

White House Tapes and Minutes of the Cuban Missile Crisis

ExCom Meetings
October 1962

Introduction to Documents

Until the partial and gradual opening of the archives in the last few years, people interested in studying the Cuban missile crisis had to rely almost exclusively on accounts given by the participants. But the picture that came through in the memoir literature was almost bound to be distorted: after President Kennedy's assassination, and the series of national traumas that followed in rapid succession, it was inevitable that recollections about the early 1960s would be filtered through many layers of emotion, and in fact the prevailing interpretation of the period came to have an almost mythic quality. But what this meant to a historian is that the archives were certain to contain some real surprises.

In 1973, in the context of the Watergate scandal, it was revealed that during the Kennedy Administration a number of recordings had been made of White House meetings, and there is little doubt that the taping had been done secretly. Indeed, some of President Kennedy's closest associates were surprised—even incredulous—at the disclosure. "I know nothing about it," McGeorge Bundy told the *New York Times*; he added "that he did not recall seeing any recording equipment at meetings he attended." And Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "described the idea of secret recordings during the Kennedy Administration as 'absolutely inconceivable.'" "It was not the sort of thing Kennedy would have done," he told a news agency. "The kind of people in the White House then would not have thought of doing something like that."¹

There are in fact 127 audiotapes of White House meetings on deposit at the Kennedy Library in Boston. They cover the period from July 30, 1962 to November 8, 1963; eighteen tapes, including eight tapes of official "ExCom" meetings, relate directly to the missile crisis. There is also a dictabelt containing the President's reflections on the crisis—the only known evidence, according to the register in the Kennedy Library, of "this sort of reflective diary-keeping" by Kennedy during his presidency.

The first missile crisis tape—or actually extracts from it, together with an 87-page "sanitized" transcript—was released last year by the Kennedy Library. The transcript, sections of which are presented here, covers what was

1. *The New York Times*, July 19, 1973, p. 20.

in effect the first day of this thirteen-day crisis. It represents about two and a half hours of conversation recorded in the White House on October 16, 1962. President Kennedy had just found out about the missiles earlier that morning.

The other documents presented here are not quite as unusual, but are still very revealing. After President Kennedy gave his famous speech on October 22 announcing the existence of the missiles and outlining the measures the United States was taking to deal with the problem, the group of advisers he had brought together at the beginning of the crisis was officially designated the "Executive Committee of the National Security Council," or "ExCom" for short. There were no formal minutes kept of its first four meetings, but Bromley Smith prepared minutes beginning with its fifth meeting on October 25, and "sanitized" versions are available in Boxes 315 and 316 of the National Security Files at the Kennedy Library. Published here are the minutes of two meetings held at the climax of the crisis, and excerpts from the minutes of a third: an invasion of Cuba was imminent, and the confrontation was clearly coming to a head.

How exactly does this material bear on accepted notions about the crisis? The first major revision relates to the issue of a trade involving the American missiles in Turkey. Many writers have assumed, on the basis of very explicit claims by the participants, that President Kennedy refused to countenance a trade involving the Jupiters in Turkey. Perhaps the most important scholarly study of this issue is Barton Bernstein's article, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: Trading the Jupiters in Turkey?" Although Bernstein here backed away from the more extreme claims he had made in earlier articles, he still tended to minimize the degree to which the President was committed to the idea of a trade. He presented Kennedy as "wavering" on October 27 between war and peace, as "prepared to countenance a trade" only "at a few points" when "he seemed desperate."² The ExCom minutes published here, however, show that the President's attitude at this point was quite consistent; he wanted to freeze work on the missile sites, and then enter into negotiations with the Russians: "we have to face up to the possibility of some kind of a trade."

Moreover, there is no evidence in the minutes of ExCom session no. 8 (cited by Bernstein to support his claim) of Kennedy at any point "opting for a course toward war."³ Kennedy's proposal to consult the NATO allies, which

2. Barton J. Bernstein, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: Trading the Jupiters in Turkey?," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 95, No. 1 (Spring 1980), pp. 119, 117.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

Bernstein alludes to in this context, might in fact be viewed as a maneuver to shore up his less belligerent position. There is some evidence that the British, in particular, took a dovish line: according to notes of the National Security Council meeting held on October 22, the President commented that a message just received from Prime Minister Macmillan “contained the best argument for taking no action.”⁴ Compare this with Bernstein’s claim, based on Macmillan’s memoirs, that the British Prime Minister “had been a strong supporter of the quarantine and worried, especially in the early days, that Khrushchev would wring concessions that would weaken the alliance.”⁵

A second point relates to Robert Kennedy’s role. According to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Robert Kennedy “was a dove from the start. If you bomb the missile sites and airports, he said on the first day, ‘you are covering most of Cuba. You are going to kill an awful lot of people and take an awful lot of heat on it.’ If the Americans said they were bombing because of the missiles, ‘it would be almost [incumbent] upon the Russians to say that we are going to send them in again and, if you do it again, we are going to do the same thing in Turkey.’”⁶ But actually, as the transcript makes clear, Robert Kennedy was arguing for an invasion. The passage Schlesinger alludes to was introduced by Robert Kennedy raising the issue of an invasion, and in fact practically every time he spoke in the course of these October 16 meetings, his comments seemed to point in that direction.⁷ His argument was that an air strike would be insufficient since six months later the Soviets could just rebuild the missile bases: “if you’re going to get into it at all,” you might as well take your losses “and get it over with.”⁸ At one point, he even asked whether the United States might be able to engineer some pretext for a war against Cuba—whether we could “sink the *Maine* again or something.”⁹

The same kind of point comes out when we examine Robert Kennedy’s feelings about the blockade option. In his memoir on the crisis, he claimed

4. In box 313, folder “NSC Meetings 1962, No. 507,” National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston.

5. Bernstein, “The Cuban Missile Crisis,” p. 114.

6. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), p. 507.

7. Presidential Recordings, Transcripts, Cuban Missile Crisis Meetings, Off-the-Record Meeting on Cuba, October 16, 1962, first meeting, p. 21 (for the passage Schlesinger refers to) and p. 31, and second meeting, pp. 24–25, 27—from the President’s Office Files, JFK Library, Boston. Henceforth cited as “October 16 transcripts, I [for the first meeting] or II [for the second].” Extracts are published below; the full transcript and an audiocassette containing extracts from the original tape are both available by mail from the Kennedy Library.

8. October 16 transcripts, II, p. 25.

9. *Ibid.*, II, p. 24.

to have supported McNamara's position in favor of a blockade.¹⁰ But when McNamara said on October 16 that the Soviets could be prevented from redeploying missiles after an air strike by a blockade, Robert Kennedy in effect argued against this: "Then we're gonna have to sink Russian ships." That to his mind meant risking war; and, he seemed to think, you might just as well face the risk of war then (through an invasion) as later.¹¹ His opposition to the blockade was also reflected in the ExCom minutes. On October 25, for example, he "repeated his view that we may decide that it is better to avoid confronting the Russians by stopping one of their ships and to react by attacking the missiles already in Cuba."¹² And he made the same point, but perhaps even more strongly, during the morning ExCom meeting on October 27, the minutes of which are published below.

All of this, perhaps, may force us to reconsider some traditional judgments about Robert Kennedy's moderation and moral sensibilities. When people talk about the role that moral considerations play in shaping foreign policy, Robert Kennedy's Pearl Harbor analogy is often the first example cited. For this reason alone, some standard claims about his attitude during the crisis merit close examination. "Listening to the war cries of the hawks," Schlesinger wrote, Robert Kennedy "sent his famous note to Sorensen: 'I now know how Tojo felt when he was planning Pearl Harbor.'" ¹³ But perhaps this was meant quite literally—although it was certainly an ironic way of putting things: he really did understand how it felt to be contemplating a large-scale military attack, because that was precisely what he at this point wanted.

A third point has to do with the military significance of the missiles in Cuba. There is the claim, made most recently by Raymond Garthoff, that even McNamara "did not deny that there was military significance to the deployment," and that the "question of the actual impact on the military balance, therefore, did not become an issue of contention."¹⁴ In fact, it is

10. Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days* (New York: New American Library, Signet Books, 1969), p. 37.

11. October 16 transcripts, II, pp. 24–25.

12. "Summary Record of NSC Executive Committee Meeting No. 5, October 25, 1962, 5 p.m.," p. 5, National Security Files, Box 315, JFK Library.

13. Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, p. 507. These claims about Robert Kennedy's moderation from the very outset were made even more strongly in the televised series based on Schlesinger's biography that was shown early in 1985. In fact the script for the episode dealing with the Cuban missile crisis showed both of the Kennedy brothers as eager from the start for a negotiated solution. But, as the transcript shows, not only was this not true of Robert, but the President himself thought at this time that an air strike was the very least that should be done (I, p. 27).

14. Raymond Garthoff, "A Retrospective Look at a 1962 Evaluation of the Soviet Missiles in

clear from the transcript that McNamara did flatly deny that the deployment would have any effect on the strategic balance; the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on the other hand, felt that the effect would be substantial.¹⁵ And it is clear that the issue did play a certain role in the discussion. In particular, McNamara's view was the basis for his belief that the missiles posed not a "military problem" but simply a "domestic, political problem"—and this assumption lay at the heart of his thinking about what should be done.¹⁶

These are all fairly narrow points. But it is not simply because they force us to make specific revisions of this sort that these documents are so valuable. They are fascinating because they give us such a direct and unfiltered sense for these events—a rare glimpse, for example, at the disorderly, unsystematic but not necessarily inefficient way in which things were worked out. Myths are easy enough to deflate, and some of the hyperbole lavished on this episode—"this combination of toughness and restraint, of will, nerve and wisdom, so brilliantly controlled, so matchlessly calibrated"¹⁷—is almost embarrassing to read in the light of the evidence. But the detailed analysis of the crisis, which documents of this sort will eventually permit, can take us well beyond simple revisionism: their real value is that they permit us to bring into focus questions about the wellsprings of policy, about exactly how things developed and why. How was it, for example, that McNamara, who at the outset of the crisis had been unwilling to sanction an attack on Cuba if any of the missiles there were operational, came at the end to view an invasion of the island as "almost inevitable," even though some of the missiles by that time had reached operational status? Does this shift in attitude suggest anything of a general nature about political behavior in time of crisis?¹⁸

And then there is the question of the time constraint—that is, the deadline for action—and the closely related issue of how long it would take before the missiles became ready to fire. On the one hand, there was the assumption

Cuba," addendum to his *Intelligence Assessment and Policymaking: A Decision Point in the Kennedy Administration* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1984), p. 28; or, in slightly different form, in his article "The Meaning of the Missiles," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Autumn 1982), p. 76.

15. October 16 transcripts, II, p. 12.

16. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 45–46.

17. This is from the concluding paragraph in the chapter on the missile crisis in Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 841.

18. October 16 transcripts, I, pp. 11, 13; "Summary Record of NSC Executive Committee Meeting No. 8, October 27, 1962, 4:00 PM," p. 5, Box 316, National Security Files, JFK Library (and reprinted below).

on October 16 that the missiles in question were “field-type” weapons, and if the equipment had been checked out and the site surveyed, the missiles could be “fielded, placed and fired in six hours.”¹⁹ But at other times, people spoke of a two-week period. General Marshall Carter, the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, said that the CIA estimate was “that these could be fully operational within two weeks,” although maybe a single missile would be operational much sooner.²⁰ All this strikes the reader as very unclear; and even at the time, McNamara, it seems, was uncertain about whether the crucial time constraint was six hours or two weeks.²¹ Is it conceivable that the notion of a two-week period took hold in an almost arbitrary way, that the deadline for final action was determined on the basis of this assumption even before this issue was satisfactorily ironed out, and that the deadline so set persisted, as much by default as by anything else, even after it had become known that a number of the missiles were operational?

A document as complete as this transcript evidently is, recording a free and fairly unstructured discussion, can be revealing as much for what it does not contain as for what it does. Everyone has heard the story about Sherlock Holmes and the significant episode of the dog in the night. “But the dog,” Watson said, “did nothing in the night.” That, Holmes replied, was the significant episode. The October 16 transcript is full of “significant episodes” of this sort. One wonders, for example, why no one even explicitly broached the issue of how the transformation of Cuba into a base for Soviet missiles would affect the vulnerability of America’s strategic forces: when McNamara denied that the deployment would have any effect on the strategic balance, no one forced him to back up his opinion and deal directly with issues of this sort.

Similarly, there is the question of what the U.S. government knew about Soviet command and control. McNamara’s unwillingness at this point to attack Cuba once any of the missiles there became operational was rooted in his fear that Soviet control over the missile sites might be loose, and in the event of an attack the local commander might decide on his own initiative to launch his missiles against American cities. But his comment that we just “don’t know” what kinds of communication and control system the Soviets had over the missiles in Cuba scarcely seems adequate. No one pressed him

19. October 16 transcripts, I, pp. 3–4, and II, p. 3.

20. *Ibid.*, II, p. 2; see also I, p. 23, and II, p. 42.

21. *Ibid.*, II, p. 11.

on this issue, but it is hard to believe that the government knew nothing of a general nature about Soviet command and control that was relevant to the situation in Cuba—how closely in their system, for example, control over warheads was integrated with control over delivery systems. One wonders whether there was any reaching down into the bureaucracy for answers to questions of this sort.

Historical analysis in fact proceeds largely by focusing on these little issues, and practically any project worth doing involves scores of such second-order problems. This mode of operation reflects as much as anything else the prejudice of the professional historian—or really the intellectual style of the discipline. From experience one comes to take it for granted that the process of sorting out the more prosaic kinds of problems gives one, often in the most unexpected ways, a “feel” for what was going on: as the French say, “le bon Dieu est dans le détail.”

—Marc Trachtenberg

Editor's Note:

PUNCTUATION. The following conventions are used:

- [?] When the transcriber is not certain of what is said on the recording.
- To indicate a sentence that the speaker trails off without completing.
- . . . When a speaker is interrupted before a sentence is completed.
- [] Used to enclose tentative interpretations or editorial comments of the transcriber.
- [Deleted] To indicate material removed by the sanitizers of the documents.
- A line of ellipses between sections represents material in the documents not selected for reprint here.
- (pp.) Page numbers at end of sections refer to pages in original transcriptions in Kennedy Library.

NAMES. “JFK” and “RFK” are used for President Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, respectively. When the identity of a speaker is unknown, “Speaker?” is used; when the identification of a speaker is uncertain, a question mark follows the name.

Participants in the meetings were:

President John F. Kennedy
Dean Rusk, Secretary of State
Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense
General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Douglas Dillon, Secretary of the Treasury
General Marshall Carter, Deputy Director of the C.I.A.
Robert F. Kennedy, Attorney General
Edwin Martin, Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America
George Ball, Under Secretary of State
U. Alexis Johnson, Deputy Under Secretary of State

Excerpts from:

OFF-THE-RECORD MEETING ON CUBA

October 16, 1962

11:50 A.M.–12:57 P.M.

JFK: Secretary Rusk?

Rusk: Yes. [Well?], Mr. President, this is a, of course, a [widely?] serious development. It's one that we, all of us, had not really believed the Soviets could, uh, carry this far. Uh, they, uh, seemed to be denying that they were going to establish bases of their own [in the same?] [words unintelligible] with a Soviet base, thus making it [essential to or essentially?] Cuban point of view. The Cubans couldn't [word unintelligible] with it anyhow, so. . . . Now, uhm, I do think we have to set in motion a chain of events that will eliminate this base. I don't think we [can?] sit still. The questioning becomes whether we do it by sudden, unannounced strike of some sort, or we, uh, build up the crisis to the point where the other side has to consider very seriously about giving in, or, or even the Cubans themselves, uh, take some, take some action on this. The thing that I'm, of course, very conscious of is that there is no such thing, I think, as unilateral action by the United States. It's so [eminently or heavily?] involved with 42 allies and confrontation in many places, that any action that we take, uh, will greatly increase the risks of direct action involving, uh, our other alliances and our other forces in other parts of the world. Uhm, so I think we, we have to think very hard about two major, uh, courses of action as alternatives. One is the quick strike. The point where we [make or think?], that is the, uh, overwhelming, overriding necessity to take all the risks that are involved doing that. I don't think this in itself would require an invasion of Cuba. I think that with or without such an invasion, in other words if we make it clear that, uh, what we're doing is eliminating this particular base or any other such base that is established. We ourselves are not moved to general war, we're simply doing what we said we would do if they took certain action. Uh, or we're going to decide that this is the

time to eliminate the Cuban problem by actual eliminate the island [sic].

The other would be, if we have a few days—from the military point of view, if we have the whole time—uh, then I would think that, uh, there would be another course of action, a combination of things that, uh, we might wish to consider. Uhm, first, uh, that we, uh, stimulate the OAS¹ procedure immediately for prompt action to make it quite clear that the entire hemisphere considers that the Rio Pact has been violated [and actually?] what acts should [we take or be taken?] in, under the terms of the Rio Pact. The OAS could constitute itself an organ of consultation promptly, although maybe, it may take two or three days to get, uh, instructions from governments and things of that sort. The OAS could, I suppose, at any moment, uh, take action to insist to the Cubans that an OAS inspection, uh, team be permitted to come and, itself, look directly at these sites, provide assurance[s?] to the hemisphere. That will undoubtedly be turned down, but it will be another step in building up the, uh, building a position.

I think also that we ought to consider getting some word to Castro, perhaps through the Canadian ambassador in Havana or through, uh, his representative at the U.N. Uh, I think perhaps the Canadian ambassador would be the best, the better channel to get to Castro [apart?] privately and tell him that, uh, this is no longer support for Cuba, that Cuba is being victimized here, and that, uh, the Soviets are preparing Cuba for destruction or betrayal.

You saw the *Times*² story yesterday morning that high Soviet officials were saying, "We'll trade Cuba for Berlin." This ought to be brought to Castro's attention. It ought to be said to Castro that, uh, uh, this kind of a base is intolerable and not acceptable. The time has now come when he must take the interests of the Cuban people, must now break clearly with the Soviet Union, prevent this missile base from becoming operational.

And I think there are certain military, uhm, uh, actions that we could, we might well want to take straight away. First, to uh, to call up, uh, highly selective units [no more than?] 150,000. Unless we feel that it's better, more desirable to go to a general national emergency so that we have complete freedom of action. If we announce, at the time that we announce this development—and I think we do have to announce this development some time this week—uh, we announce that, uh, we are conducting a surveillance of Cuba, over Cuba, and we will enforce our right to do so. We reject the mission of secrecy

1. Organization of American States
2. *New York Times*

in this hemisphere in any matters of this sort. We, we reinforce our forces in Guantanamo. We reinforce our forces in the southeastern part of the United States—whatever is necessary from the military point of view to be able to give, to deliver an overwhelming strike at any of these installations, including the SAM sites. And, uh, also, to take care of any, uh, MIGs or bombers that might make a pass at Miami or at the United States. Build up heavy forces, uh, if those are not already in position.

[Deleted]

I think also that we need a few days, uhm, to alert our other allies, for consultation with NATO. I'll assume that we can move on this line at the same time to interrupt all air traffic from free world countries going into Cuba, insist to the Mexicans, the Dutch, that they stop their planes from coming in. Tell the British, who, and anyone else who's involved at this point, that, uh, if they're interested in peace, they've got to stop their ships from Cuban trade at this point. Uh, in other words, isolate Cuba completely without at this particular moment a, uh, a forceful blockade.

I think it would be important to use the, uh, consider, uh, calling in General Eisenhower,³ giving him a full briefing before a public announcement is made as to the situation and the [forcible?] action which you might determine upon.

But I think that, by and large, there are, there are these two broad alternatives: one, the quick strike; the other, to alert our allies *and* Mr. Khrushchev that there is utterly serious crisis in the making here, and that, uh. . . . Mr. Khrushchev may not himself really understand that or believe that at this point. I think we'll be facing a situation that could well lead to general war; that we have an obligation to do what has to be done but do it in a way that gives, uh, everybody a chance to, uh, put the [word unintelligible] down before it gets too hard. Those are my, my reactions of this morning, Mr. President. I naturally need to think about this very hard for the next several hours, uh, what I and what my colleagues at the State Department can do about it.

McNamara: Mr. President, there are a number of unknowns in this situation I want to comment upon, and, in relation to them, I would like to outline very briefly some possible military alternatives and ask General Taylor to expand upon them.

But before commenting on either the unknowns or outlining some military alternatives, there are two propositions I would suggest that

3. Dwight D. Eisenhower

we ought to accept as, uh, foundations for our further thinking. My first is that if we are to conduct an air strike against these installations, or against any part of Cuba, we must agree now that we will schedule that prior to the time these missile sites become operational. I'm not prepared to say when that will be, but I think it is extremely important that our talk and our discussion be founded on this premise: that any air strike will be planned to take place prior to the time they become operational. Because, if they become operational before the air strike, I do not believe we can state we can knock them out before they can be launched; and if they're launched there is almost certain to be, uh, chaos in part of the east coast or the area, uh, in a radius of six hundred to a thousand miles from Cuba.

Uh, secondly, I, I would submit the proposition that any air strike must be directed not solely against the missile sites, but against the missile sites plus the airfields plus the aircraft which may not be on the airfields but hidden by that time plus all potential nuclear storage sites. Now, this is a fairly extensive air strike. It is not just a strike against the missile sites; and there would be associated with it potential casualties of Cubans, not of U.S. citizens, but potential casualties of Cubans in, at least in the hundreds, more likely in the low thousands, say two or three thousand. It seems to me these two propositions, uh, should underlie our, our discussion.

Now, what kinds of military action are we capable of carrying out and what may be some of the consequences? Uh, we could carry out an air strike within a matter of days. We would be ready for the start of such an air strike within, within a matter of days. If it were absolutely essential, it could be done almost literally within a matter of hours. I believe the chiefs would prefer that it be deferred for a matter of days, but we are prepared for that quickly. The air strike could continue for a matter of days following the initial day, if necessary. Uh, presumably there would be some political discussions taking place either just before the air strike or both before and during. In any event, we would be prepared, following the air strike, for an air, invasion, both by air and by sea. [Deleted] after the start of the air strike, that would be possible if the political environment made it desirable or necessary at that time. [Fine?] Associated with this air strike undoubtedly should be some degree of mobilization. Uh, I would think of the mobilization coming not before the air strike but either concurrently with or somewhat following, say possibly five days afterwards, depending upon the possible invasion requirements. The character of the mobilization would be such that it could be carried out in its first phase at least within the limits of the authority granted by Congress. There might have to be a second

phase, and then it would require a declaration of a national emergency.

Now, this is very sketchily the military, uh, capabilities, and I think you may wish to hear General Taylor, uh, outline his choice.

Speaker ?: Almost too [words unintelligible] to Cuba.

Speaker ?: Yes.

Taylor: Uh, we're impressed, Mr. President, with the great importance of getting a, a strike with all the benefit of surprise, uh, which would mean *ideally* that we would have all the missiles that are in Cuba above ground where we can take them out. Uh, that, that desire runs counter to the strong point the secretary made if the other optimum would be to get every missile before it could, becomes operational. Uh, practically, I think the, our knowledge of the timing of the readiness is going to be so, so, uh, difficult that we'll never have the, the exact permanent, uh, the perfect timing. What we'd like to do is to look at this new photography, I think—and take any additional—and try to get the, the layout of the targets in as near an optimum, uh, position as possible, and then take 'em out without any warning whatsoever. That does not preclude, I don't think, Mr. Secretary, some of the things you've been talking about. It's a little hard to say in terms of time how much I'm discussing. But we must do a good job the first time we go in there, uh, pushing a 100 percent just as far, as closely as we can with our, with our strike. I'm having all the responsible planners in this afternoon, Mr. President, at four o'clock, to talk this out with 'em and get their best judgment.

I would also mention among the, the military actions we should take that once we have destroyed as many of these offensive weapons as possible, we should, should prevent any more coming in, which means a naval blockade. So I suppose that all. . . . And also a reinforcement of Guantanamo and evacuation of dependents. So, really, the, in point of time, I'm, I'm thinking in terms of three phases.

One, a, an initial pause of some sort while we get completely ready and get, get the right posture on the part of the target, so we can do the best job. Then, virtually concurrently, a air strike against, as the secretary said, missiles, airfields, uh, nuclear sites that we know of. At the same time, naval blockade. At the same time, reinforce Guantanamo and evacuate the dependents. I'd then start this continuous reconnaissance, the list that you had, continue over Cuba.

Then, then the decision can be made as we, as we're mobilizing, uh, with the air strike as to whether we invade or not. I think that's the hardest question militarily in the whole business—one which we

should look at very closely before we get our feet in that deep mud in Cuba.

Rusk: There are st-, one or two things, Mr. President, uh. Gromyko⁴ asked to see you Thursday. Uh, it may be of some interest to know what he says about this, if he says anything. He may be bringing a message on this subject. Uh, but that. . . . I just want to remind you that you are seeing him and that may be relevant to this [topic?]. I might say incidentally, sir, that you delay anything else you have to do at this point.

Secondly, I don't believe, myself, that the critical question is whether you get a particular missile before *it* goes off because if they shoot *those* missiles we are in general nuclear war. In other words, the Soviet Union has got quite a different decision to make. If they, if they shoot those missiles, want to shoot 'em off before they get knocked out by aircraft. . . . So, I'm not sure that this is, uh, necessarily the precise [critical?] element, Bob.

McNamara: Well, I would strongly emphasize that I think our time should be based on the assumption it is, Dean. We don't know what kinds of communications the Soviets have with those sites. We don't know what kinds of control they have over the warheads.

Rusk: Yes, [words unintelligible] . . .

McNamara: If we saw a warhead on the site and we knew that that launcher was capable of launching that warhead, I would. . . . Frankly, I would strongly urge against the air attack, to be quite frank about it, because I think the danger to this country in relation to the gain that would accrue with the excessive [time?]. . . . This is why I suggest that if we're talking about an air attack, I believe we should consider it *only* on the assumption that we can carry it off before these become operational.

JFK: What is the, uh, advant-. . . . Must be some major reason for the Russians to, uh, set this up as a. . . . Must be that they're not satisfied with their ICBMs. What'd be the reason that they would, uh. . . .

Taylor: What it'd give 'em is primary, it makes the launching base, uh, for short range missiles against the United States to supplement their rather defective ICBM system, for example. There's one reason.

JFK: Of course, I don't see how we could prevent further ones from coming in by submarine.

Taylor: Well, I think that that thing is all over . . .

JFK: I mean if we let 'em blockade the thing, they come in by submarine.

4. Andrei A. Gromyko, Soviet Foreign Minister

- McNamara: Well, I think the only way to prevent them coming in, quite frankly, is to say you'll take them out the moment they come in. You'll take them out and you'll carry on open surveillance and you'll have a policy to take them out if they come in. [Deleted]
- Bundy: Are you absolutely clear of your premise that an air strike must go to the whole air complex?
- McNamara: Well, we are, Mac . . .
- Bundy: . . . air complex? [Appears to be a repeat of the words above.]
- McNamara: . . . because we are fearful of these MIG 21s. We don't know where they are. We don't know what they're capable of. If there are nuclear warheads associated with the launchers, you must assume there will be nuclear warheads associated with aircraft. Even if there are not nuclear warheads associated with aircraft, you must assume that those aircraft have high explosive potential. [Deleted]
- Rusk: Still, about why the Soviets are doing this, uhm, Mr. McCone⁵ suggested some weeks ago that one thing Mr. Khrushchev may have in mind is that, uh, uh, he knows that we have a substantial nuclear superiority, but he also knows that we don't really live under fear of his nuclear weapons to the extent that, uh, he has to live under fear of ours. Also we have nuclear weapons nearby, in Turkey and places like that. Uhm. . . .
- JFK: How many weapons do we have in Turkey?
- Taylor?: We have Jupiter missiles . . .
- Bundy?: Yeah. We have how many?
- McNamara?: About fifteen, I believe it is.
- Bundy?: I think that's right. I think that's right.
- Speaker?: [Words unintelligible]
- Rusk: But then there are also delivery vehicles that are, could easily . . .
- McNamara: Aircraft.
- Rusk: . . . be moved through the air, aircraft and so forth.
- Speaker?: Route 'em through Turkey.
- Rusk: Uhm, and that Mr. McCone expresses the view that Khrushchev may feel that it's important for us to learn about living under medium-range missiles, and he's doing that to sort of balance that, uh, that political, psychological [plank?]. I think also that, uh, Berlin is, uh, very much involved in this. Uhm, for the first time, I'm beginning really to wonder whether maybe Mr. Khrushchev is entirely rational about Berlin. We've [hardly?] talked about his obsession with it. And

5. John A. McCone, Director of the C.I.A.

I think we have to, uh, keep our eye on that element. But, uh, they may be thinking that they can either bargain Berlin and Cuba against each other, or that they could provoke us into a kind of action in Cuba which would give an umbrella for them to take action with respect to Berlin. In other words like the Suez–Hungary combination. If they could provoke us into taking the first overt action, then the world would be confused and they would have, uh, what they would consider to be justification for making a move somewhere else. But, uh, I must say I don't really see the rationality of, uh, the Soviets' pushing it this far unless they grossly misunderstand the importance of Cuba to this country.

Bundy: It's important, I think, to recognize that they did make this decision, as far as our estimates now go, in early summer, and, this has been happening since August. Their *Tass* statement of September 12, which the experts, I think, attribute very strongly to Khrushchev himself, is all mixed up on this point. It has a rather explicit statement, "The harmless military equipment sent to Cuba designed exclusively for defense, defensive purposes. The president of the United States and the American military, the military of any country know what means of defense are. How can these means threaten United States?"

Now there, it's very hard to reconcile *that* with what has happened. The rest, as the secretary says, has many comparisons between Cuba and Italy, Turkey and Japan. We have other evidence that Khrushchev is, honestly believes, or, or at least affects to believe that we have nuclear weapons in, in Japan, that combination, [word unintelligible] . . .

Rusk: Gromyko stated that in his press conference the other day, too.

Bundy: Yeah. They may mean Okinawa.

Speaker?: Right.

McNamara: It's not likely, but it's conceivable the nuclear warheads for these launchers are not yet on Cuban soil.

Bundy: Now that seems to me that's. . . . It's perfectly possible that this, that they are in that sense a bluff. That doesn't make them any less offensive to us . . .

McNamara: No.

Bundy: . . . because we can't have proof about it.

McNamara: No, but it does possibly indicate a different course of action . . .

Bundy: Yeah.

McNamara: . . . and therefore, while I'm not suggesting how we should handle this, I think this is one of the most important actions we should take: to ascertain the location of the nuclear warheads for these missiles.

Later in the discussion we can revert back to this. There are several alternative ways of approaching it.

- JFK: Doug, do you have any. . . .
- Dillon: No. The only thing I'd, would say is that, uh, this alternative course of, of warning, getting, uh, public opinion, uh, OAS action and telling people in NATO and everything like that, would appear to me to have the danger of, uh, getting us wide out in the open and forcing the Russians to, uh, Soviets to take a, a position that if anything was done, uh, they would, uh, have to retaliate. Whereas, uh, a, a quick action, uh, with a statement at the same time saying this is all there is to it, might give them a chance to, uh, back off and not do anything. Meanwhile, I think that the chance of getting through this thing without a Russian reaction is greater under a quick, uh, strike than, uh, building the whole thing up to a, a climax then going through. . . . [It will be a lot of debate on it?]
- Rusk: That is, of course, a possibility, but, uh. . . .
- Bundy: The difficulties—I, I share the secretary of the treasury's feeling a little bit—the difficulties of organizing the OAS and NATO; the amount of noise we would get from our allies saying that, uh, they can live with Soviet MRBMs, why can't we; uh, the division in the alliance; the certainty that the Germans would feel that we *were* jeopardizing Berlin because of our concern over Cuba. The prospect of that pattern is not an appetizing one
- Rusk: Yes, but you see
- Bundy: . . . [words unintelligible]
- Rusk: . . . uh, uh, everything turns crucially on what *happens*.
- Bundy: I agree, Mr. Secretary.
- Rusk: And if we go with the quick strike, then, in fact, they *do* back it up, then you've exposed all of your allies [word unintelligible], ourselves to all these great dangers without
- Bundy: You get all these noises again.
- Rusk: . . . without, uh, the slightest consultation or, or warning or preparation.
- JFK: But, of course, warning them, uh, it seems to me, is warning everybody. And I, I, obviously you can't sort of announce that in four days from now you're going to take them out. They may announce within three days they're going to have warheads on 'em; if we come and attack, they're going to fire them. Then what'll, what'll we do? Then we don't take 'em out. Of course, we then announce, well, if they do that, then we're going to attack with nuclear weapons.

.....

JFK: The advant-, what is. . . . The advantage of taking out these airplanes would be to protect us against a reprisal . . .

Taylor: Yes.

JFK: . . . by them. I would think you'd have to pre-, assume they'd be using, uh, iron bombs and not nuclear weapons because obviously why would the Soviets permit nuclear war to begin under that sort of half-assed way?

McNamara: I think that's reasonable.

Speaker?: But they still . . .

Speaker?: But they have . . .

Speaker?: . . . have ten IL-28s and twenty . . .

Speaker?: Yes. Yes. They may carry out [words unintelligible]. Yes.

Speaker?: . . . twenty-five big ones.

JFK: So you think that if we're going to take out the, uh, missile sites you'd want to take out these planes at the same time?

Carter?: There are eight airfields that are capable of mounting these jets. Eight [words unintelligible] . . .

Bundy: But politically, if you're trying to get him to understand the limit and the non-limit and make it as easy for him as possible, there's an enormous premium on having a small, as small and clear-cut an action as possible, against the hazard of, uh, going after all the operational airfields becomes a kind of . . .

(pp. 25-26)

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Dillon: I would think this business about the Soviet reaction, that there, that might be helpful, uh, if we could maybe take some, uh, general war preparation type of action that would show them that we're ready if they want to start anything, without what you might, with starting anything.

Bundy: One. . . .

Dillon: You just don't know.

Bundy: On this track, one obvious element on the political side is do we say something simultaneously or, uh, to the Cubans, to the Soviets, or do we let the action speak for itself?

- Rusk: This point whether we say something to the Cubans and the Soviets before any, before . . .
- JFK: I think we ought to, what we ought to do is, is, uh, after this meeting this afternoon, we ought to meet tonight again at six, consider these various, uh, proposals. In the meanwhile, we'll go ahead with this maximum, whatever is needed from the flights, and, in addition, we will. . . . I don't think we got much time on these missiles. They may be. . . . So it may be that we just have to, we can't wait two weeks while we're getting ready to, to roll. Maybe just have to just take *them out*, and continue our other preparations if we decide to do that. That may be where we end up. I think we ought to, beginning right now, be preparing to. . . . Because that's what we're going to do *anyway*. We're certainly going to do number one; we're going to take out these, uh, missiles. Uh, the questions will be whether, which, what I would describe as number two, which would be a general air strike. That we're not ready to say, but we should be in preparation for it. The third is the, is the, uh, the general invasion. At least we're going to do number one, so it seems to me that we don't have to wait very long. We, we ought to be making *those* preparations.
- Bundy: You want to be clear, Mr. President, whether we have *definitely* decided *against* a political track. I, myself, think we ought . . .
- Taylor?: Well, we'll have . . .
- Bundy: . . . to work out a contingency on that.

(pp. 27–28)

Excerpts from:

OFF-THE-RECORD MEETING ON CUBA

October 16, 1962

6:30–7:55 P.M.

- Taylor: This is a point target, Mr., uh, President. You're never sure of having, absolutely of getting everything down there. We intend to do a great deal of damage because we can [words unintelligible]. But, as the secretary says here, there was unanimity among all the commanders involved in the Joint Chiefs, uh, that in our judgment, it would be a mistake to take this very narrow, selective target because it invited reprisal attacks and it may be detrimental. Now if the, uh, Soviets have been willing to give, uh, nuclear warheads to these missiles, there is every, just as good reason for them to give nuclear capability to these bases. We don't think we'd ever have a chance to take 'em again, so that we lose this, the first strike surprise capability. Our

recommendation would be to get complete intelligence, get all the photography we need, the next two or three days, no, no hurry in our book. Then look at this target system. If it really threatens the United States, then take it right out with one hard crack.

JFK: That would be taking out the, uh, some of those fighters, bombers and . . .

Taylor: Fighters, the bombers, uh, IL-28s may turn up in this photography. It's not that all unlikely there're some there.

JFK: Think you could do that in one day?

Taylor: [Deleted]

McNamara: Mr. President, could I outline three courses . . .

JFK?: [Yes?].

McNamara: . . . of action we have considered and speak very briefly on each one? The first is what I would call the political course of action, in which we, uh, follow some of the possibilities that Secretary Rusk mentioned this morning by approaching Castro, by approaching Khrushchev, by discussing with our allies. An overt and open approach politically to the problem [attempting, or in order?] to solve it. This seemed to me likely to lead to no satisfactory result, and it almost stops subsequent military action.

[Deleted]

A second course of action we haven't discussed but lies in between the military course we began discussing a moment ago and the political course of action is a course of action that would involve declaration of open surveillance; a statement that we would immediately impose an, uh, a blockade against *offensive* weapons entering Cuba in the future; and an indication that with our open-surveillance reconnaissance which we would plan to maintain indefinitely for the future, [Deleted]

Bundy: [Deleted]

McNamara: [Deleted]

But the third course of action is any one of these variants of military action directed against Cuba, starting with an air attack against the missiles. The Chiefs are strongly opposed to so limited an air attack. But even so limited an air attack is a very extensive air attack. It's not twenty sorties or fifty sorties or a hundred sorties, but probably several hundred sorties. Uh, we haven't worked out the details. It's very difficult to do so when we lack certain intelligence that we hope to have tomorrow or the next day. But it's a substantial air attack. [Deleted]

This is the very, very rough plan that the Chiefs have outlined, and it is their judgment that that is the type of air attack that should be carried out. [Deleted]

It seems to me almost certain that any one of these forms of direct military action will lead to a Soviet military response of some type some place in the world. It may well be worth the price. Perhaps we should pay that. But I think we should recognize that possibility, and, moreover, we must recognize it in a variety of ways. We must recognize it by trying to deter it, which means we probably should alert SAC, probably put on an airborne alert, perhaps take other s-, alert measures. These bring risks of their own, associated with them. It means we should recognize that by mobilization. Almost certainly, we should accompany the initial air strike with at least a partial mobilization. We should accompany an, an invasion following an air strike with a large-scale mobilization, a *very* large-scale mobilization, certainly exceeding the limits of the authority we have from Congress requiring a declaration therefore of a national emergency. We should be prepared, in the event of even a small air strike and certainly in the event of a larger air strike, for the possibility of a Cuban uprising, which would force our hand in some way. Either force u-, us to accept a, a, uh, an unsatisfactory uprising, with all of the adverse comment that result; or would, would force an invasion to support the uprising.

Rusk: Mr. President, may I make a very brief comment on that? I think that, um, uh, any course of action involves heavy political involvement. Um, it's going to affect all sorts of policies, positions, uh, as well as the strategic situation. So I don't think there's any such thing as a nonpolitical course of action. I think also that, um, uh, we have to consider what political preparation, if any, is to occur before an air strike or in connection with any military action. And when I was talking this morning, I was talking about some steps which would put us in the best position to crack the . . .

JFK: I think the difficulty . . .

Rusk: . . . the strength of Cuba.

JFK: . . . it seems to me, is. . . . I completely agree that there isn't any doubt that if we announced that there were MRBM sites going up that that would change, uh, we would secure a good deal of political support, uh, after my statement; and, uh, the fact that we indicated our desire to restrain, this really would put the burden on the Soviet. On the other hand, the very fact of doing that makes the military. . . . We lose all the advantages of our strike. Because if we announce that it's there, then it's quite obvious to them that we're gonna probably do something about it. I would *assume*. Now, I don't know, that, it

seems to me what we ought to be thinking about tonight is if we made an announcement that the intelligence has revealed that there are, and if we [did the note?] message to Khrushchev. . . . I don't think, uh, that Castro has to know we've been paying much attention to it any more than. . . . Over a period of time, it might have some effect, [have settled?] back down, change. I don't think he plays it that way. So [have?] a note to Khrushchev. . . . I don't. . . . It seems to me, uh, my press statement was so *clear* about how we *wouldn't* do anything under these conditions and under the conditions that we *would*. He must know that we're going to find out, so it seems to me he just, uh . . .

Bundy: That's, of course, why he's been very, very explicit with us in communications to us about how dangerous this is, and . . .

JFK: That's right, but he's . . .

Bundy: . . . the TASS statement and his other messages.

JFK: He's initiated the danger really, hasn't he? He's the one that's playing [his card, or God?], not us. So we could, uh . . .

Rusk: And his statement to Kohler⁶ on the subject of his visit and so forth, completely hypocritical.

(pp. 8–11)

.....

Bundy: But, the, uh, question that I would like to ask is, quite aside from what we've said—and we're very hard-locked onto it, I know—What is the strategic impact on the position of the United States of MRBMs in *Cuba*? How gravely does this change the strategic balance?

McNamara: Mac, I asked the Chiefs that this afternoon, in effect. And they said, substantially. My own personal view is, not at all.

Bundy: Not so much.

McNamara: And, and I think this is an important element here. But it's all very . . .

Carter: The reason our estimators didn't think that they'd put them in there because of . . .

McNamara: That's what they said themselves . . .

Bundy: That's what they said themselves . . .

McNamara: . . . in TASS statement.

Bundy: Yeah.

6. Foy D. Kohler, U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union

- Carter: But then, going behind that . . .
- JFK: [But why? Did it indicate? Being?] valuable enough?
- Bundy: Doesn't prove anything in the strategic balance [overall?].
- Carter: Doesn't prove anything. That was what the estimators felt, and that the Soviets would not take the risk. Mr. McCone's reasoning, however, was if this is so, then what possible reason have they got for going into Cuba in the manner in which they are with surface-to-air, uh, missiles and cruise-type missile. He just couldn't understand while their, *why* the Soviets were so heavily bol-, bolstering Cuba's defensive posture. There must be something behind it, which led him *then* to the belief that they *must* be coming in with MRBMs.
- Taylor: I think it was [old-blooded?] . . .
- Carter: [Words unintelligible]
- Taylor: . . . point of view, Mr. President. You're quite right in saying that these, these are just a few more missiles, uh, targetted on the United States. Uh, however, they *can* become a, a very, a rather important adjunct and reinforcement to the, to the strike capability of the Soviet Union. We have no idea how far they will go. But more than that, these are, uh, uh, to our nation it means, it means a great deal more. You all are aware of that, in Cuba and not over in the Soviet Union.
- Bundy: Well, I ask the question . . .
- Taylor: Yeah.
- Bundy: . . . with an awareness [laughter?] of the political . . .
- JFK: I will say, my understanding's that . . .
- Bundy: [Words unintelligible]
- JFK: . . . let's just say that, uh, they get, they get these in there and then you can't, uh, they get sufficient capacity so we can't, uh, with warheads. Then you don't want to knock 'em out ['cause?], uh, there's too much of a gamble. Then they just begin to build up those air bases there and then put more and more. I suppose they really. . . . Then they start getting ready to squeeze us in Berlin, doesn't that. . . . You may say it doesn't make any difference if you get blown up by an ICBM flying from the Soviet Union or one that was ninety miles away. Geography doesn't mean that much.
- Taylor: We'd have to target then with our missiles and have the same kind of, of pistol-pointed-at-the-head situation as we have in the Soviet Union at the present time.
- Bundy: [Deleted]
- JFK: That's why it shows the Bay of Pigs was really right. [We've, or We'd?] got it right. That was better and better and worse and worse.

- Taylor: [Deleted]
[Faint laughter]
- Taylor: [We've changed?] our evaluations well.
- RFK: Of course, the other problem is, uh, in South America a year from now. And the fact that you got, uh, *these* things in the hands of Cubans, here, and then you, say your, some problem arises in Venezuela, er, you've got Castro saying, You move troops down into that part of Venezuela, we're going to fire these missiles.
- Taylor: Well, I think you've [words unintelligible].
- RFK: I think that's the difficulty . . .
- Speaker?: [Words unintelligible].
- RFK: . . . rather than the [words unintelligible].
- Speaker?: [Words unintelligible].
- RFK: I think it gives the [word unintelligible] image.
- JFK: It makes them look like they're coequal with us and that . . .
- Dillon: We're scared of the Cubans.
- RFK: We let the, uh. . . . I mean like we'd hate to have it in the hands of the Chinese. [Possibly words unintelligible]
- Dillon: [Right?] I agree with that sort of thing very strongly.
- Martin: It's a psychological factor. It won't reach as far as Venezuela is concerned.
- Dillon: Well, that's . . .
- McNamara: It'll reach the U.S. though. This is the *point*.
- Speaker?: That's the point.
- Dillon: Yeah. That is the point.
- Martin: Yeah. The psychological factor of our having taken it.
- Dillon: Taken it, that's the best.
- RFK: Well, and the fact that if you go there, we're gonna fire it.
- JFK: What's that again, Ed? What are you saying?
- Martin: Well, it's a psychological factor that we have sat back and let 'em do it to us, that is more important than the direct threat. Uh, it is a threat in the Caribbean . . .
- JFK: [Words unintelligible] I said we weren't going to.
- Martin: . . . [words unintelligible].
- Bundy?: That's something we could manage.
- JFK: Last month I said we weren't going to.
- [Laughter]

- JFK: Last month I should have said we're . . .
- Speaker?: Well . . .
- JFK: . . . that we don't care. But when we said we're *not* going to and then they go ahead and do it, and then we do nothing, then . . .
- Speaker?: That's right.
- JFK: . . . I would think that our risks increase. Uh, I agree. What difference does it make? They've got enough to blow us up now anyway. I think it's just a question of. . . . After all this is a political struggle as much as military. Well, uh, so where are we now? Where is the. . . . Don't think the message to Castro's got much in it. Uh, let's just, uh, let's try to get an answer to this question. How much. . . . It's quite obviously to our advantage to surface this thing to a degree before. . . . First to inform these governments in Latin America, as the secretary suggests; secondly to, uh, the rest of NATO [Deleted] Uh, how much does this diminish. . . . Not that we're going to do anything, but the existence of them, without any say about what we're gonna do. Let's say we, twenty-four hours ahead of our doing something about it, [deleted] we make a public statement that these have been found on the island. That would, that would be notification in a sense that, uh, of their existence, and everybody could draw whatever conclusion they wanted to.
- Martin?: I would say this, Mr. President, that I would, that if you've made a public statement, you've got to move immediately, or they, you're going to have a . . .
- JFK: Oh, I . . .
- Martin?: . . . a [words unintelligible] in *this* country.
- JFK: . . . oh, I understand *that*. We'll be talking about. . . . Say, say we're going to move on a Saturday and we would say on Friday that these MRBMs, that the existence of this presents the gravest threat to our security and that appropriate action must be taken.
- RFK: Could you stick planes over them, until you made the announcement at six o'clock Saturday morning? And at the same time or simultaneously put planes over to make sure that they weren't taking any action or movement, and that you could move in if they started moving in the missiles in place or something, you would move in and knock, that would be the trigger that you would move your planes in and knock them out. Otherwise you'd wait until six o'clock or five o'clock that night. I don't, is that, uh, is that. . . .
- Taylor: I don't think anything like that. . . . I can't visualize doing it, uh, doing it successfully that way. I think that, uh, uh, anything that shows, uh, our intent to strike is going to place the airplanes and,

and the missiles into, these are por-, really mobile missiles. They can be . . .

RFK: [You mean they can just?] . . .

Taylor: They can pull in under trees and forest and disappear almost at once, as I visualize.

McNamara: And they can also be readied, perhaps, between the time we, in effect, *say* we're going to come in and the time we *do* come in. This, this is a very, very great danger to this, this coast. I don't know exactly how to appraise it because . . .

Speaker?: I don't know.

McNamara: . . . of the readiness period, but it is *possible* that these are field missiles, and then in that case they can be readied very promptly if they choose to do so.

Carter: These *are* field missiles, sir. They are mobile-support-type missiles.

Taylor: About a forty-minute countdown, something like that's been estimated.

(pp. 12–16)

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JFK: I'm not completely, uh, I don't think we ought to abandon just knocking out these missile bases as opposed to, that's much more, uh, defensible, explicable, politically or satisfactory-in-every-way action than the general strike which takes us . . .

Speaker?: Move down . . .

JFK: . . . us into the city of Havana . . .

Speaker?: . . . those two.

JFK: . . . and [it is plain to me?] takes us into much more . . .

Speaker?: [Words unintelligible]

JFK: . . . hazardous, shot down. Now I know the Chiefs say, Well, that means their bombers can take off against us, uh, but, uh . . .

Bundy: Their bombers take off against us, then *they* have made a general war against Cuba of it, which is a, it then becomes much more *their* decision. We move *this* way. . . . The political advantages are, are *very* strong, it seems to me, of the small strike. Uh, it corresponds to the, the punishment fits the crime in political terms, the we are doing only what we *warned* repeatedly and publicly we would *have* to do. Uh, we are *not* generalizing the attack. The things that we've already recognized and said that we have *not* found it necessary to attack and said we would not find it necessary to attack . . .

(pp. 17–18)

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RFK: Mr. President, while we're considering this problem tonight, I think that we should also consider what, uh, Cuba's going to be a year from now, or two years from now. Assume that we go in and knock these sites out, uh, I don't know what's gonna stop them from saying, We're gonna build the sites six months from now, bring 'em in . . .

Taylor: Noth-, nothing permanent about it.

RFK: Uh, the, what, where are we six months from now? Or that we're in any better position, or aren't we in worse position if we go in and knock 'em out and say, uh . . .

Speaker?: [We sure are?]

RFK: . . . Don't do it. Uh, I mean, obviously they're gonna *have* to do it then.

McNamara: You have to put a blockade in following any . . .

Speaker?: Sure.

McNamara: . . . limited action.

RFK: Then we're gonna have to sink Russian ships.

McNamara?: Right.

RFK: Then we're gonna have to sink . . .

McNamara?: Right.

RFK: . . . Russian submarines. Now whether it wouldn't be, uh, the argument, if you're going to get into it at all, uh, whether we should just get into it and get it over with and say that, uh, take our losses, and if we're gonna. . . . If he wants to get into a war over *this*, uh. . . . Hell, if it's war that's gonna come on this thing, or if he sticks those kinds of missiles in, it's after the warning, and he's gonna, and he's gonna get into a war for, six months from now or a year from now, so. . . .

McNamara: Mr. President, this is why I think tonight we ought to put on paper the alternative plans and the probable, possible consequences thereof in a way that State and Defense could agree on, even if we, uh, disagree and put in both views. Because the consequences of these actions have *not* been thought through clearly. The one that the attorney general just mentioned is illustrative of that.

JFK: If the, uh, it doesn't increase very much their strategic, uh, strength, why is it, uh, can any Russian expert tell us why they. . . . After all Khrushchev demonstrated a sense of caution [thousands?] . . .

- Speaker?: Well, there are several, several possible . . .
- JFK: . . . Berlin, he's been cautious, I mean, he hasn't been, uh . . .
- Ball?: Several possibilities, Mr. President. One of them is that he has given us word now that he's coming over in November to, to the UN. If, he may be proceeding on the assumption, and this lack of a sense of *apparent* urgency would seem to, to support this, that this *isn't* going to be discovered at the moment and that, uh, when he comes over this is something he can do, a ploy. That here is Cuba armed against the United States, or possibly use it to try to trade something in Berlin, saying he'll disarm Cuba if, uh, if we'll, uh, yield some of our interests in Berlin and some arrangement for it. I mean, that this is a, it's a trading ploy.
- Bundy: I would think one thing that I would still cling to is that he's not likely to give Fidel Castro nuclear warheads. I don't believe that has happened or is likely to happen.
- JFK: Why does he put these in there though?
- Bundy: Soviet-controlled nuclear warheads [of the kind?] . . .
- JFK: That's right, but what is the advantage of that? It's just as if we suddenly began to put a major number of MRBMs in Turkey. Now that'd be goddam dangerous, I would think.
- Bundy?: Well, we *did*, Mr. President.
- U.A. Johnson?: We *did* it. We . . .
- JFK: Yeah, but that was five years ago.
- U.A. Johnson?: . . . did it in England; that's why we were short.
- JFK: What?
- U.A. Johnson?: We gave England two when we were short of ICBMs.
- JFK: Yeah, but that's, uh . . .
- U.A. Johnson?: [Testing?]
- JFK: . . . that was during a different period then.
- U.A. Johnson?: But doesn't he realize he has a deficiency of ICBMs, needs a PR capacity perhaps, in view of. . . He's got lots of MRBMs and this is a way to balance it out a bit?
- Bundy?: I'm sure his generals have been telling him for a year and a half that he had, was missing a golden opportunity to add to his strategic capability.
- Ball?: Yes, I think, I think you, you look at this possibility that this is an attempt to, to add to his strategic capabilities. A second consideration is that it is simply a trading ploy, that he, he wants this in so that he could, he could [words unintelligible]

.....

RFK: . . . one other thing is whether, uh, we should also think of, uh, uh, whether there is some *other* way we can get involved in this through, uh, Guantanamo Bay, or something, er, or whether there's some ship that, you know, sink the *Maine* again or something. (p. 27)

.....

Bundy: I think there's an *enormous* political advantage, myself, within these options, granting that *all* the Chiefs didn't fully agree, taking out the thing that gives the trouble and not the thing that doesn't give the trouble.

McNamara?: This, as opposed to, uh, is it an air attack on . . .

Bundy: *Supplementary to an air attack. I mean, how're you gonna know that you've got 'em? And if you haven't got 'em, what've you done?* (p. 43)

.....

McNamara: . . . I, let me answer Mac's question first. How do we know we've got them? We will have photo recon [militarily?] with the strike. Sweeney⁷ specifically plans this, and . . .

Bundy: Proving a negative is a hell of a job. (p. 43)

.....

McNamara: It seems to me that there are some *major* alternatives here that I don't think we discussed them fully enough today, and I'd like to see them laid on the paper, if State agrees. The first is what I, I *still* call it the political approach. Uh, let me say it a nonmilitary action.

[Laughter]

McNamara: It doesn't start with one and it isn't gonna end with one.

Speaker?: Yeah.

McNamara: And I, for that reason I call it a political approach.

7. General Walter C. Sweeney, Commanding General, Tactical Air Command

- Speaker?: Right . . .
- McNamara: And I say it isn't gonna end with one because once you start this political approach, I don't think you're gonna *have* any opportunity for a military operation.
- (p. 44)
-
- McNamara: Now, the second alternative, I, I'd like to discuss just a second, because we haven't discussed it fully today, and I alluded it to, to it a moment ago. I, I, I'll be quite frank. I don't think there *is* a military problem here. This is my answer to Mac's question . . .
- Bundy: That's my honest [judgment?].
- McNamara: . . . and therefore, and I've gone through this today, and I asked myself, Well, what is it then if it isn't a military problem? Well, it's just exactly *this* problem, that, that, uh, if Cuba should possess a capacity to carry out offensive actions against the U.S., the U.S. would act.
- Speaker?: That's right.
- Speaker?: That's right.
- McNamara: Now, it's that problem, this . . .
- Speaker?: You can't get around that one.
- McNamara: . . . this, this is a domestic, political problem. The announcement—we didn't say we'd go in and not, and kill them, we said we'd *act*. Well, how will we act? Well, we want to act to prevent their use, and it's really the . . .
- Bundy: Yeah.
- McNamara: . . . the act. Now, how do we pre-, act to prevent their use? Well, first place, we carry out open surveillance, so we know what they're doing. All times. Twenty-four hours a day from now and forever, in a sense indefinitely. What else do we do? We prevent any further offensive weapons coming in. In other words we blockade offensive weapons.
- Bundy: How do we do that?
- McNamara: We search every ship.
- Taylor: There're two kinds of, of blockade: a blockade which stops ships from coming in and, and simply a seizure, I mean a, simply a search.
- McNamara: A search, that's right . . .
- Taylor?: Yeah.
- McNamara: . . . and . . .

Speaker?: Well, it would be a search and removal if found.
Bundy: You have to make the guy stop to search him, and if he won't stop, you have to shoot, right?
Speaker?: All [words unintelligible] up . . .
Speaker?: And you have to remove what you're looking for if you find it.
Speaker?: That's right.
McNamara: Absolutely. Absolutely. And then an ul-, I call it an ultimatum associated with these two actions is a statement to the world, particularly to Khrushchev, that we have located these offensive weapons; we're maintaining a constant surveillance over them; if there is ever any indication that they're to be launched against this country, we will respond not only against Cuba, but we will respond directly against the Soviet Union with, with a full nuclear strike. Now this alternative doesn't seem to be a very acceptable one, but wait until you work on the others.

(pp. 45-47)

.....

Ball?: . . . How're you gonna survey 'em during the night? Uh, I mean, it seems to me that they're some gaps in the surveillance.
McNamara: Oh, well, it's really the, yes, it isn't the surveillance, it's the ultimatum that is . . .
Ball?: Yeah.
McNamara: . . . the key part in this.
Ball?: Yeah.
McNamara: And really what I tried to do was develop a little package that meets the action requirement of that paragraph I read.
Speaker?: Yeah.
McNamara: Because, as I suggested, I don't believe it's primarily a military problem. It's primarily a, a domestic, political problem.
Ball: Yeah, well, as far as the American people are concerned, action means military action, period.
McNamara: Well, we have a blockade. Search and, uh, removal of, of offensive weapons entering Cuba. Uh, [word unintelligible] again, I don't want to argue for this . . .
Ball: No, no, I . . .
McNamara: . . . because I, I don't think it's . . .
Ball: . . . I think it's an alternative.

McNamara: . . . a perfect solution by any means. I just want to . . .

Bundy: Which one are we [still on?] would you say?

McNamara: Still on the second one, uh . . .

Ball: Now, one of the things we look at is whether any, the actual operation of a blockade doesn't, isn't a greater involvement almost than a . . .

McNamara: Might well be, George.

Ball: . . . military action.

Speaker?: I think so.

McNamara: It's, it's a search, not a, not an embargo, uh. . . .

Speaker?: Yeah.

Ball: It's a series of single, unrelated acts, not by surprise. This, uh, come in there on Pearl Harbor just frightens the hell out of me as to what's going beyond. [Yeah, well, anyway?] the Board of National Estimates have been working on this ever since . . .

Bundy: What, what goes, what goes beyond what?

Ball: What happens beyond that. You go in there with a surprise attack. You put out all the missiles. This isn't the *end*. This is the *beginning*, I think. . . .

(pp. 47–49)

Excerpts from:

Summary Record of NSC Executive Committee Meeting No. 6
October 26, 1962, 10:00 AM

Secretary Rusk summarized political actions now under way. He said the object of the talks with U Thant⁸ today was to set up some form of negotiations with the Russians in New York. The objective would be to obtain a commitment from the Russians that there would be no further construction at the missile sites in Cuba, no further Soviet military shipments, the defuzing [*sic*] of existing weapons in Cuba, UN inspection of all nuclear-capable missiles, and an observer corps on the ground in Cuba of 350 technically able inspectors. The U.S. quarantine would continue until a UN quarantine is in place. UN teams would be put into specified Cuban ports. U.S. Navy ships would stay close to all Cuban ports to ensure that there were no landings unknown to the UN inspectors and no cargoes landed anywhere which UN inspectors did not see.

(p. 3)

.....

8. Secretary General of the United Nations

The President said work on the missile sites has to cease and we have to verify what is going on at the sites every day during the talks in New York. As to the message to Castro, he agreed in general, but wanted to have another look at it. He doubted that it would do any good, but it might be undertaken if done now with the greatest urgency.

Ambassador Stevenson⁹ discussed the immediate negotiations now under way with U Thant and the longer talks which would follow if agreement can be reached with the Russians in New York. He said the immediate talks were aimed at getting a 24–48-hour standstill on the missile buildup in Cuba. He acknowledged that in these talks it would be impossible to obtain an agreement to make the weapons inoperable. He wanted to know whether he should seek a standstill on all Soviet arms or only offensive weapons. He would seek to get a commitment that there be no further construction, but it would not be possible to set up a system to ensure that the weapons were made inoperable and kept inoperable. In addition, he needed to know whether in return we would be prepared to suspend the quarantine.

Ambassador Stevenson said the aim of the longer term talks would be the withdrawal from this hemisphere of the strategic missiles and the dismantlement of existing sites. He predicted that the Russians would ask us for a new guarantee of the territorial integrity of Cuba and the dismantlement of U.S. strategic missiles in Turkey.

Mr. McCone disagreed with Ambassador Stevenson's linking of Soviet missiles in Cuba to U.S. missiles in Turkey. He said the Soviet weapons in Cuba were pointed at our heart and put us under great handicap in continuing to carry out our commitments to the free world. He urged that we do not drop the quarantine until the Soviet missiles are out of Cuba. He believed that we must keep up the momentum so far achieved by the quarantine.

The President said we will get the Soviet strategic missiles out of Cuba only by invading Cuba or by trading. He doubted that the quarantine alone would produce a withdrawal of the weapons. He said our objective should be to prevent further military shipments, further construction at missile sites, and to get some means of inspection.

Mr. McCone urged that any inspectors sent to Cuba be U.S. inspectors knowledgeable about strategic missiles.

The President said he understood Ambassador Stevenson to be asking for time during which he would try to negotiate the withdrawal of the missiles.

Secretary Rusk doubted that we could get any pre-conditions to negotiation.

Secretary Dillon agreed that the Soviets could not back down merely in return for dropping the quarantine.

9. Adlai Stevenson, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations

Mr. Nitze¹¹ called attention to the importance of obtaining a guarantee that the nuclear missiles would be disassembled from their launchers.

Mr. Bundy said negotiations for a standstill or a standdown were not enough for our security because we must press, in addition, for guaranteed inspection of Cuba.

Secretary Dillon said we could not negotiate for two weeks under the missile threat which now exists in Cuba.

The President noted that there appeared to be little support for Ambassador Stevenson's plan. If the quarantine would not result in the Soviets withdrawing the missiles, what will we do if negotiations break down?

Mr. Bundy said when the interim 24–48-hour talks fail, then our choice would be to expand the blockade or remove the missiles by air attack.

General Taylor urged that we increase our reconnaissance activity in order to keep informed as to what was happening in Cuba.

The President decided to delay night reconnaissance missions, at least until the Soviets turn down U Thant's proposal. He also agreed that we should announce publicly that construction work at the missile sites in Cuba was going on and that, therefore, we will continue our aerial reconnaissance flights. The President also wanted attention called by a White House spokesman to his earlier speech which insisted that work at the missile sites in Cuba cease. The President decided that a presentation of the current situation should be made to the Congressional Leaders.

Bromley Smith¹⁰
(pp. 5–7)

Summary Record of NSC Executive Committee Meeting No. 7 October 27, 1962, 10:00 AM

Director McCone highlighted the intelligence information contained in the first two pages of the attached CIA Cuba Crisis Memorandum.

Secretary McNamara reported on the positions of Soviet Bloc ships moving toward Cuba. He said we do not know yet whether any such ships will enter the interception area. He recommended that we be prepared to board the *Graznyy*, which is now out about 600 miles. We would put ships alongside her and follow along for about 200 miles. [Deleted]

Under Secretary Ball pointed out that the Soviets did not know the extent of our quarantine zone.

The President agreed that we should ask U Thant to tell the Russians in New York where we are drawing the quarantine line. The Russians would then be in a position to decide whether to turn back their tanker or allow her to enter the quarantine zone sometime later today.

10. Author of minutes of Ex Com meetings

11. Paul Nitze, Assistant Secretary of Defense

Secretary McNamara recommended, and the President approved, two daylight reconnaissance missions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Secretary McNamara also recommended that a night reconnaissance mission be flown—Secretary Rusk recommended against a night flight. The President instructed the Defense Department to place the night reconnaissance planes on the alert and to prepare a public announcement of the mission in order that a final decision to be taken this afternoon could be promptly implemented.

The discussion then turned to the question of U.S. missiles in Turkey. Mr. Nitze said it would be an anathema to the Turks to pull the missiles out. He feared the next Soviet step would be a demand for the denuclearization of the entire NATO area. He urged us to focus attention on Cuba rather than on U.S. bases in other countries.

Under Secretary Ball reported [Deleted].

At this point in the meeting the partial text of a Soviet public statement was read by the President as it was received in the room. The President commented that the statement was a very tough position and varied considerably from the tone of Khrushchev's personal letter to the President received last night. The President felt that the Soviet position would get wide support and said we should consider making public the Khrushchev private letter.

Secretary Rusk returned to the question of U.S. missiles in Turkey and pointed out that this subject must be kept separate from Soviet missiles in Cuba. The Turkish missile problem should be dealt with in the context of NATO vs. Warsaw Pact.

Mr. Bundy said we could not accept the Soviet proposal on Turkish missiles because the Soviet missiles were not out of Cuba.

The President recalled that he had asked that consideration be given to the withdrawal of U.S. missiles from Turkey some days previously.

Under Secretary Ball replied that the Department had decided it could not raise this question with the Turks at this time for fear of a disastrous Turkish reaction. He said the question had been raised with Finletter¹² in Paris and study was being given to whether any method could be worked out to reassure the Turks if we were going to offer to withdraw the Jupiter missiles.

Mr. Bundy said we cannot get into the position of appearing to sell out an ally, i.e. Turkey, to serve our own interests, i.e. getting the Soviet missiles out of Cuba.

The President commented that the Russians had made the Turkish missile withdrawal proposal in the most difficult possible way. Now that their proposal is public, we have no chance to talk privately to the Turks about the missiles, which, for a long time, we have considered to be obsolete.

Secretary Dillon said that it was possible that the Russians had made their public statement as part of a stalling tactic to provide them with sufficient time for a full-fledged confrontation with us.

12. Thomas Finletter, U.S. Ambassador to NATO

The President read a draft statement telephoned from New York by Ambassador Stevenson commenting on the Soviet statement. Ambassador Stevenson argued for releasing his statement in an effort to keep the "peace offensive" from going to the Soviets.

The President left the meeting at this point with Mr. Sorensen.¹³ There ensued a discussion of how to handle the discrepancy between the Khrushchev private letter and the Russian offer made public in the Soviet statement. A suggestion was made that the Russian proposals contained in the private Khrushchev letter be made public.

The President returned to the meeting. He said we must ensure that the construction work on the missile sites in Cuba be stopped at once. He suggested that we talk to the Turks about the missiles, pointing out to them the great peril facing them during the next week. He acknowledged that the Turks were now in no position to make a statement to the effect that they would ask that the Jupiters be withdrawn.

Secretary Rusk suggested that we tell the Turks they must say that the Jupiter problem is a NATO problem and is not associated with the Cuban missile problem.

Secretary McNamara called attention to the fact that the missiles belonged to Turkey and that only the nuclear warheads are under our total control.

The President returned to a discussion of where we now find ourselves, i.e. we now have Soviet public proposals and Khrushchev's private proposals. What we must seek is an immediate cessation of the work on offensive missiles in Cuba. Once this work stopped we could talk to the Russians.

Mr. Bundy reiterated the view that the threat to us in Cuba [*sic*]. One explanation for the varying Soviet proposals is that the hard line Russians wanted to make public their preferred demands in order to make impossible progress toward the Khrushchev private offer which may have been drafted by those who are less hard-nosed.

The President noted that it appeared to him that the Russians were making various proposals so fast, one after the other, that they were creating a kind of shield behind which work on the missile sites in Cuba continued. He said we had a perfectly defensible position, i.e. work on the missile sites must stop. Secretary McNamara added the thought that these offensive weapons must be made inoperable.

Mr. Bundy suggested that we tell Khrushchev privately that the position in their public statement was impossible for us, but that the position Khrushchev took in his private letter was different and we were studying these proposals. In the meantime, however, time is running out.

The President interrupted to take a telephone call from Ambassador Stevenson in New York. He resumed the discussion by saying that Khrushchev obviously is attempting to limit our freedom of action in Cuba by introducing the question of the missile bases outside this hemisphere.

13. Theodore Sorensen, Special Counsel to the President

Mr. Bundy read a draft press statement and Mr. Gilpatric¹⁴ read a statement which he had prepared.

Mr. Alexis Johnson reported that he had just been informed that the Turkish Government had issued a press statement saying that the Russian proposal with respect to Jupiters in Turkey was not conceivable.

(As the remainder of the Soviet public statement was received in the Cabinet Room, it appeared that the Russian base proposal involved not merely Turkey but all of NATO.)

Mr. Sorensen introduced a draft statement which was read by the group.

Revisions were made in the Gilpatric draft, which was issued shortly thereafter in the form attached. This statement emphasized the offensive weapons buildup in Cuba.

The Attorney General said that the statement might make people think that if the Russians stopped the missile buildup in Cuba, we would be willing to withdraw our missiles from Turkey. He desired that we make doubly clear that Turkish NATO missiles were one problem and that Cuba was an entirely separate problem.

Mr. Gilpatric stated that it was crucial for us to stand on the position that we will not negotiate with the Russians while the Soviet missile threat is growing in Cuba.

The President recalled that over a year ago we wanted to get the Jupiter missiles out of Turkey because they had become obsolete and of little military value. If the missiles in Cuba added 50% to Soviet nuclear capability, then to trade these missiles for those in Turkey would be of great military value. But we are now in the position of risking war in Cuba and in Berlin over missiles in Turkey which are of little military value. From the political point of view, it would be hard to get support on an airstrike against Cuba because many would think that we would make a good trade if we offered to take the missiles out of Turkey in the event the Russians would agree to remove the missiles from Cuba. We are in a bad position if we appear to be attacking Cuba for the purpose of keeping useless missiles in Turkey. We cannot propose to withdraw the missiles from Turkey, but the Turks could offer to do so. The Turks must be informed of the great danger in which they will live during the next week and we have to face up to the possibility of some kind of a trade over missiles.

The President left the meeting to meet the State Governors who had been waiting for one-half hour to see him.

The discussion continued in the President's absence. It was not possible to say with certainty whether the Soviet public offer included all NATO bases or referred specifically to Turkey.

The Attorney General expressed his concern as to what our position would be if we talked to the Russians for sixty days and then the Cubans refused to permit UN

14. Roswell Gilpatric, Deputy Secretary of Defense

inspectors to continue to ensure that missiles in Cuba were inoperable. The reply was that we could then decide to attack the bases by air.

There was discussion of a second statement to be put out but this proposal was later abandoned.

A draft message to Khrushchev, which had been prepared by Ambassador Thompson,¹⁵ was read and a final version was to be completed for the President's consideration later in the day. The group agreed to meet at the State Department without the President at 2:30 PM and meet with the President again at 4:00 PM.

(Note: At the meeting at the State Department, the Attorney General repeated his view that we should keep the focus on the missile bases. He preferred to let the Soviet tankers through the quarantine line in order to avoid a confrontation with the Soviets over one of their ships. He said if we attack a Soviet tanker, the balloon would go up. He urged that we buy time now in order to launch an air attack Monday or Tuesday.

Secretary McNamara expressed his view that before we attack Cuba we must notify the Cubans.

Bromley Smith

Summary Record of NSC Executive Committee Meeting No. 8 October 27, 1962, 4:00 PM

Secretary McNamara reported on today's daylight reconnaissance mission. One mission aborted for mechanical reasons, according to preliminary reports. One plane is overdue and several are said to have encountered ground fire.

Secretary McNamara again recommended night reconnaissance missions. The President delayed a decision on night flights pending a full report on today's daylight mission (the night mission was later called off).

There followed a discussion of a draft letter from the President to Khrushchev. The President added to the draft an offer to discuss with the Russians the proposals they had made public. He predicted that Khrushchev would say we had rejected his proposal. The formulation included a comment that Khrushchev must realize that matters relating to NATO must be discussed at a later time. The letter was approved in a revised form.

A message to U Thant was discussed and approved. The purpose of the message was to obtain the halting of work on the bases in Cuba as a condition to discussion of various other problems.

Secretary Rusk reported that one of our U-2 planes had overflown the Soviet Union by accident due to navigational error. Soviet fighters were scrambled from a base

15. Llewellyn Thompson, adviser on Soviet affairs

near Wrangel Island. The Secretary thought that the Russians would make a loud fuss about this incident.

The President decided not to make the incident public, but be prepared to do so as soon as the Soviets publicized it.

The President asked whether we wanted to continue to say that we would talk only about the missiles in Cuba. He believed that for the next few hours we should emphasize our position that if the Russians will halt missile activity in Cuba we would be prepared to discuss NATO problems with the Russians. He felt that we would not be in a position to offer any trade for several days. He did feel that if we could succeed in freezing the situation in Cuba and rendering the strategic missiles inoperable, then we would be in a position to negotiate with the Russians.

Mr. Bundy pointed out that there would be a serious reaction in NATO countries if we appeared to be trading withdrawal of missiles in Turkey for withdrawal of missiles from Cuba. The President responded that if we refuse to discuss such a trade and then take military action in Cuba, we would also be in a difficult position.

The President left the room to talk to General Norstad¹⁶ on the KY-9 secure telephone to Paris.

In the President's absence the message to U Thant was further discussed. The Attorney General felt we should say to U Thant: "While these and other proposals are being discussed, would you urgently ascertain whether the Soviet Union is prepared to cease work on the bases and render the missiles inoperable?" U Thant would be asked to convey the President's message to the Russians in New York most urgently.

Secretary Rusk questioned whether the Russians are trying at the last minute to obtain more of a quid pro quo from us or whether they are introducing new elements in the picture merely to weaken our public position worldwide.

Secretary McNamara pointed out, in connection with the current military situation, that a limited airstrike on Cuba was now impossible because our reconnaissance planes were being fired on. He felt that we must now look to the major airstrike to be followed by an invasion of Cuba. To do so he said we would need to call up the reserves now.

Secretary McNamara [deleted]. If we could do this he felt that the Soviets would not attack Turkey when we invaded Cuba. Our objective should be to seek to avoid any Soviet attack in Europe as a response to our invasion of Cuba.

Ambassador Thompson commented that it was impossible to draw any conclusions from the fact that one of our reconnaissance planes over Cuba had been shot at.

The President returned to the meeting, accompanied by General Lemnitzer.¹⁷

The President approved the final revision of the statement to U Thant, which was to be phoned to U Thant and released here publicly. (Copy attached)

16. General Lauris Norstad, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe

17. General Lyman Lemnitzer, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The President asked whether we should call together the representatives of NATO to report to them what we had done and were planning to do. If we reject Soviet efforts to tie in NATO problems to the Cuban situation, then we could persuade NATO to take the same position. An additional reason for a NATO meeting then is that if the Russians do attack the NATO countries we do not want them to say that they had not been consulted about the actions we were taking in Cuba.

Secretary McNamara said that current military planning [deleted].

The President expressed his concern that the alternatives we are facing have not been presented to NATO. NATO does not realize what may be coming and the Europeans do not realize that we may face a choice of invading Cuba or taking the missiles out of Turkey.

Secretary McNamara urged that a NATO meeting be held tomorrow only if we have decided to launch our strike tomorrow. He repeated his hope that we can act in such a way as to reduce the pressure on the Russians to hit Turkey.

Secretary Rusk recommended that mobilization measures be authorized immediately.

The President suggested that we talk immediately to the Turks, explaining to them what we were planning to do with our missiles and then explain the entire situation to the North Atlantic Council.

Secretary Rusk then read a Stevenson draft of a letter to Khrushchev.

The President said that the key to any letter to Khrushchev was the demand that work cease on the missile sites in Cuba. He predicted that if we make no mention of Turkey in our letter, Khrushchev will write back to us saying that if we include Turkey, then he would be prepared to settle the Cuban situation. The President said this would mean that we would lose twenty-four hours while they would continue to work on the bases and achieve an operational status for more of their missiles. He suggested that we would be willing to guarantee not to invade Cuba if the Soviet missiles were taken out.

Secretary Rusk returned to the Stevenson draft, which the President approved as revised. The phrase "and assurance of peace in the Caribbean" was discussed and the reference to no invasion of Cuba was omitted. The President also agreed not to call a meeting of the North Atlantic Council.

The Attorney General commented that in his opinion the Stevenson draft letter was defensive. It sounded as if we had been thrown off balance by the Russians. The State Department draft merely said that we accepted Khrushchev's offer.

General Taylor summarized the conclusions of the Joint Chiefs. Unless the missiles are defused immediately, the Chiefs recommended implementation on Monday [deleted].

Secretary McNamara asked what we should do about air surveillance tomorrow. He stated his recommendation, i.e. if our reconnaissance planes are fired on, we will attack the attackers. General Taylor noted that in order to be ready to invade on Monday, we must continue intensive air surveillance.

The President directed that our air reconnaissance missions be flown tomorrow without fighter escort. If our planes are fired on, we must be prepared for a general response or an attack on the SAM site which fired on our planes. We will decide tomorrow how we return fire after we know if they continue their attacks on our planes and after we hear from U Thant the Russian reply to our offer.

The President considered a draft message to the Turks about their missiles. His objective was to persuade the Turks to suggest to us that we withdraw our missiles. He noted that negotiations with the Turks were very difficult if there was any life left in the proposal which we had asked U Thant to make to the Russians.

General Taylor read a late report of the shooting down of the U-2 reconnaissance plane in Cuba which said that the wreckage of the U-2 was on the ground and that the pilot had been killed. He felt that we should make an air attack tomorrow on the SAM site responsible for shooting down the U-2 plane.

Secretary McNamara said that we must now be ready to attack Cuba [deleted]. Invasion had become almost inevitable. If we leave U.S. missiles in Turkey, the Soviets might attack Turkey. If the Soviets do attack the Turks, we must respond in the NATO area. [Deleted] However, we should make every effort to reduce the chance of a Soviet attack on Turkey.

In an informal discussion following the formal end of the meeting, the Vice President asked why we were not prepared to trade the withdrawal of U.S. missiles from Turkey for the withdrawal of the Soviet missiles from Cuba, if we were prepared to give up the use of U.S. missiles in Turkey. Under Secretary Ball responded that last week we thought it might be acceptable to trade the withdrawal of the missiles in Turkey if such action would save Berlin. He felt that we could accept the Soviet offer and replace the missiles in Turkey by assigning Polaris submarines to the area.

Bromley Smith