

Ball: Bob, are these the same kind of flares you use in night bombing? Are these pathfinder kind of flare?

McNamara: They're basically pathfinder flares, but they're not—

Ball: Could this be regarded by the people seeing it as though they were probably a bombing operation?

McNamara: No, I don't believe so. If we wish to, we could give warning ahead of time—simply say we're going on regular reconnaissance missions night and day.

Robert Kennedy: If they hear that explosion plus the night flares, I think that they'll think something— [*Mixed voices.*]

Robert Kennedy: Although it's probably a good idea.

Unidentified: We want to be sure these missiles aren't on their launchers.

Robert Kennedy: I know.

Unclear exchanges. The meeting is beginning to break up.

President Kennedy: All right. Your point, Walt, is that if we go to POL that's a very strong act.

Rostow: It's a very strong act, sir. The clock begins to tick. On the other hand, it still gives them time to negotiate. [*Unclear*] that it's the optimum background of pressure . . .

President Kennedy: Well, I'm just trying to think about whether it appears, if we let this ship go, that we've relaxed on them.

As I say, we still could pick up beginning tomorrow night. We'll know a little more of Khrushchev's response. We can still get this *Grozny*. So all we really have to decide is the East Germans. Let's let that go. [*Others agree.*]

What do you think, Tommy?

Llewellyn Thompson: I think you've really considered it right. I'm a little troubled by Khrushchev's strong letter of yesterday. That we don't just soon show him that we're not backing away because of a threat. On the other hand, he *is* backing away and that [*unclear*]. We'll just have to [*unclear*]. [*Unclear exchanges.*]

Robert Kennedy: He definitely has, though, when he says: "We're not going to retreat an inch," and we retreat an inch. And he says: "Six feet to go."

Thompson: [*Unclear.*] I talked to the Yugoslav ambassador after the briefing the other day, and he volunteered, without my bringing it up, he said: "I just want to tell you one thing. I don't agree with your [*unclear*] in your papers, that Khrushchev thinks you're afraid to act, or are weak." And he said: "I've had a lot of private conversations with him. And he [Khrushchev] said he doesn't think that." Just to throw that in.