

Therefore, I would recommend that tomorrow we carry on surveillance but that we defer the decision as late as possible in the day to give a little more time. Because if we go in with surveillance, we have to put a cover on, and if we start shooting back we have escalated substantially.

President Kennedy: [*Unclear*] with the shoot—

Dillon: Why cover on it? I don't understand that.

McNamara: Well, we can't send these low-altitude aircraft in.

Dillon: And the cover, they'll attack that?

President Kennedy: If you're going to take a reprisal, the cover isn't much good because you've got the anti-aircraft guns. You've got somebody up there at 10,000 feet and actually they can't give much more cover.

What you'd really, it seems to me, have is a justification for more elaborate action, wouldn't you? Do we want to worry about whether we're going to shoot up that one gun or do we want to just use this as a reason for doing a lot of other shooting at the SAMs?

Taylor: The main thing is to assure effective reconnaissance—whatever that implies. We won't know, really, till we . . .

President Kennedy: I would think we ought to just take a chance on reconnaissance tomorrow, without the cover, because I don't think the cover is really going to do you much good. You can't protect, hide it, from ground fire, and if they're shooting tomorrow, and if we don't get an answer from U Thant, then we ought to consider whether Monday morning [October 29] we [go ahead with the air attack on Cuba]. I'm not convinced yet of an invasion, because I think that's a much . . . I think we may . . .

Taylor: I agree with that. My personal view is that we should be ready to go in Monday [with the strike] and also ready to invade, but make no advance decisions.

President Kennedy: What do you think? [*turning to McNamara*]

McNamara: Well, I doubt—

President Kennedy: I don't think your cover's going to do much good.

McNamara: No. I . . .

My point is, I don't think we should stop the surveillance tomorrow. That I want to underline.

Point number two is, if we do carry on a surveillance tomorrow and they fire on it—

President Kennedy: That's a signal then. Then we know. . . .

McNamara: Then I think we ought to either do one of two things. We ought to decide at that moment that we're either going to return