the point originally

that George made, [which] is that it gives us a better position with our allies. Not perhaps with Khrushchev but with the world.

**Ball:** I think the history too would give us a better position.

**Dillon:** That's it. For history, or to the world, we've done it. But that's what we're doing it for. We're not doing it to the . . . and if he does have other [unclear].

**McCone:** [Unclear] a demand on him right away. For instance, there are quite a number of ships, in transit. You demand that they would be turned around.

**Thompson:** If he does have trouble at this point—

**McCone:** And demand that this work stop at once.

**Bundy:** How much better are you off before history if you ask him 24 hours ahead of time, if he says: "I want a summit," and you say, "Nuts."

**Rusk:** [Unclear.] It's what has to happen in Cuba. Before there can be a summit.

**Sorensen:** And before we would call off—

**Bundy:** You can have that in the first message. It's very likely he would propose that we meet. But we can't meet unless we can have agreement on these things.

**Taylor:** Doesn't the Gromyko call this afternoon have some advantages from the possibility that we can get him to lie that he doesn't have them—

**Rusk:** Well I was going to suggest that the President consider expressing to Gromyko our deep disturbance about all this provocation in Cuba. Read to him from this paragraph of this statement of September 4th and see what Gromyko says. See if he will lie about it, because Ambassador Dobrynin said there are no offensive weapons there and so forth, but Dobrynin might not know.

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, what if he says there are? Then what do you do?

**Rusk:** I don't think the President ought to disclose to Gromyko what we have in mind, until we get an actual message to him [Khrushchev].

**Robert Kennedy:** What if he says to you: "We've just got the same kind of weapons you've got in Turkey. Because they're no more offensive than your weapons in Turkey"? Then what do you do? What do you do?

**Rusk:** He's talking about [a Turkish and NATO deployment decision made] five years ago and that's not relevant. Well, first the Rio Treaty.

Second, that we have here in this postwar era a rough status quo. When they took strong action against Hungary, on the ground that this was on their side of that status quo. Now they're penetrating into this hemisphere which violates not only modern obligations but historic well-known policies of the United States toward this hemisphere.

In fact, in any event NATO was itself built as a direct response to Soviet aggression, fully registered on the agenda of the U.N. In 1946 we didn't have any allies. There was no Rio Pact or NATO or CENTO or SEATO. The only allies that we had were those that were the disappearing allies that fought together during World War II. And these things came into being as a result of Stalin's policies. It makes all the difference in the world in this situation.

**President Kennedy:** How many missiles do we have in Turkey?

**Bundy:** Fifteen.

Plus nuclear-equipped aircraft?

**McNamara:** Yes.<sup>33</sup>

**Gilpatric:** Yes.

**Robert Kennedy:** Well if you went that far [in talking to Gromyko] and decided to do that, we could perhaps resolve the thing about Khrushchev saying: "Well . . . this poses a problem for us. We're going to have to take whatever steps . . ."

**Ball:** Well I think you'd have to say this is totally unacceptable.

**Robert Kennedy:** I mean, if you get into it at all, if you went into it as blatantly as that . . .

I suppose the other way is to do it rather subtly [with Gromyko] with me saying: "What are you doing in Cuba? It's embarrassing in this election. What kind of missiles are you sticking down there?"

**Taylor:** Well, if he admits it, we have the advantage of being able to discuss it without indicating our own knowledge of the situation. If he denies it, you have something that we can [*unclear*] Khrushchev with later.

**Bundy:** That's correct.

**Robert Kennedy:** This would indicate, the frontal approach would indicate that you have knowledge of it. If you did it you're likely [*unclear*].

**Rusk:** I think you start off talking about a general provocation in Cuba, as far as the American people are concerned, in the hemisphere.

**Sorensen:** Actually, I think the Attorney General's suggestion is a pretty good gambit, to say to him: "Well, Khrushchev was not going to do anything before our election. But look what he's doing in Cuba and so on." And see if he . . .

**McCone:** [*suggesting another line*] "Well, the accusations that are

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33. The United States had stockpiled nuclear bombs in Turkey, under U.S. control, for possible use by Turkish (or U.S.) F-100 aircraft.

being made by Senator Keating and others is that there are missiles down there.”

**Ball:** I wouldn't think the President would disclose it this afternoon, though [with Gromyko].

**Bundy:** The President ought to get him down and [*unclear*].

**Sorensen:** No, just talk about what appears in the press, which is stirring up these elections.

**Rusk:** There would be some significance that Khrushchev in his talk with [U.S. ambassador to Moscow Foy] Kohler did not deny there were missiles there.<sup>34</sup>

**President Kennedy:** He didn't?

**Rusk:** No.

**Bundy:** He wasn't charged with it, but he didn't put it that way.

**Rusk:** I think . . . referring to refugee reports [*unclear*] that they know now that we know. They must know now that we know. That's why they're working around the clock down there.

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, then maybe if they [the Soviets] said that, I suppose you wouldn't have to send a message to Khrushchev. Then you could do it all.

**Bundy:** At this point.

**Taylor:** One point we haven't mentioned, Mr. President, is the fact we still haven't all the intelligence. I'm impressed with how our minds have changed on this in 24 hours based upon this last intelligence. I think before we really commit ourselves we ought to get the full picture of this island.

**Bundy:** I agree.

**Gilpatric:** That's why Monday [October 22], I think, is better than Saturday [October 20].

**Taylor:** I think so, very much so.

**President Kennedy:** Monday?

**Taylor:** As long as you think you can hold it.

**McCone:** I think, tomorrow morning at this time we could have a quite a good deal more information, from the photography we ran yesterday.

I'm worried about this getting out. I think it's remarkable that it's been held this week. For that reason I feel that we mustn't delay too long.

**President Kennedy:** We haven't much time.

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34. Rusk is referring to Khrushchev's conversation with Ambassador Kohler on 16 October, described in a cable Kohler sent back to Washington that day.

**McNamara:** Mr. President, I think we can hold it, however, till Monday [October 22]. I think the thing that is lacking is not more intelligence, although that will modify our position somewhat. What's lacking here is a real well thought out course of action, or alternative courses of action.

I think we ought to go back this afternoon and split up into a couple of groups and assign one group one course of action, another group another course of action and work them out in great detail. My guess is that both of these courses of action—really there are only two we're talking about.

I would call one a rapid introduction to military action. The other is a slow introduction to military action. Those are really the only two courses of action that we are talking about.

The slow introduction is a political statement followed, or accompanied, by a blockade. The rapid introduction is a brief notice to Khrushchev followed by a strike.

Now those are basically the only two alternatives we've discussed with you. We ought to take both of those and follow them through and find out what the prices are likely to be and how to minimize those prices.

**President Kennedy:** Well, let me ask you this. Is there anyone here who doesn't think that we ought to do something about them? I guess there's only . . .

**McNamara:** I, for one, am not clear however which of these two courses we should follow.

**President Kennedy:** Well, we've got so many different alternatives as far as the military action. As I say, we have the blockade without a declaration of war. We've got a blockade with a declaration of war. We've got strikes I, II, and III. We've got invasion. We've got notification to Khrushchev and what that notification ought to consist of.

**Robert Kennedy:** In other words, it's not really that bad though. Because if you have the strike, you don't have to make up your mind about the invasion. I mean, that's not going to come for three or four days—

**President Kennedy:** A blockade—

**Bundy:** In one sense you have to make up your mind to face it if you have to.

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah. I think everybody's [*unclear*]. So all you have really, as Bob says, all you have is really the two courses of action.

And I think that as long as it really has come down to this after talking about this for 48 hours . . .

**Alexis Johnson:** Mr. President, there's one problem—

**Robert Kennedy:** I think his idea of us going back and trying to put it down for you more definitively rather than you trying to discuss it . . .

**Rusk:** Well, and even there I think the real issue is: What do you do, if anything, before you strike?

**Dillon:** When do you tell the press? Exactly what do you say to them?

**Robert Kennedy:** And then what do you tell the American people. And I think that we should go back . . .

**President Kennedy:** Well now as I . . . militarily you're not really in a position to do this strike until Monday, is that it?

**Taylor:** That is correct.

**McNamara:** May I suggest, Max, that we still keep open the possibility of [a decision on] Saturday [October 20]. [Air Force General Walter] Sweeney, the other night, said Saturday. Now I know that events have changed. We've got more targets and so on since then, Mr. President. But I don't think this is absolutely critical and I don't think we need to decide this morning.

**Taylor:** Unless the President really needed it [*unclear*]; we can certainly need it militarily. . . .

**McNamara:** We need it. We need it.

**President Kennedy:** Well, now the only argument for going quicker than that really, not only is the one that it may leak but also that the—

**Bundy:** Level of readiness.

**President Kennedy:** I don't know, whether if there are two of them [Soviet MRBMs in Cuba] ready, whether that makes a hell of a difference anyway.

**Bundy:** I don't think so.

**President Kennedy:** Because if they're going to fire nuclear missiles at us . . .

**Bundy:** If they were rational, Mr. President.

**Taylor:** We may find on this photography that has been taken, Mr. President, how it's highly desirable to take out everything that is visible at the time we go.

**McNamara:** It would seem to me your instructions to us, or our assumptions, ought to be that we're going to be ready at the earliest possible moment regardless of whether you want us to go there or not. And that earliest possible moment is for an air strike Saturday morning [October 20]. That's the earliest possible moment.

**Taylor:** The strikes should be number III and number IV.

**McNamara:** And we ought to be ready for strikes III, IV, or V, in effect.

And the second thing we ought to do is get this intelligence in here and interpret it as rapidly as possible. Now, we've taken actions to do that.

The third thing we ought to do is really think through these courses of action more definitively and get back to you tonight, I would think, with options laid out.

**Taylor:** That's right.

**Robert Kennedy:** Bob, militarily, which would be the best day to strike? Saturday, Sunday or Monday? Militarily. Considering . . .

**McNamara:** Balancing everything off . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** I think that's the entire question before us.

**McNamara:** Max is figuring, they keep saying Monday [October 22]. I would say Saturday [October 20].

**Taylor:** I would say Tuesday [October 23].

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, even though the missiles will be in place?

**Taylor:** The more time we've got, the better we can do it. [*Mixed voices.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** The missiles will be in place though, Max.

**Rusk:** Mr. President, on that, General Taylor mentioned yesterday that we've got a relatively untrained armed forces at the moment in terms of combat experience. It's going to take some very careful work in all echelons. And if we overlook steps that are necessary to give us the protection that we need against, say, mining and things of that sort, through a rush here, and if somebody really gets hurt . . .

**Taylor:** It's one thing for us to have time to get the orders out but another thing to get the orders out and then have experienced men as a check that everything has gone as we ordered.

**McNamara:** I'm not suggesting a date. I'm simply suggesting that our action ought to be to plan for the earliest possible strike because there is another penalty we pay with untrained personnel, and with operational nuclear weapons we run great dangers. And that this is the thing that we must keep in our minds. I don't know when these [Soviet] weapons are going to be operational but we may find some tonight that are, or tomorrow night, or Saturday night.

But I don't think that we have to decide that now. That is a judgment. We ought to be ready—

**President Kennedy:** We ought to be ready in case. It looks like they're [the Soviets] going to be and you've got to be ready Saturday morning.

**McNamara:** That's right. Exactly.

**Taylor:** But may I assume that category I and II is out? That we are planning for III, IV, or V? If we do that, that will simplify our planning and arrangements.

**Bundy:** Can I raise the question of the President's going away?

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, I want to ask about that. I'm supposed to go . . . start at 11:30 or 12:00 tomorrow [on a scheduled campaign trip]. If I cancel it, of course, it's a major—What?

**Unidentified:** It's pretty important, I should think.

**President Kennedy:** To go?

**Robert Kennedy:** It really is.

**Dillon:** You can't cancel it.

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Dillon:** It's very difficult to cancel it now.

**President Kennedy:** Without an explanation. I better figure on going on Friday. I can always come back late Friday night if this turns out . . . So we better just go ahead on that.

Now, the only thing is, we ought to have, probably, a meeting before I go see Gromyko. I see him at five.

**Ball:** Mr. President, the only question I think you ought to consider is that if there should be a leak and, given the campaigning, I think that the public might find it pretty underhanded.

**Robert Kennedy:** I'd just deny the leak.

**Bundy:** Which leak? Of what?

**McCone:** I don't think you can. I don't think [Senator Kenneth] Keating would leak this.

**Robert Kennedy:** No, I'd just say that, John, this couldn't be more untrue. And so what, after it's all over. I think everybody just has—

**McCone:** I don't think you can deny the leak. I think that there's too much information on this through the refugee channels.

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah, but it's been in there all the time, John. Nothing has come up in the last three days that's going to—

**McNamara:** You don't deny the leak. What you say is: "There have been a number of rumors going around. I've asked the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Department to check every one of these. We're investigating it; we're querying refugees; we're taking every possible step to determine the condition."

**Bundy:** And there's no present change in the government's position.

**Sorensen:** But the President isn't going to hold a press conference anyway.

**Rusk:** There is the other question too, as to whether, since we're



heading into, what we are heading into here. The President hopes to unify or not, by going on this trip this weekend? Unify the country?

**President Kennedy:** I don't need to unify the country. That's not the purpose of the trip. [*Laughter.*]

The only problem is, calling it off, obviously that'd be a major story as to why we called it off. So unless we were about to proceed Saturday or Sunday, I'd better not call it off.

We are going over to Monday unless we get our sequences into a position where we can surface this thing by Friday afternoon. The minute I call off [this trip], this thing is going to break. Because then every newspaperman will be around to everybody and then they're going to get it. So I don't think I can call this thing off tomorrow without having this thing—unless we are ready to have it surface tomorrow.

**Dillon:** I don't think there's any problem about unifying the country because once you . . . This action will unify it just like that. No problem at all. [*Mixed voices, general agreement.*]

**Bundy:** I wouldn't [*unclear*] this weekend.

**President Kennedy:** Well, I'm not going to.

**McCone:** [*Unclear*] unanimously support that.

**Rusk:** Now there may be some inquiries about this meeting this morning.

**Bundy:** I still believe that our best cover is intensive review of the defense budget. Now we haven't had to use it yet. [*Laughter.*]

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, that's all right because we had this [10:00] Cabinet meeting.

**Dillon:** It's credible after the Cabinet meeting. More credible than it was.

**Thompson:** And, of course, I'd be seeing you in preparation for Gromyko's visit.

**Bundy:** Martin isn't here and I think it's really very important.<sup>35</sup>

**Martin:** No, I'll disappear.

**Rusk:** Now, Mr. President, I have invited Gromyko to dinner after our talk, but I'm inclined to call him and say that talks may go on for a while and that we better cancel this dinner. I think this . . .

**Bundy:** I think it's worth thinking about the channel of yourself to Gromyko, though. And if we decide on a warning, having [someone

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35. Martin was there. Bundy meant that people should not reveal that Martin was there, since that would reveal that the meeting concerned Latin America and their cover story would unravel.

with] a good deal of responsibility and having someone play it both ways. Not for Friday night, not for tonight.

**Rusk:** [*Unclear*] won't happen. I can see some real disadvantages in sitting through a dinner there and appearing to be cozy and [*unclear*] and friendly and that sort of thing. But I think with the translation, with the interpretation going on, this meeting [between President Kennedy and Gromyko] is apt to go beyond 7:30. It will go three or four hours.

**President Kennedy:** What, my meeting with him?

**Rusk:** Yes.

**Dillon:** Mr. President, I have one thing.

**President Kennedy:** It won't go that long.

**Dillon:** As you know, I am supposed to be leaving Saturday afternoon to go down to Mexico City for this—the Inter-American conference opens Monday. I could wait and go Sunday if that made any difference. I'll have to leave various things that we'll have to—

**President Kennedy:** Well, why don't we wait on that because we'll all know a little better on the schedule.

Why don't you . . . if you want to just call off the dinner on some . . . I don't know what your pretext is going to be. They'll probably want us . . .

**Rusk:** You're leaving town tomorrow night?

**President Kennedy:** Yeah. Let's see what happens. Why don't you wait to call it off until things are really [*unclear*], saying: "The President has asked . . ."

But now, what have we . . . ? What is this group going to do as far as meeting? Trying to get some more final judgments on all these questions which we turned around?

**Sorensen:** Well, can I make a suggestion there, Mr. President?

It seems to me that the various military courses have been outlined here as the Secretary says. They need to be developed in more detail, step by step, and so on. But there has also been general though not unanimous agreement that you are likely to be making some kind of representation to Khrushchev ahead of time, maybe very shortly ahead of time. And I think that you ought to have, in great detail, drawn up what that representation would consist of. Were it a letter, what will be a satisfactory answer? And soon.

**President Kennedy:** Yes. Well, we have to have . . . certainly to do the Khrushchev. We have to decide in advance we'd do it, or whether I would make the public statement that we really had talked about the afternoon before.

These are some of the questions now. How do we want to function?

**Rusk:** Well, I think that we ought to draw the group together except for those who are going to be needed on military assignments.

**McNamara:** I don't believe the military problem, the military plans, need much elaboration. That isn't really what I was thinking about.

What I was really thinking about is this give-and-take here.

**Bundy:** That's very true.

**McNamara:** Which we haven't gone through. I think the price of any one of these actions is going to be very very high. I can visualize a whole series of actions that the Russians are going to take. And it seems to me we ought to lay those down. And then we ought to consider, how can we reduce that price?

And I would suggest, therefore, that under the guidance of State, because this is primarily an international political problem, we develop two groups here. And that we have Defense and State people in those two groups, and we take two or three hours this afternoon to let those two groups take these two basic alternatives. They can derive any number of variations they wish to.

But one is a minimum military action, a blockade approach, with a slow buildup to subsequent action. And the other is a very forceful military action with a series of variants as to how you enter it. And consider how the Soviets are going to respond. This is what we haven't done.

**Dillon:** Well, not only the Soviet response but what the response to the response will be.

**McNamara:** [*Mixed voices.*] I think that's it, exactly. So then, how we respond to these responses.

**Rusk:** They're beginning to work on them already.

**Ball:** We've done a good deal of work on this.

**Rusk:** Yes, we could pull those together.

**McNamara:** Well, I think it would be useful to pull it together.

**President Kennedy:** Well, now, let's see. Mr. Secretary [Rusk], I ought to meet with you at 4:30 with Tommy before the Gromyko [meeting] to see where we are on this conversation. Then, at the end of the Gromyko conversation, we may want to have . . . I don't think we'll go three or four hours but let's say we finish in two hours. I don't know what he wants to see us about. And then, whether we ought to, some time this evening, have another meeting based on what Gromyko said and see where we are with planning.

**Bundy:** I hate to be worried about security all the time but I think evening meetings are very dangerous. I think they create a feeling around the town and almost inevitably people have to leave dinners. I think it's a very—

**President Kennedy:** Well, I'm going to leave right now so why don't you, Mr. Secretary and Mr. McNamara, decide how we are going to proceed for this afternoon. In any case, I will meet you [Rusk] at 4:30 and we will meet . . .

Mr. Lovett is coming down here. He'll be here at a quarter of five or at five. We can . . .

[*speaking to Bundy*] Are you going to be in with me with Gromyko?

**Bundy:** Whatever you want.

**President Kennedy:** There's no need to be. Why don't you—

**Bundy:** I'll talk to him.

**President Kennedy:**—discuss with Mr. Lovett and see whether he's got any thoughts about it. And we will then be in touch tonight. At least, Bundy will communicate anything that Gromyko may have said to see whether that affects any of our . . . [*Bundy whispers something, perhaps about Lovett.*] I'll talk to him.

*President Kennedy then leaves the meeting, and it begins to break up. A few participants stay behind and continue to talk in mixed conversations.*

*The following are the more audible fragments of these conversations on the recording.*

**Dillon:** As long as this has been all briefed to the Congress, I quite agree [*unclear*].

**Bundy:** He's coming into the White House, I gather, at five to five. Do you want to [*unclear*] briefing [*unclear*] here or go over it yourself?

**Gilpatric:** Actually, Mr. Secretary, I think this blockade paper might interest you [*unclear*].

**Bundy:** Well, the question of reactions is what Bob has in mind [for the analytical work to be done].

**McNamara:** That's right.

**Bundy:** That's . . .

**Alexis Johnson:** Soviet reactions and our counterreactions.

**Bundy:** Yeah.

**Alexis Johnson:** We've catalogued Soviet reactions, but . . .

**Rusk:** [*aside to someone else*] Why don't you come to my office at around, say, 2:00 or 2:30. 2:30.

**Taylor:** Bob, one of the things that has not been laid out in front of the President is mobilization requirements. At this point I—

**McNamara:** Yes, certainly, and [*unclear*].

**Rusk:** [*Unclear*] Bob is that . . . well, we can put some words on a piece of paper. But you can't really say much about the Soviet reaction. You can say what they may be.

**Taylor:** For that reason, though, I think we have to recognize that

we will have to start mobilizing when we make this strike. We have to have the necessary alert [*unclear*] available strength to meet any of these possibilities.

**Rusk:** Yeah.

**Gilpatric:** There are about five areas; we've done a fair amount of work trying to figure out where it is possible—

**McNamara:** I don't think we have had enough discussion among this group, enough serious discussion, of a blockade approach versus immediate strike approach.

**Gilpatric:** No, that's true.

**McNamara:** So I'd at least suggest we get together to do that.

**Dillon:** I think you ought to think on the blockade approach too, of not just of what it does to the Russians but what the effect is on the rest of our own people and on the rest of Latin America of allowing these things that's there. The commitment [*unclear*] which they will under the blockade approach.

**Thompson:** If you announce at the same time that you are going to take them out of there [*unclear*] remove [*unclear*].

**Martin:** As far as the blockade approach is concerned, if it is a blockade which is adequate, if it has a chance of bringing down Castro. This will be much more satisfactory in Latin America than just taking out the missiles.

**Robert Kennedy:** Has a blockade ever brought anybody down?

**Bundy:** The missiles go to blockade, I think. The missiles are . . . I can't see that you do the missiles without the . . .

**Taylor:** I wouldn't take these things out without resolving to let nothing else in.

**Dillon:** Oh no. But I mean the blockade without the missiles.

**Alexis Johnson:** If you don't make them operational.

**Rusk:** I would think blockade with at least [strikes] I or II. [Option] One I guess would be a pretty good size wallop. But a blockade plus that would be a minimum in any event. Wouldn't it?

**Taylor:** The minimum. That would make the only sense—

**Bundy:** Well, are there people for a blockade without a strike?

**Thompson:** I am.

**McNamara:** I am. [*Unclear*].

**Robert Kennedy:** I am.

**Alexis Johnson:** Well, I think there's a big difference, [*unclear*].

**Taylor:** If you're talking about 24 hours or something like that, but not for longer.

**Thompson:** A blockade on military weapons, plus moving your troops, getting into position, and that would be in connection with the

announcement that you're going to overfly it, and that you were going to strike if this thing went on.

**Taylor:** If there were any further work done.

**Thompson:** And all these other measures to . . .

**Dillon:** Well that would mean overflying low altitude [reconnaissance].

**Alexis Johnson:** That's right. At low altitude.

**Thompson:** Yes. I would do all those things.

**Taylor:** And air engagement over the island.

**Bundy:** The great advantage of that, of course, is you don't kill any Russians.

**McNamara:** This is the main theory.

**Alexis Johnson:** Or Cubans.

**Bundy:** Or Cubans.

**Gilpatric:** It's not a direct conflict.

**Dillon:** Well what happens when they start shooting down your planes?

**Taylor:** Well, yeah. That's the point. You hit them [*unclear*] chance again.

**Rusk:** Then they've escalated. Then they've escalated.

**Taylor:** Now the only military advantage is the fact you can be doing these things which you would like to do before we execute an invasion.

**Alexis Johnson:** Now, the blockade approach we contemplated here though has a considerable number of steps leading up to it.

**McNamara:** That's right.

**Alexis Johnson:** This is not an immediate, we didn't contemplate—

**Martin:** Both in terms of political negotiations and military preparedness.

**Alexis Johnson:** Military preparedness and political negotiations.

**Gilpatric:** If you announce a blockade, how long before it is actually imposed?

**Rusk:** Well immediately.

**McNamara:** Well it becomes effective over a period of hours, 48 hours.

**Alexis Johnson:** You see if you are going to do it within the framework, you have the two choices. You do it—well, three choices really. You do it unilaterally without declaration of war. This is about the worst of all.

**Unidentified:** This would get you in real trouble.

**Bundy:** You must declare. I think the President did not fully grasp that.

**Alexis Johnson:** Then you've got the OAS track that the Secretary [Rusk] was talking about here. Some way of getting it sanctioned under the OAS support.

And then you have getting it sanctioned under OAS plus declaration of war on our part are the three—

**Martin:** May I also point out that I think you can start the political discussions, and the military preparations, and have a blockade as part of these initial actions, without having decided whether your final action will stop with the blockade or will include military—

**Bundy:** Do your blockade before OAS consent?

**Dillon:** The purpose of a war is to destroy your enemy and that's the only purpose of it. And so, if you do declare war, how do you . . . I mean, you only justify the blockade on the basis of that is what it's going to do. And that you're going to carry it through completely and totally, so there's not much difference between that and straight action.

**Rusk:** Of course, there's another advantage to the blockade action too. Put on a blockade and then the Soviets hit the Turkish missile sites. Then your hands are probably free to [*unclear*].

**McNamara:** I think you have to look to the end of the other course to really see the potential of a blockade. The end to the other course, the end to the other course is the missiles out of Cuba and some kind of a price. Now the minimum price are missiles out of Turkey and Italy, it seems to me.

**Martin:** With Castro still there?

**McNamara:** Pardon me?

**Martin:** Castro's still there.

**Bundy:** No, Castro goes out on either of these roads in my judgment, at the end of the road.

**McNamara:** He may or may not. This is something to think about.

But, in any case, the minimum price you pay under the military course of action is missiles out of Turkey and Italy. And they *may* be out by *physical* means. Because of the Russians moving against them. And you have a serious potential division in the alliance. Now it seems to me that's the *best* possible situation you could be in as a result of the military course. I can visualize many worse situations.

Under the blockade, [*tapes changing, material repeated*] the best possible situation—

**Bundy:** The other thing you can do with a blockade is consult. That's clear. You can consult with everybody.

**McNamara:** The best possible conclusion of a blockade, it seems to me, is that the alliance is not divided. You have agreed to take your missiles out of Turkey and Italy, and the Soviets have agreed either to take

them out of Cuba or impose some kind of control comparable to your control over the missiles in Turkey and Italy. Now that's the *best* possible solution. There are many worse solutions.

**Taylor:** Now, I thought we were hoping last night that we would get the collapse of Castro.

**McNamara:** Well you might get that.

**Martin:** I think so, too. [*Unclear*] best, I think—

**Bundy:** I believe that Castro is not going to sit still for a blockade and that that's to our advantage. I'm convinced myself that Castro has to go. I always thought . . . It never occurred to [me before], I just think, his [Castro's] demon is self-destruction and we have to help him do that.

**McNamara:** Well, then you're going to pay a bigger price. Because—

**Bundy:** Later.

**McNamara:** Later. And I think that's a possibility. But the price is going to be larger. I really think we've got to think these problems through more than we have.

At the moment I lean to the blockade because I think it reduces the very serious risk of large-scale military action from which this country cannot benefit under what I call program two [surprise strike].

**Bundy:** Russian roulette and a broken alliance.

**McNamara:** Russian roulette, exactly so, and a broken alliance.

**Robert Kennedy:** Can I say this? What are the chances of . . . You've got to say to him, "They can't continue to build these missiles. All right then, so you're going to have people flying over all the time." Well, at night it looks a little different than it did the next morning.

**McNamara:** Oh, he's not going to stop building. He's going to continue to build.

**Robert Kennedy:** But not if you knock them out though, Bob?

**McNamara:** I think this goes back to what you say, at the time of blockade. I'm not sure you can say that.

**Robert Kennedy:** Are you going to let him continue to build the missiles?

**McNamara:** This goes back to what you begin to negotiate. He says: "I'm not going to stop building. You have them in Turkey." At the time you've acted by putting the blockade on. That's done.

**Robert Kennedy:** All right. Then you let them build the missiles? And you let them—

**McNamara:** Then you talk.

**Thompson:** Is your assumption that he would run the blockade?

**McNamara:** No, no. But they have goods inside that they use to carry on construction.



**Robert Kennedy:** We tell them they can build as many missiles as they want?

**McNamara:** Oh, no. No, what we say is: "We are going to blockade you. This is a danger to us. We insist that we talk this out and the danger be removed."

**Robert Kennedy:** Right. Now, but they're going to go ahead and build the missiles.

**McNamara:** That's right.

[*responding to an interjection*] Overflights, definitely.

So they—

**Robert Kennedy:** They put the missiles in place and then they announce they've got atomic weapons.

**McNamara:** Sure. And we say we have them in Turkey. And we're not going to tolerate this.

**Sorensen:** What is the relationship then between the blockade and the danger?

**McNamara:** Well, all this time Castro is being strangled.

**Thompson:** Why wouldn't you say that if construction goes on, you would strike?

**McNamara:** Well, I might, I might. But that is a more dangerous form of the blockade.

**Taylor:** What is your objection to taking out the missiles and the aircraft?

**McNamara:** My real objection to it is that it kills several hundred Russians, and I think we're going to have [*unclear*] a very strong response to it.

**Taylor:** [*Unclear*] all around the world. They have—

**Unidentified:** Then you start killing Russians, you get into escalation.

**McNamara:** All right. Then I'll go through the other courses of action and—

**Robert Kennedy:** Let's just pursue that a little bit. You put the blockade on and then you tell them they can go ahead and construct the . . .

**McNamara:** No, I don't tell them.

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, you don't tell them [to go ahead,] but they go ahead.

**McNamara:** What I say is: "The danger must be removed."

**Robert Kennedy:** All right. They construct their—

**McNamara:** But I don't say that it has to be stopped tomorrow.

**Robert Kennedy:** —they construct their missiles.

**Bundy:** Could I ask how the discussion is going to proceed? I'm sorry, I have to [*unclear*].

**Robert Kennedy:** Can we resume?

**Rusk:** Could you come on that basis at 2:00 or 2:30?

**Bundy:** I have a speech at 1:30 which is going to be very conspicuous if I don't give it.

**Rusk:** Yeah. All right. Come when you can, at any time.

**Robert Kennedy:** At 2:30?

**Rusk:** 2:30. I suppose several [of us] have got to get away here at the moment [*unclear*]. I think we've got to pursue this further and, Bob, I think that perhaps we could detail Alex [Johnson] and Paul [Nitze] and Tommy [Thompson] to sketching in the body of these two alternatives [*unclear*].

**Bundy:** I thought Ted [Sorensen] [would] try various sizes of message with the drafts that exist with Tommy.

**Rusk:** I think we ought to get together as a group and talk about these issues [*unclear*] heart of the matter.

**McNamara:** Yeah, I agree.

**Rusk:** At 2:30.

**McNamara:** 2:30. All right.

**Bundy:** Couldn't you and Tommy work on drafts—possible messages?

*Almost everyone but McNamara, Taylor, Bundy, Sorensen, and Thompson then gathers his papers and leaves, talking on the way out.*

**Bundy:** The Secretary wants to do it. [*Unclear exchanges.*]

**Thompson:** Alexis, are you going to be free to work on this?

**Alexis Johnson:** Free? [*Unclear.*] [*Laughter.*] [*Unclear exchanges.*]

**Unidentified:** You want to come right over?

**Unidentified:** I've got to have lunch with [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** Oh, are you?

**Unidentified:** I've got to eat sometime! I haven't eaten a thing yet.

*Laughter; more trailing discussions of departing officials. Two separate, simultaneous conversations can be overheard.*

**Alexis Johnson:** I might bring [*unclear name*] and Bill Bundy [*unclear*].

**Taylor:** I'll be talking to you.

**Alexis Johnson:** All right. Are we going to enlarge this out?

**Taylor:** Meanwhile, they're mobilizing and [*unclear*]. We'll take out. [*Unclear response.*]

**Unidentified:** I haven't enlarged this out at all. I thought everybody in the office just—

**Unidentified:** What did you figure out doing?

**Unidentified:** Me too! [*Unclear exchanges.*]

**McNamara (?)**: Are you going to handle the recon briefing?

**Taylor**: Sure, sure.

**McNamara (?)**: Well, this is what I'd really like you —

**Taylor**: We've got the President here. He says [strike options] III, IV, or V. That's what we're going to [unclear] at this point.

**McNamara**: In effect those cover I and II anyhow.

**Taylor**: You can't—you're not quite—he's not quite seeing as [unclear] that one out because they get interlocked [unclear].

**McNamara**: I know it. I realize that, but I'd rather work on III, IV, and V that I or II.

**Taylor**: [Unclear] take that decision [unclear].

**McNamara**: Yeah.

**Bundy**: I'm just checking the security of this chamber. [Quiet; unclear exchanges.]

**Taylor**: I suspect that [unclear].

**McNamara**: Mac, one thing . . . I realize [unclear] security [unclear] get in here without [unclear]. I really think we ought to [unclear]. We have to come up with [unclear].

**Bundy**: The President has all morning tomorrow. I . . .

**McNamara**: I think we're two meetings away from a decision [unclear] and now it's entirely a decision of security [press leaks].

**Bundy**: That's the problem.

**McNamara**: But, we don't have [unclear] in terms of time [unclear]. It's well worth wasting the time if that's the case.

**Bundy**: Oh, I don't think time bothers me at all.

**McNamara**: I wouldn't worry about the security. Not that much. We can hold this [unclear]. I'm certain we can hold it.

**Bundy**: But now let me tell you what [unclear].

**Sorensen**: Particularly with the fact that [unclear]. There's so much speculation driving so many rumors.

**McNamara**: [Unclear] rumor and all.

**Sorensen**: Congress is out of town now, and there'll be a lot of [unclear].

**McNamara**: My only point, Ted, is I think we need a meeting to see the President. Because, we're advancing. We're further than we were yesterday at this time. We might be further ahead tomorrow if we talk [unclear].

**Bundy**: I think everybody ought to give real attention . . . I've got, for example, a newspaper [unclear].

**McNamara**: Yeah. Yeah.

**Bundy**: It's complicated.

**Thompson:** Did you figure on [*unclear*].

**McNamara:** Well, I would strongly urge [perhaps urging the night meeting that had worried Bundy] . . . At least I would urge you not to cancel it solely because of security. Because otherwise there are other ways [*unclear*] security.

**Unidentified:** Twenty-four hours.

**Unidentified:** That's vital.

Then the room fell silent. The tape recorder continued running for more than 20 minutes until it ran out of tape or was turned off.

President Kennedy went to his scheduled meeting with the Japanese minister for trade and industry, Eisaku Sato, and then had lunch in the Mansion.

### *Near Midnight*

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*During the course of the day, opinions had obviously switched from the advantages of a first strike on the missile sites and on Cuban aviation to a blockade.*

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### **Kennedy Summarizes a Late-Night Meeting on the Cuban Missile Crisis<sup>36</sup>**

After lunch and a brief swim, while still in the Mansion, President Kennedy met with former secretary of state Dean Acheson. Acheson outlined his views in favor of an immediate air strike without prior warning to the Soviets.

At 3:30 P.M. Rusk and McNamara came back over to the White House from their meetings at the State Department and reported on their progress. At 4:30 Rusk again returned to the White House, this time with Thompson, to prepare President Kennedy for his meeting with Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko. That meeting began at 5:00. Meanwhile Bundy, as planned, briefed and talked with former secretary of defense Robert Lovett. McNamara and McCone also spoke to Lovett.

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36. Tape 31.1, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

The meeting with Gromyko lasted until about 7:15. Gromyko emphasized the need to settle the Berlin issue. Though he repeated the promise that the Soviets would do nothing before the November elections in the United States, he warned that later in that month the Soviet government would bring the Berlin problem to conclusion. If there was no understanding, Gromyko said that “the Soviet government would be compelled, and Mr. Gromyko wished to emphasize the word *compelled*,” to take steps to end the Western presence in Berlin. Gromyko described the Western military presence in Berlin as a “rotten tooth which must be pulled out.”

Gromyko also complained about U.S. threats against Cuba. The Soviet Union was only training Cubans in the use of defensive weapons. President Kennedy said that “there was no intention to invade Cuba” and that he would have been glad to give Khrushchev assurances to that effect, if asked. Yet Soviet shipments of arms to Cuba were an extremely serious matter, as a result of which the two countries faced “the most dangerous situation since the end of the war [World War II].”

Returning to Cuban fears, Gromyko referred to the Bay of Pigs invasion attempt of 1961. Kennedy cut in to say that he’d already admitted that this had been a mistake. He repeated that he “would have given assurances that there would be no further invasion, either by refugees or by U.S. forces.” But since the Soviet shipments of arms had begun in July, the situation had changed.

Kennedy then read from his September 4 and 13 public statements, looking for a reaction. None was evident. The two leaders also discussed the ongoing negotiations to restrict nuclear testing and Kennedy agreed to see Khrushchev when the Soviet leader came to the United States for the U.N. meeting in November.<sup>37</sup>

After Gromyko left, Rusk and Thompson stayed and President Kennedy asked Lovett and Bundy to join them. Two years later Lovett recalled their discussion as follows:<sup>38</sup>

[Kennedy] phoned down and asked me to come up to his office. When I went in, there was the President, Dean Rusk, Llewellyn Thompson, and that was all. At his suggestion, I went into Mrs.

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37. Quotations are from the full State Department Memorandum of Conversation for the meeting (A. Akalovsky was the notetaker), in National Security Archive, Cuban Missile Crisis Files, 1992 Releases Box.

38. From an interview by Dorothy Fosdick for the John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Project, 19 November 1964. The interview was only two years after the event, and Lovett had kept substantial notes of the session that he had reexamined in preparing for this interview. So

Lincoln's office to avoid the press which seemed to have taken over that section of the office building [the north side of the West Wing of the White House]. I learned that the reason for this was that Gromyko had just left.

When I went into the President's office [the Oval Office], he was sitting in his rocking chair, with Rusk and Thompson on his left and the sofa, on his right, vacant. He motioned Bundy and me to it. He asked me if I had gotten the briefing and all the facts available, and I said that I had. He grinned and said, "I ought to finish the story by telling you about Gromyko who, in this very room not over 10 minutes ago, told more bare-faced lies than I have ever heard in so short a time. All during his denial that the Russians had any missiles or weapons, or anything else, in Cuba, I had the low-level pictures in the center drawer of my desk and it was an enormous temptation to show them to him."<sup>39</sup>

The President then asked me what I thought of the situation and I outlined briefly the philosophy which I felt would be appropriate here for the President to take, as well as the military steps which seemed to be called for. I urged the quarantine route [Lovett is using the term that later passed into common usage; it was then still called the blockade] as the first step . . . and the matter was discussed in some detail with Rusk and Thompson joining in.<sup>40</sup>

At about this stage of the discussion the door onto the Rose Garden opened and the Attorney General came in and joined the discussion. The President asked me to repeat what I had previously said, and I did so. Robert Kennedy asked two or three very searching questions about the application of any blockade and indicated that he felt as I did about the necessity for taking a less violent step at the outset because, as he said, we could always blow the place up if necessary but that might be unnecessary and then we would then be in the position of having used too much force. He did not support one of the

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we find the account an unusually detailed record of a key moment in the shaping of Kennedy's conclusions about how to proceed.

39. In fact they were not low-level pictures. Low-level reconnaissance of Cuba had not begun.

40. Lovett explained in the same oral history interview that he thought a tight blockade should precede air strikes and a possible invasion. The blockade allowed a demonstration of national will to persuade the Russians to withdraw their missiles without great bloodshed, without appearing trigger-happy. His doubt, according to his notes of the time, "lay in the area of the willingness of the Administration to follow through on a course of action undertaken by it." This meant a full blockade, not letting up until the objective was accomplished, and being ready to escalate if necessary.

arguments which I had made to the effect that it might be contended in the United Nations that we were guilty of an act of aggression if we ordered an air strike or an invasion whereas the imposition of a quarantine [blockade] could, I thought, be . . . justified far more easily on the grounds that we were trying to prevent an aggression by removing the tools which might make it possible in the hands of the Cubans. I was, however, delighted to see that he was apparently of the same opinion that I was.

He also indicated that the President had received advice from another source that a full-stage invasion should be made and that still another adviser had strongly pled for an air strike. I remember commenting that the President would undoubtedly receive two or three more opinions, as I had observed it was a normal occupational hazard in dealing with military matters to get three men together and get at least four opinions.

A considerable amount of the discussion with the President centered on the possible reaction of the Russians and Thompson talked on this point at some length. There seemed to be a consensus—by this time various members of his staff had come in on three or four occasions to tell the President that it was past dinnertime—that those were risks which had to be taken in the national interest and as a matter of national and world security. The whole subject of the protection of the Western Hemisphere was gone over at some length and finally the Secretary of State and Ambassador Thompson withdrew [to go to the Gromyko dinner that was beginning at 8:00] and the President went over again three or four elements in this picture. The Attorney General and I were asked to stay and join him for dinner.

As I had been through a rather rugged day, which started at 6:30 in the country, I asked the President's leave to return to New York at some reasonable hour and he smilingly agreed. I caught the last shuttle out to LaGuardia [airport in New York City] and got home after midnight.

President Kennedy returned to his residential quarters for dinner at about 8:20. Meanwhile, at the State Department, meetings had continued with people coming and going. State's acting legal adviser, Leonard Meeker, had been brought into the deliberations to do a legal analysis of blockade options. Meeker suggested the term *defensive quarantine* instead of *blockade*.

At about 9:15 P.M. Kennedy called the group of advisers back to the White House. Since the meeting was after hours, he dared not hold it in

the West Wing of the White House for fear that reporters would notice and wonder. So the meeting was held in the Oval Room on the second floor of the Executive Mansion. Therefore the session could not be tape-recorded.

At this meeting there was continued agreement that the United States must act, though Bundy voiced a dissenting view. The group generally agreed that U.S. action should probably start with a blockade rather than an immediate attack. Kennedy discussed the timing of a possible announcement of the blockade and directed that detailed planning begin. The meeting broke up sometime near midnight.

After the others left, President Kennedy went to the Oval Office, possibly accompanied by his brother. Aware that he had been unable to record the meeting, President Kennedy turned on the recording machine there in the Oval Office and began to dictate.

**President Kennedy:** [*Unclear*], Secretary [Robert] McNamara, Deputy Secretary [Roswell] Gilpatric, General [Maxwell] Taylor, Attorney General [Robert Kennedy], George Ball, Alexis Johnson, Ed Martin, McGeorge Bundy, Ted Sorensen.<sup>41</sup> During the course of the day, opinions had obviously switched from the advantages of a first strike on the missile sites and on Cuban aviation to a blockade.

Dean Acheson, with whom I talked this afternoon, stated that while he was uncertain about any of the courses, favored the first strike as being most likely to achieve our result and less likely to cause an extreme Soviet reaction. That strike would take place just against the missile sites.

When I saw Robert Lovett, later after talking to Gromyko, he was not convinced that any action was desirable. He felt that the missile strike, the first strike, would be very destructive to our alliances. The Soviets would inevitably bring about a reprisal; that we would be blamed for it—particularly if the reprisal was to seize Berlin. And that we'd be regarded as having brought about the loss of Berlin with inadequate provocation, they having lived with these intermediate-range ballistic missiles for years.

Bundy continued to argue against any action on the grounds that there would be, inevitably, a Soviet reprisal against Berlin and that this

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41. These were apparently the participants in the White House meeting that had just ended. Dean Rusk and Llewellyn Thompson had stayed at the State Department attending the dinner for Gromyko, which dragged on until after midnight.



would divide our alliance and that we would bear that responsibility. He felt we would be better off to merely take note of the existence of these missiles, and to wait until the crunch comes in Berlin, and not play what he thought might be the Soviet game.

Everyone else felt that for us to fail to respond would throw into question our willingness to respond over Berlin, [and] would divide our allies and our country. [They felt] that we would be faced with a crunch over Berlin in two or three months and that by that time the Soviets would have a large missile arsenal in the Western Hemisphere which would weaken our whole position in this hemisphere and cause us, and face us with the same problems we're going to have in Berlin anyway.

The consensus was that we should go ahead with the blockade beginning on Sunday night. Originally we should begin by blockading Soviets against the shipment of additional offensive capacity, [and] that we could tighten the blockade as the situation requires. I was most anxious that we not have to announce a state of war existing, because it would obviously be bad to have the word go out that we were having a war rather than that it was a limited blockade for a limited purpose.

It was determined that I should go ahead with my speeches so that we don't take the cover off this, and come back Saturday night [October 20].

President Kennedy then turned off the tape recorder.