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JOHN F. KENNEDY

THE GREAT CRISES, VOLUME TWO

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After the crisis Bundy privately recorded that Kennedy, just before he left Washington on October 19 (in the few minutes after his meeting with the Joint Chiefs), asked Bundy to keep the air strike option open until he returned. In another brief exchange as he prepared to depart on his campaign trip to Ohio and Illinois, President Kennedy asked his brother, with Sorensen standing by, to "pull the group together."[8]

The President wanted to act soon and said Bobby should call if and and when he should cut short his trip and return to Washington. At 10:35 the presidential helicopter lifted off from the South Lawn of the White House.

Saturday, October 20, 1962

On Friday, October 19, the meetings at the State Department ran all day and into the night. The day started with advisers divided into two camps, one favoring a blockade and the other favoring an air strike. Bundy said that, in the course of a sleepless night, he had decided that an air strike was needed. Decisive action would confront the world with a fait accompli. He said he had spoken with President Kennedy and passed along this advice. Acheson, Dillon, McCone, and Taylor agreed with Bundy.

McNamara disagreed. Ball said he was wavering. Robert Kennedy then said, with a grin, that he too had spoken with the President and that a surprise attack like Pearl Harbor was "not in our traditions." He "favored *action"* but wanted action that gave the Soviets a chance to pull back.[1]

Rusk then suggested that the group divide into working groups to refine the blockade and air strike scenarios. It became plain to all, after

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8. Bundy's recollection is drawn from notes excerpted from his private papers by Francis Bator. Bator shared this information in an April 1998 letter to Ernest May and Philip Zelikow. Deputy Under Secretary of State Alexis Johnson, who attended almost all of the meetings during the crisis, remembered that the apparent consensus that had formed in favor of the blockade on October 18 "came unstuck" on Friday, 19 October. Alexis Johnson thought this was because of Dean Acheson's argument for an air strike. U. Alexis Johnson with Jef Olivarius McAllister, *The Right Hand of Power* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984), p. 383. In fact Kennedy had already heard Acheson's case on the afternoon of the 18th, *before* the consensus formed that night, and had not talked again to Acheson. On the "pull the group together" exchange, see Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 692.

1. This account draws on several sources, but these and other quotations from the 19 October meetings are from minutes drafted by State Department deputy legal adviser Ralph Meeker, in *FRUS*, 11: 116–22 (Robert Kennedy's emphasis on *action* is in Meeker's notes).

hearing from Justice Department and State Department lawyers, that a declaration of war was not needed in order to impose a blockade and that, under the U.N. Charter, the U.S. could obtain authorization for this from the OAS. Martin predicted that OAS approval could be obtained. Robert Kennedy stressed how crucial this judgment was, since a failed attempt to gain approval would be disastrous. Martin stood by his estimate.

After hours of discussion within and among the working groups, McNamara emerged as the chief advocate of a more diplomatic option that envisioned a blockade as a prelude to negotiations. McNamara thought that the United States would at least have to give up its missile bases in Italy and Turkey, probably more.

As the blockade option became dominant, its advocates split again into two factions. One, led by McNamara, emphasized a blockade accompanied by diplomacy and proffered concessions. The other faction would couple the blockade with a stern ultimatum demanding removal of the missiles. The previous day, when this version of the blockade was articulated by Llewellyn Thompson, McNamara had called it "the more dangerous form of the blockade."

During a sobering discussion of the danger of war, Robert Kennedy argued that the time for confrontation had arrived. "[I]n looking into the future it would be better for our children and grandchildren if we decided to face the Soviet threat, stand up to it, and eliminate it, now. The circumstances for doing so at some future time were bound to be more unfavorable, the risks would be greater, the chances of success less good."

As the afternoon waned, Rusk said there needed to be a planned action, then a pause to consider other steps. Advocates of a blockade could not support any military action unless the Soviets were given some chance to back out. Advocates of a strike insisted on doing something about the missiles already in Cuba. Dillon stressed that a blockade could be a first step, effectively conveying an ultimatum, with further pressure or military action following on. To some, this tougher version of the blockade seemed to combine the virtues of both the blockade and the air strike options.

So when McNamara and other military representatives commented that a strike might still be effective after a blockade (though Taylor had his doubts), Robert Kennedy "took particular note of this shift." Toward the end of the day, Robert Kennedy began portraying the blockade as only a first step that would not preclude other action. "He thought it was now pretty clear what the decision should be."

Sorensen had begun to draft a presidential speech. After reviewing the draft on Saturday morning, October 20, Robert Kennedy called his brother

and asked him to come back to Washington.[2] Feigning a cold, President Kennedy left Chicago on Saturday morning and arrived back at the White House at about 1:30 P.M. He read the draft speech as his advisers sneaked by various routes into the Oval Room on the second floor of the Executive Mansion. Just as on the night of October 18, the meeting was held in the Mansion rather than in the West Wing business area of the White House. Therefore the meeting could not be tape-recorded. We include a record of it here because this was the decision meeting that completes the deliberations detailed and recorded of the preceding four days. Also, the documentary record of this meeting is unusually good.[3]

2:30–5:10 P.M.

The Attorney General said that, in his opinion, a combination of the blockade route and the air strike route was very attractive to him. . . . The President said he was ready to go ahead with the blockade and to take actions necessary to put us in a position to undertake an air strike on the missiles and missile sites by Monday or Tuesday.

National Security Council Meeting on the Cuban Missile Crisis

Four general approaches had emerged by the time of the meeting. One was that of Taylor and Bundy, who wanted to start with an air strike. A second was that of Robert Kennedy, Dillon, Thompson, and McCone, who

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2. The timing of the call is based on Sorensen's account. Much later, however, Lundahl told Dino Brugioni that Robert Kennedy, worried about the tone of the 19 October discussions, called his brother on Friday, 19 October, failed to reach him, then called him again on Saturday, got him, and urged him to return [Dino Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball: The Inside Story of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, ed. Robert F. McCort (New York: Random House, 1991), pp. 303–4].

3. The notetaker of the NSC meeting was Bromley Smith. This was the first meeting during the missile crisis which Smith was allowed to attend, because it was the first such meeting styled as a formal meeting of the NSC, of which Smith was the executive secretary. Smith attended and took notes at every subsequent major meeting during the crisis, because the next two meetings were also deemed NSC meetings and then, after that, this crisis management body was formally constituted as the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (or Excom for short). Smith's notes of this 20 October meeting were more detailed than his notes of subsequent NSC and Excom meetings during the crisis, perhaps because this growing accumulation of work left Smith less and less time to type up more detailed summaries. Fortunately Kennedy was able to tape the subsequent NSC and Excom meetings during the crisis, from 22 October on.

preferred to start with a blockade but to treat it as a kind of ultimatum that might soon be followed by a strike. A third approach, advocated by Rusk, was to start with a blockade, try to freeze the Soviet action rather than reverse it, and then decide what to do. A fourth approach, supported chiefly by McNamara and Stevenson, and apparently also by Sorensen, would start with a blockade but treat the blockade as an opening to negotiations, including the offer of a summit meeting, at which trades would be offered to get the Soviet missiles out of Cuba.

It was, officially, a meeting of the National Security Council. McCone led off and asked Ray Cline, deputy director of intelligence at the CIA, to begin the intelligence briefing. Cline followed his marked-up script, which was as follows:[4]

> Mr. President: We want to bring you up to date very briefly on the deployment of Soviet military weapons systems to Cuba. You have been briefed many times on the major buildup of equipment in Cuba prior to mid-October.
>
> In the past week we have discovered unmistakable evidence of the deployment to Cuba of medium range ballistic missiles (i.e., 1020 NM range) and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (i.e., 2200 NM range). These ranges imply coverage of targets from Dallas through Cincinnati and Washington, D.C. (by MRBMs) and practically all of the continental United States (by IRBMs).
>
> There are 4 and possibly 5 MRBM sites deployed in field-type installations, 4 launchers at each site. Two of these sites are in a state of at least limited operational readiness at this time. All of the sites are in a state of continuous construction and improvement and we would expect the remaining MRBM sites to become operational in about one week's time.
>
> In addition 2 fixed IRBM sites (with 4 launch pads at each site and permanent storage facilities) are being constructed near Havana. One of these sites appears to be in a stage of construction that leads to an estimate of operational readiness of 6 weeks from now, i.e. about 1 December and the other in a stage indicating operational readiness between 15 December and the end of the year.
>
> We have not seen nuclear warheads for any of these missiles, but we do not rely on ever seeing them in our photography. [*Small excision of classified information.*] We have found what appears to be a

4. The briefing notes, with Cline's handwritten annotations, are reproduced in *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962*, ed. Mary McAuliffe, (Washington, DC: CIA, 1992), pp. 221–26.

nuclear warhead storage facility at one of the IRBM sites at Guanajay, near Havana. It will probably be completed about 1 December along with the missile site itself.

Since the missile systems in question are relatively ineffective without them, we believe warheads either are or will be available. They could be in temporary storage prior to completion of the storage facility we have seen. The *Poltava*, a Soviet ship which we think is the most likely carrier of security-sensitive military cargoes into the tightly guarded port of Mariel, has made 2 trips to Cuba and is due back in about 10 days.

In summary, we believe the evidence indicates the probability that 8 MRBM missiles can be fired from Cuba today. Naturally operational readiness is likely to be degraded by many factors, but if all 8 missiles could be launched with nuclear warheads, they could deliver a total load of 16–24 megatons (2 to 3 MT per warhead). If able to refire, they could theoretically deliver the same load approximately 5 hours later.

When the full installation of missile sites we now see under construction is completed at the end of the year, the initial salvo capability if all missiles on launchers were to reach target would be 56–88 MT.

Lundahl then went through the photographs. When he had finished, he turned to the President and said, "Mr. President, gentlemen, this summarizes the totality of the missile and other threats as we've been able to determine it from aerial photography. During the past week we were able to achieve coverage of over 95 percent of the island and we are convinced that because of the terrain in the remaining 5 percent, no additional threat will be found there." [5]

According to someone who talked to Lundahl, "The President was on his feet the moment Lundahl finished. He crossed the room directly toward Lundahl and said, 'I want to extend to your organization my gratitude for a job very well done.' Lundahl, rather embarrassed, hesitantly thanked the President." [6]

Nonverbatim minutes, taken by NSC executive secretary Bromley Smith, pick up at this point. [7]

The President summarized the discussion of the intelligence material

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5. Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, p. 314.
6. Ibid. About two hours earlier Robert Kennedy and McNamara had visited NPIC (National Photographic Interpretation Center), escorted by John McCone, and reviewed its operations.
7. Minutes of the 505th Meeting of the National Security Council, 20 October 1962, *FRUS*, 11: 126–36.

as follows. There is something to destroy in Cuba now and, if it is destroyed, a strategic missile capability would be difficult to restore. . . .

Secretary [Robert] McNamara explained to the President that there were differences among his advisers which had resulted in the drafting of alternative courses of action. He added that the military planners are at work on measures to carry out all recommended courses of action in order that, following a presidential decision, fast action could be taken.

Secretary McNamara described his view as the "blockade route." This route is aimed at preventing any addition to the strategic missiles already deployed in Cuba and eventually to eliminate these missiles. He said to do this we should institute a blockade and be prepared to take armed action in specified instances.

(The President was handed a copy of Ted Sorensen's "blockade route" draft of a presidential message, which he read.)[8]

Secretary McNamara concluded by explaining that following the blockade, the United States would negotiate for the removal of the strategic missiles from Turkey and Italy and possibly agreement to limit our use of Guantánamo to a specified limited time. He added that we could obtain the removal of the missiles from Cuba only if we were prepared to offer something in return during negotiations. He opposed as too risky the suggestion that we should issue an ultimatum to the effect that we would order an air attack on Cuba if the missiles were not removed.[9] He said he was prepared to tell Khrushchev we consider the missiles in Cuba as Soviet missiles and that if they were used against us, we would retaliate by launching missiles against the U.S.S.R.

Secretary McNamara pointed out that SNIE 11-19-62, dated October 20, 1962, estimates that the Russians will not use force to push their ships through our blockade.[10] He cited Ambassador [Charles] Bohlen's view that the U.S.S.R. would not take military action, but would limit its reaction to political measures in the United Nations.

Secretary McNamara listed the disadvantages of the blockade route as follows:

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8. No copy of this draft has been found: ibid., p. 128, note 3.

9. Afterward, McNamara recalled in some detail the arguments that he had made at this meeting for and against a blockade, but he appeared to have no recollection of taking this Stevenson-like position with regard to possible negotiations with the Soviets. Interview with Robert McNamara conducted by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Project, 1964, pp. 23–25.

10. "Major Consequences of Certain U.S. Courses of Action on Cuba," in *CIA Documents*, McAuliffe, pp. 211–20.

1. It would take a long time to achieve the objective of eliminating strategic missiles from Cuba.
2. It would result in serious political trouble in the United States.
3. The world position of the United States might appear to be weakening.

The advantages which Secretary McNamara cited are:

1. It would cause us the least trouble with our allies.
2. It avoids any surprise air attack on Cuba, which is contrary to our tradition.
3. It is the only military course of action compatible with our position as a leader of the free world.
4. It avoids a sudden military move which might provoke a response from the U.S.S.R. which could result in escalating actions leading to general war.

The President pointed out that during a blockade, more missiles would become operational, and upon the completion of sites and launching pads, the threat would increase. He asked General Taylor how many missiles we could destroy by air action on Monday.

General [Maxwell] Taylor reported that the Joint Chiefs of Staff favor an air strike on Tuesday when United States forces could be in a state of readiness. He said he did not share Secretary McNamara's fear that if we used nuclear weapons in Cuba, nuclear weapons would be used against us.

Secretary [Dean] Rusk asked General Taylor whether we dared to attack operational missile sites in Cuba.

General Taylor responded that the risk of these missiles being used against us was less than if we permitted the missiles to remain there.

The President pointed out that on the basis of the intelligence estimate there would be some 50 strategic missiles operational in mid-December, if we went the blockade route and took no action to destroy the sites being developed.

General Taylor said that the principal argument he wished to make was that now was the time to act because this would be the last chance we would have to destroy these missiles. If we did not act now, the missiles would be camouflaged in such a way as to make it impossible for us to find them. Therefore, if they were not destroyed, we would have to live with them with all the consequent problems for the defense of the United States.

The President agreed that the missile threat became worse each day,

adding that we might wish, looking back, that we had done earlier what we are now preparing to do.

Secretary Rusk said that a blockade would serious affect the Cuban missile capability in that the Soviets would be unable to deploy to Cuba any missiles in addition to those now there.

Under Secretary [George] Ball said that if an effective blockade was established, it was possible that our photographic intelligence would reveal that there were no nuclear warheads in Cuba; hence, none of the missiles now there would be made operational.

General Taylor indicated his doubt that it would be possible to prevent the Russians from deploying warheads to Cuba by means of a blockade because of the great difficulty of setting up an effective air blockade.

Secretary McNamara stated that if we knew that a plane was flying nuclear warheads to Cuba, we should immediately shoot it down. Parenthetically, he pointed out that there are now 6,000 to 8,000 Soviet personnel in Cuba.

The President asked whether the institution of a blockade would appear to the free world as a strong response to the Soviet action. He is particularly concerned about whether the Latin American countries would think that the blockade was an appropriate response to the Soviet challenge.

The Attorney General [Robert Kennedy] returned to the point made by General Taylor, i.e., that now is the last chance we will have to destroy Castro and the Soviet missiles deployed in Cuba.

Mr. [Theodore] Sorensen said he did not agree with the Attorney General or with General Taylor that this was our last chance. He said a missile buildup would end if, as everyone seemed to agree, the Russians would not use force to penetrate the United States blockade.

Air Strike Route

Mr. [McGeorge] Bundy handed to the President the "air strike alternative," which the President read. It was also referred to as the Bundy plan.

The Attorney General told the President that this plan was supported by Mr. Bundy, General Taylor, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and with minor variations, by Secretary [Douglas] Dillon and Director [John] McCone.

General Taylor emphasized the opportunity available now to take out not only all the missiles, but all the Soviet medium bombers (IL-28) which were neatly lined up in the open on airbases in Cuba.

Mr. McNamara cautioned that an air strike would not destroy all the missiles and launchers in Cuba, and, at best, we could knock out two-thirds

of these missiles. Those missiles not destroyed could be fired from mobile launchers not destroyed. General Taylor said he was unable to explain why the IL-28 bombers had been left completely exposed on two airfields. The only way to explain this, he concluded, was on the ground that the Cubans and the Russians did not anticipate [a] United States air strike.

Secretary Rusk said he hesitated to ask the question but he wondered whether these planes were decoys. He also wondered whether the Russians were trying to entice us into a trap. Secretary McNamara stated his strong doubt that these planes were decoys. Director McCone added that the Russians would not have sent one hundred shiploads of equipment to Cuba solely to play a "trick." General Taylor returned to the point he had made earlier, namely, that if we do not destroy the missiles and the bombers, we will have to change our entire military way of dealing with external threats.

The President raised the question of advance warning prior to military action—whether we should give a minimum of two hours notice of an air strike to permit Soviet personnel to leave the area to be attacked.

General Taylor said that the military would be prepared to live with a 24-hour advance notice or grace period if such advance notice was worthwhile politically. The President expressed his doubt that any notice beyond seven hours had any political value.

There was a brief discussion of the usefulness of sending a draft message to Castro, and a copy of such a message was circulated.[11]

The President stated flatly that the Soviet planes in Cuba did not concern him particularly. He said we must be prepared to live with the Soviet threat as represented by Soviet bombers. However, the existence of strategic missiles in Cuba had an entirely different impact throughout Latin America. In his view the existence of 50 planes in Cuba did not affect the balance of power, but the missiles already in Cuba were an entirely different matter.

The Attorney General said that in his opinion a combination of the blockade route and the air strike route was very attractive to him. He felt that we should first institute the blockade. In the event that the Soviets continued to build up the missile capability in Cuba, then we should inform the Russians that we would destroy the missiles, the launchers, and the missile sites. He said he favored a short wait during which time the Russians could react to the blockade. If the Russians did not halt the development of the missile capability, then we would proceed to make an air strike. The

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11. Not found. *FRUS*, 11: 131, note 6.

advantage of proceeding in this way, he added, was that we would get away from the Pearl Harbor surprise attack aspect of the air strike route.

Mr. Bundy pointed out that there was a risk that we would act in such as way as to get Khrushchev to commit himself fully to the support of Castro.

Secretary Rusk doubted that a delay of 24 hours in initiating an air strike was of any value. He said he now favored proceeding on the blockade track.

Secretary Dillon mentioned 72 hours as the time between instituting the blockade and initiating an air strike in the event we receive no response to our initial action.

Director McCone stated his opposition to an air strike, but admitted that in his view a blockade was not enough. He argued that we should institute the blockade and tell the Russians that if the missiles were not dismantled within 72 hours, the United States would destroy the missiles by air attack. He called attention to the risk involved in a long drawn-out period during which the Cubans could, at will, launch the missiles against the United States. Secretary Dillon said the existence of strategic missiles in Cuba was, in his opinion, not negotiable. He believed that any effort to negotiate the removal of the missiles would involve a price so high that the United States could not accept it. If the missiles are not removed or eliminated, he continued, the United States will lose all of its friends in Latin America, who will become convinced that our fear is such that we cannot act. He admitted that the limited use of force involved in a blockade would make the military task much harder and would involve the great danger of the launching of these missiles by the Cubans.

Sorensen recalled later that these presentations by McCone and Dillon, taking direct issue with McNamara's proposal for negotiations, resulted in "a brief awkward silence," which was then broken by Gilpatric, "normally a man of few words in meetings with the President when the Defense Secretary was present."[12]

Bromley Smith's minutes continue.

Deputy Secretary [Roswell] Gilpatric saw the choice as involving the use of limited force or of unlimited force. He was prepared to face the prospect of an air strike against Cuba later, but he opposed the initial use of all-out military force such as a surprise air attack. He defined a blockade as being the application of the limited use of force and doubted that such limited use could be combined with an air strike.

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12. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 694.

General Taylor argued that a blockade would not solve our problem or end the Cuban missile threat. He said that eventually we would have to use military force and, if we waited, the use of military force would be much more costly.

Secretary McNamara noted that the air strike planned by the Joint Chiefs involved 800 sorties. Such a strike would result in several thousand Russians being killed, chaos in Cuba, and efforts to overthrow the Castro government. In his view the probability was high that an air strike would lead inevitably to an invasion. He doubted that the Soviets would take an air strike on Cuba without resorting to a very major response. In such an event, the United States would lose control of the situation which could escalate to general war.

The President agreed that a United States air strike would lead to a major Soviet response, such as blockading Berlin. He agreed that at an appropriate time we would have to acknowledge that we were willing to take strategic missiles out of Turkey and Italy if this issue was raised by the Russians. He felt that implementation of a blockade would also result in Soviet reprisals, possibly the blockade of Berlin. If we instituted a blockade on Sunday, then by Monday or Tuesday we would know whether the missile development had ceased or whether it was continuing. Thus, we would be in a better position to know what move to make next.

Secretary Dillon called attention to the fact that even if the Russians agreed to dismantle the missiles now in Cuba, continuing inspection would be required to ensure that the missiles were not again made ready.

The President said that if it was decided to go the Bundy route, he would favor an air strike which would destroy only missiles. He repeated this view that we would have to live with this threat arising out of the stationing in Cuba of Soviet bombers.

Secretary Rusk referred to an air strike as chapter two. He did not think we should initiate such a strike because of the risk of escalating actions leading to general war. He doubted that we should act without consultation of our allies. He said a sudden air strike had no support in law or morality, and, therefore, must be ruled out. Reading from notes, he urged that we start the blockade and only go on to an air attack when we knew the reaction of the Russians and of our allies.

At this point Director McCone acknowledged that we did not know positively that nuclear warheads for the missiles deployed had actually arrived in Cuba. Although we had evidence of the construction of storage places for nuclear weapons, such weapons may not yet have been sent to Cuba.

The President asked what we would say to those whose reaction to

our instituting a blockade now would be to ask why we had not blockaded last July.

Both Mr. Sorensen and Mr. Ball made the point that we did not institute a blockade in July because we did not then know of the existence of strategic missiles in Cuba.

Secretary Rusk suggested that our objective was an immediate freeze of the strategic missile capability in Cuba to be inspected by United Nations observation teams stationed at the missile sites. He referred to our bases in Turkey, Spain and Greece as being involved in any negotiation covering foreign bases. He said a United Nations group might be sent to Cuba to reassure those who might fear that the United States was planning an invasion.

Ambassador Stevenson stated his flat opposition to a surprise air strike, which he felt would ultimately lead to a United States invasion of Cuba. He supported the institution of the blockade and predicted that such action would reduce the chance of Soviet retaliation of a nature which would inevitably escalate. In his view our aim is to end the existing missile threat in Cuba without casualties and without escalation. He urged that we offer the Russians a settlement involving the withdrawal of our missiles from Turkey and our evacuation of Guantánamo base.

The President sharply rejected the thought of surrendering our base at Guantánamo in the present situation. He felt that such action would convey to the world that we had been frightened into abandoning our position. He was not opposed to discussing withdrawal of our missiles from Turkey and Greece [*sic*], but he was firm in saying we should only make such a proposal in the future.

The Attorney General thought we should convey our firm intentions to the Russians clearly and suggested that we might tell the Russians that we were turning over nuclear weapons and missiles to the West Germans.[13]

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13. To reassure the German allies but also to discourage any thoughts on their part of an independent nuclear deterrent, the United States in the late 1950s had begun to equip Luftwaffe aircraft with "tactical" nuclear bombs and missiles. The nuclear devices remained under U.S. control. The proposed multilateral nuclear force [MLF] was supposed to include Germans among the multinational crews whose ships would carry nuclear-armed missiles, but authority for the release of the weapons remained exclusively with the U.S. President. Champions of the MLF in the United States, mostly in the State Department and sometimes referred to as the "cabal," hoped that it would not only dampen any German interest in nuclear weapons but would lead the French and perhaps the British to abandon their own independent nuclear forces [see McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New

Ambassador [Llewellyn] Thompson stated his view that our first action should be the institution of a blockade. Following this, he thought we should launch an air strike to destroy the missiles and sites, after giving sufficient warning so that Russian nationals could leave the area to be attacked.

The President said he was ready to go ahead with the blockade and to take actions necessary to put us in a position to undertake an air strike on the missiles and missile sites by Monday or Tuesday.

General Taylor summarized the military actions already under way, including the quiet reinforcement of Guantánamo by infiltrating marines and the positioning of ships to take out United States dependents from Guantánamo on extremely short notice.

The Attorney General said we could implement a blockade very quickly and prepare for an air strike to be launched later if we so decided.

The President said he was prepared to authorize the military to take those preparatory actions which they would have to take in anticipation of the military invasion of Cuba. He suggested that we inform the Turks and the Italians that they should not fire the strategic missiles they have even if attacked. The warheads for missiles in Turkey and Italy could be dismantled. He agreed that we should move to institute a blockade as quickly as we possibly can.

In response to a question about further photographic surveillance of Cuba, Secretary McNamara recommended, and the President agreed, that no low level photographic reconnaissance should be undertaken now because we have decided to institute a blockade.

Secretary Rusk recommended that a blockade not be instituted before Monday in order to provide time required to consult our allies.

Mr. Bundy said the pressure from the press was becoming intense and suggested that one way of dealing with it was to announce shortly that we had obtained photographic evidence of the existence of strategic missiles in Cuba. The announcement would hold the press until the President made his television speech.

The President acknowledged that the domestic political heat following his television appearance would be terrific. He said he had opposed an invasion of Cuba but that now we were confronted with the possibil-

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York: Random House, 1988), pp. 487–90]. Some Western officials interpreted Khrushchev's position regarding Berlin as traceable chiefly to Soviet concern lest Germany acquire nuclear weapons [see Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 169–234]. Robert Kennedy's suggestion here must have been startling to the State Department contingent, especially to Ball, who was active in the cabal.

ity that by December there would be fifty strategic missiles deployed there. In explanation as to why we have not acted sooner to deal with the threat from Cuba, he pointed out that only now do we have the kind of evidence which we can make available to our allies in order to convince them of the necessity of acting. Only now do we have a way of avoiding a split with our allies.

It is possible that we may have to make an early strike with or without warning next week. He stressed again the difference between the conventional military buildup in Cuba and the psychological impact throughout the world of the Russian deployment of strategic missiles to Cuba. General Taylor repeated his recommendation that any air strike in Cuba included attacks on the MIGs and medium bombers.

The President repeated his view that our world position would be much better if we attack only the missiles. He directed that air strike plans include only missiles and missile sites, preparations to be ready three days from now.

Under Secretary Ball expressed his view that a blockade should include all shipments of POL [petroleum, oil, and lubricants] to Cuba. Secretary Rusk thought that POL should not now be included because such a decision would break down the distinction which we want to make between elimination of strategic missiles and the downfall of the Castro government. Secretary Rusk repeated his view that our objective is to destroy the offensive capability of the missiles in Cuba, not, at this time, seeking to overthrow Castro!

The President acknowledged that the issue was whether POL should be included from the beginning or added at a later time. He preferred to delay possibly as long as a week.

Secretary Rusk called attention to the problem involved in referring to our action as a blockade. He preferred the use of the word *quarantine*.

Parenthetically, the President asked Secretary Rusk to reconsider the present policy of refusing to give nuclear weapons assistance to France. He expressed the view that in light of present circumstances a refusal to help the French was not worthwhile. He thought that in the days ahead we might be able to gain the needed support of France if we stopped refusing to help them with their nuclear weapons project.[14]

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14. Like Eisenhower before him, Kennedy had never been an all-out opponent of France's having independent nuclear forces. He had gone along, however, with the MLF scheme and had approved public statements by McNamara that described such forces as "dangerous, expensive, prone to obsolescence, and lacking in credibility as a deterrent." He had also drawn upon

There followed a discussion of several sentences in the "blockade route" draft of the President's speech. It was agreed that the President should define our objective in terms of halting "offensive missile preparations in Cuba." Reference to economic pressures on Cuba would not be made in this context.

The President made clear that in the United Nations we should emphasize the subterranean nature of the missile buildup in Cuba. Only if we were asked would we respond that we were prepared to talk about the withdrawal of missiles from Italy and Turkey. In such an eventuality, the President pointed out that we would have to make clear to the Italians and the Turks that withdrawing strategic missiles was not a retreat and that we would be prepared to replace these missiles by providing a more effective deterrent, such as the assignment of Polaris submarines. The President asked Mr. Nitze to study the problems arising out of the withdrawal of missiles from Italy and Turkey, with particular reference to complications which would arise in NATO. The President made clear that our emphasis should be on the missile threat from Cuba.

Ambassador [Adlai] Stevenson reiterated his belief that we must be more forthcoming about giving up our missile bases in Turkey and Italy. He stated again his belief that the present situation required that we offer to give up such bases in order to induce the Russians to remove the strategic missiles from Cuba.

Mr. [Paul] Nitze flatly opposed making any such offer, but said he would not object to discussing this question in the event that negotiations developed from our institution of a blockade.

The President concluded the meeting by stating that we should be ready to meet criticism of our deployment of missiles abroad but we should not initiate negotiations with a base withdrawal proposal.

During the 2 hours and 40 minutes of this meeting, lines had been clearly drawn between the groups that would later be labeled doves and hawks.[15] It is a pity that Kennedy held the meeting outside the reach of

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himself strong French criticism because of a loosely worded press conference remark which seemed to single out French nuclear forces, not British, as "inimical to the community interest of the Atlantic alliance." (see Bundy, *Danger and Survival,* pp. 484–86).

15. The terminology may have been Kennedy's own. It achieved popularity through a postmortem on the crisis: Stewart Alsop and Charles Bartlett, "In Time of Crisis," *Saturday Evening Post*, 8 December 1962, for which Kennedy was a source [see Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev 1960–1963* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 569].

his microphones, for not even the anodyne vocabulary of an official notetaker conceals the intensity of the exchanges. McNamara seems even more emphatic than usual in describing the possible consequences of not following a blockade and negotiate strategy. Stevenson pleads for such a strategy even after the President has "sharply rejected" negotiations about Guantánamo and has declared that the United States will not initiate talks about trading away the IRBMs in Turkey and Italy. Nitze has "flatly opposed" Stevenson. Dillon has come down hard in saying that the missiles in Cuba are "not negotiable." Taylor has intervened time and again to argue for an air strike and against a blockade, while Rusk has said categorically that "a sudden air strike had no support in the law or morality, and, therefore, must be ruled out."

President Kennedy has emerged from the meeting midway between the hawks and the doves. He has rejected making any offer to negotiate, at least for the time being. He has come down in favor of a blockade, now to be labeled a quarantine. The blockade is to be coupled with a demand that Khrushchev remove the missiles, with at least an air strike (a narrow one, President Kennedy hopes) readied if Khrushchev does not comply. This was the option pressed by Thompson, Dillon, and McCone, vitally backed by Robert Kennedy. After the meeting McCone followed up with Robert Kennedy to nail down this outcome. Later in the evening President Kennedy called to reassure McCone that "he had made up his mind to pursue the course which I had recommended and he agreed with the views I expressed in the afternoon meeting."[16]

When Taylor returned to the Pentagon, he told the Chiefs, "This was not one of our better days." He added that President Kennedy had said, "I know you and your colleagues are unhappy with the decision, but I trust that you will support me in this decision." Taylor said he had assured the President they would. General Wheeler remarked, "I never thought I'd live to see the day when I would want to go to war."[17]

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16. McCone to File, 20 October 1962, in *FRUS*, 11:137–38.

17. Notes taken from Transcripts of Meetings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, October–November 1962, p. 13, National Security Archive, Washington, DC. These notes must be used with some caution, but we rely on passages that the original notetaker marked as direct quotations.