

*The*  
PRESIDENTIAL  
RECORDINGS  
JOHN F. KENNEDY

→→→→ *THE GREAT CRISES, VOLUME TWO* ←←←←

---

SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 21, 1962

Timothy Naftali and Philip Zelikow  
*Editors, Volume Two*

David Coleman

George Eliades

Francis Gavin

Jill Colley Kastner

Erin Mahan

Ernest May

Jonathan Rosenberg

David Shreve

*Associate Editors, Volume Two*

Patricia Dunn

*Assistant Editor*

Philip Zelikow and Ernest May

*General Editors*



W. W. NORTON & COMPANY • NEW YORK • LONDON

Copyright © 2001 by The Miller Center of Public Affairs

Portions of this three-volume set were previously published by Harvard University Press in *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis* by Philip D. Zelikow and Ernest R. May.  
Copyright © 1997 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College

All rights reserved  
Printed in the United States of America  
First Edition

For information about permission to reproduce selections from this book, write to Permissions,  
W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10110

The text of this book is composed in Bell, with the display set in Bell and Bell Semi-Bold  
Composition by Tom Ernst  
Manufacturing by The Maple-Vail Book Manufacturing Group  
Book design by Dana Sloan  
Production manager: Andrew Marasia

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

John F. Kennedy : the great crises.  
p. cm. (The presidential recordings)  
Includes bibliographical references and indexes.  
Contents: v. 1. July 30–August 1962 / Timothy Naftali, editor—v. 2. September 4–October 20, 1962 / Timothy Naftali and Philip Zelikow, editors—v. 3. October 22–28, 1962 / Philip Zelikow and Ernest May, editors.

**ISBN 0-393-04954-X**

1. United States—Politics and government—1961–1963—Sources. 2. United States—Foreign relations—1961–1963—Sources. 3. Crisis management—United States—History—20th century—Sources. 4. Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917–1963—Archives. I. Naftali, Timothy J. II. Zelikow, Philip, 1954– III. May, Ernest R. IV. Series.

E841.J58 2001  
973.922—dc21

2001030053

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110  
www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House, 75/76 Wells Street, London W1T 3QT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

## Tuesday, October 16, 1962

On September 4 President Kennedy responded to reports of Soviet arms shipments to Cuba by choosing to issue (through press secretary Salinger) a statement noting that this was happening and drawing a line that warned only against Soviet deployment of “offensive” weapons in Cuba. Everyone, including the Soviets, understood that in this context *offensive* meant systems able to deliver nuclear weapons to the United States. The White House statement was at least as significant for what it said Kennedy *would* tolerate. It told administration insiders, like those involved in the ongoing debate about the future of the Mongoose program against Castro, that Kennedy would accept Soviet arms shipments to Cuba. Kennedy’s best hope thus was to overwhelm the critics with a barrage of official statements downplaying the significance of these shipments of “defensive” arms in order to deflate the opposition case.

The Republicans had reacted with even more serious charges. Probably on the basis of the many reports and rumors coming out of Cuba and conveyed by private Americans in contact with Cuban exile groups, Republican senator Kenneth Keating of New York announced on the floor of the Senate that there were “Soviet rocket installations in Cuba.” With Republicans on the offensive, Kennedy felt obliged to make yet another statement. Bundy’s advice was critical. President Kennedy would be giving a press conference on September 13. Cuba was bound to come up. On September 11 the Soviet government declared unequivocally that Moscow had not sent and would not send nuclear missiles to Cuba. There was no need for this, the Soviet government announced. The next day Bundy urged Kennedy to repeat, in person, the line Salinger had put out on September 4. Bundy opened his memo by telling Kennedy that if he wanted to invade Cuba, he should then reject his advice, because Kennedy would be minimizing the Soviet threat there. But, as Bundy knew, President Kennedy had told his aides repeatedly that he did not want a U.S. invasion of Cuba, that the real danger came from the Soviet Union, and that this danger was likely to arise later that year in Berlin.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. On the sources for Keating’s allegations, see Max Holland, “A Luce Connection: Senator Keating, William Pawley, and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1 (Fall 1999), pp. 139–67. Bundy to President Kennedy, “Memorandum on Cuba for the Press

President Kennedy himself underscored a position that accepted what was already discovered and drew a line against what the Soviets had just promised they would not do. Kennedy said that “unilateral military intervention on the part of the United States cannot currently be either required or justified.” He added that if Cuba “should ever . . . become an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union, then this country will do whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its allies.” The administration mounted a forceful campaign of denial, with the President right in the front line. The Soviet assurances were repeated by the amiable Soviet ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin, who spoke with Robert Kennedy and soon afterward with the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson, saying flatly to each man that the Soviet government had no intention whatever of using Cuba as an offensive military base.

Over the month until the crisis actually broke, Kennedy remained of the view that the notion of the Soviets’ turning Cuba into a missile base came largely from the imagination and zeal of Republicans campaigning for Senate and House seats up for election in November (although his brother Robert and the Republican CIA director, John McCone, had also voiced this fear). Largely at the instance of Keating and Republican Senator Homer Capehart of Indiana, the Senate on September 20 passed by 86 to 1 a resolution authorizing the use of force against Cuba “to prevent the creation or use of an externally supported offensive military capability endangering the security of the U.S.” On October 10, Keating rose in the Senate to charge that the Soviets were establishing intermediate-range missile bases in Cuba.

Kennedy knew of no intelligence data that warranted the Senate resolution or supported Keating’s allegation. He had learned that, in addi-

---

Conference,” 13 September 1962, National Security Files, Box 36, “Cuba General September 62,” John F. Kennedy Library. Bundy’s introduction comes quickly and clearly to the point:

1. The congressional head of steam on this is the most serious that we have had. It affects both parties and takes many forms.
2. The immediate hazard is that the Administration may appear to be weak and indecisive.
3. One way to avoid this hazard is to act by naval or military force in the Cuban area.
4. The other course is to make a very clear and aggressive explanation of current policy and its justification.

Bundy then argued for this “other course,” urging Kennedy to explain “*The threat is under control* [Bundy’s emphasis]. Neither Communist propaganda nor our own natural anger should blind us to the basic fact that Cuba is not—and will not be allowed to become—a threat to the United States.”

tion to surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), the Soviets were sending crates containing unassembled IL-28 bombers to Cuba. These bombers, though capable of carrying nuclear weapons, were being phased out of the Soviet Air Force as obsolete. In themselves, they were not a cause for worry. Moreover—though this was before evidence came in regarding the IL-28s—the CIA's topmost analytic group, its Board of National Estimates, produced a Special National Intelligence Estimate. Use of Cuba by the Soviet Union as a base for offensive ballistic missiles, said the board, "would be incompatible with Soviet practice to date and with Soviet policy as we presently estimate it. It would indicate a far greater willingness to increase the level of risk in U.S.-Soviet relations than the U.S.S.R. has displayed thus far. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

But as September turned to October with new kinds of Soviet arms being discovered in Cuba almost every week, an increasingly worried President was keeping an eye on accelerated contingency planning by State and Defense in case he was driven toward some kind of military action against Cuba.<sup>3</sup> Kennedy not only had reason to feel justified in discounting the Republicans' charges; he also felt he had a right to curb suspected leaks from the intelligence community feeding those charges. After he had shown Kennedy photographs of the crates containing IL-28 bombers on October 11, McCone noted: "The President requested that such information be withheld at least until after the elections as if the information got into the press, a new and more violent Cuban issue would be injected into the campaign and this would seriously affect his independence of action."<sup>4</sup>

That Kennedy could make such a request of McCone, a Republican, is remarkable, but the final phrase, about his "independence of action," may well have had wider significance to him. A letter from Khrushchev dated September 28 had brought Kennedy potentially ominous news about

---

2. Special National Intelligence Estimate 85-3-62, "The Military Buildup in Cuba," 19 September 1962; reprinted in *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962*, ed. Mary McAuliffe (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1992), pp. 91–93.

3. Kennedy met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on September 14 and was already wondering about the feasibility of an air strike against SAM sites. See the meeting on 21 September in which he reminded McNamara about the need to keep the plans up to date. On 2 October, prodded by the Chiefs, McNamara offered them a big list of contingencies for possible action, led off by a Soviet move against Berlin or Soviet deployment of "offensive" systems to Cuba (see Kennedy to McNamara, 21 September 1962, in *FRUS*, 10: 1081; McNamara to Taylor, 2 October 1962, in *FRUS*, 11: 6–7).

4. McCone, "Memorandum on Donovan Project," 11 October 1962, in *CIA Documents*, McAuliffe, pp. 123–25.

Berlin. In it, Khrushchev said, "the abnormal situation in Berlin should be done away with. . . . And under present circumstances we do not see any other way out but to sign a German peace treaty." Moreover, Khrushchev commented angrily on agitation in the United States for action against Cuba. The congressional resolution, he said, "gives ground to draw a conclusion that the U.S. is evidently ready to assume responsibility for unleashing nuclear war." Khrushchev asserted that he would not force the Berlin issue until after the U.S. congressional elections, but he seemed to say that, by the second half of November, time would run out. Kennedy discussed his reactions to the letter with his top "demonologists," a nickname for his advisers on the Soviet Union, in the conversation that he recorded on September 29.

Therefore, as mid-October arrived, Kennedy and members of his circle had reason to expect a crisis, perhaps their greatest crisis yet, over Berlin. To them, Khrushchev remained a mystifying figure, and in his last high-level meeting with an American, on September 6 with Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, Khrushchev had crudely threatened to go to war in order to force the issue in Berlin. Then there was Khrushchev's meeting at the same time with the poet Robert Frost, in which the Soviet leader said he believed the United States and Western Europe to be weak and worn out. He invoked Tolstoy's comment to Maxim Gorky about old age and sex: "The desire is the same; it's the performance that's different." As Frost cleaned this up when answering questions from U.S. reporters, it came out: "He said we were too liberal to fight." This was how Kennedy first heard it, and it infuriated him, not least because it provided fodder for Republicans in the congressional campaign.<sup>5</sup>

On Sunday, October 14, on ABC's news program *Issues and Answers*, Bundy was denying the presence of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba to the national television audience just as a high-flying U-2 reconnaissance aircraft of the U.S. Strategic Air Command was flying a limited photographic mission directly over Cuba. For nearly a month, Director of Central Intelligence John McCone had pressed for such a flight. Secretary of State Dean Rusk had resisted. McCone suspected that the Soviets planned to turn Cuba into an offensive military base. Rusk worried lest some protests about U.S. overflights or some incident like that of 1960 complicate delicate ongoing negotiations. Moreover, Rusk knew that most Soviet experts, including those in McCone's own CIA, thought

---

5. Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), p. 351.

McCone wrong. When Soviet SAMs were spotted in Cuba at the end of August, McCone pressed harder for U-2 flights, for he interpreted these SAMs as harbingers of offensive surface-to-surface missiles. Rusk's resistance also hardened, for the Soviet SAMs were SA-2s, which had shot down Powers's U-2 in 1960. The shutdown of a Taiwanese U-2 over western China on September 8 added to Rusk's and Kennedy's fears. Bundy had allied himself with Rusk. On September 10 Kennedy chose the cautious approach. But, as worrying evidence mounted, McCone—with Robert Kennedy's support—won approval on October 9 for another U-2 flight directly over Cuba.<sup>6</sup> That flight took place on October 14.

During October 15, experts at the CIA's National Photographic Intelligence Center (NPIC), in a nondescript building at 5th and K Streets in Washington, pored over photos from that October 14 U-2 flight over Cuba. Seeing images of missiles much longer than SAMs, they leafed through files of photos from the Soviet Union and technical data micro-filmed by Soviet officer (and Anglo-American spy) Oleg Penkovsky. They came up with a perfect match. These were medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) of the SS-4 family. At about 5:30 in the afternoon, Arthur Lundahl, the head of NPIC, passed the news to CIA headquarters out in Langley, Virginia.<sup>7</sup>

In ignorance of what was in progress at NPIC, McNamara had met that afternoon with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and dozens of lower-level officials. Although McNamara explained that Kennedy had decided not to take any military action against Cuba during the next three months, the group reviewed plans for a massive air strike on Cuba and for an invasion.

That evening, Bundy and his wife gave a small dinner at their home on Foxhall Road for Charles (Chip) and Avis Bohlen. Chip Bohlen was going off to be U.S. ambassador to France. Called away to the telephone, Bundy heard CIA deputy director for intelligence Ray Cline say cryptically, "Those things we've been worrying about—it looks as though we've really got something." "It was a hell of a secret," Bundy wrote later. Though he considered immediately calling Kennedy, he concluded that a few hours made no difference. The President had been in New York State, speaking for Democratic congressional candidates, and had

---

6. For more background on the discovery of the missiles, see Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (2d ed.; New York: Longman, 1999), pp. 219–24, 331–37.

7. Full details are in Dino Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball: The Inside Story of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, ed. Robert F. McCort (New York: Random House, 1991), pp. 187–217. (Brugioni was in NPIC at the time.)

gotten back to Washington in the early hours of the morning. Bundy, as he also wrote later, “decided that a quiet evening and a night of sleep were the best preparation” the President could have for what lay ahead of him. Kennedy never reproached Bundy for giving him that extra rest.<sup>8</sup>

Bundy brought his news to the private quarters of the White House at about 9:00 A.M. on Tuesday, October 16. In the major morning papers, the President had seen one front-page story about Cuba. The *Washington Post* reported that “Communist sources” were floating a rumor of a possible trade—the West to make concessions on Berlin in return for a slowdown in the Soviet buildup of Cuba. State Department spokesman Lincoln White denied seeing any such proposal and said, “It would have been kicked out the window so fast it would have made your head swim.” The *Post*’s front page and that of the *New York Times* featured a Boston address by Eisenhower, attacking the Kennedy administration’s “dreary foreign record.” In his administration, Eisenhower said, “No walls were built. No threatening foreign bases were established.”

President Kennedy told Bundy to round up officials—secretly—for a meeting later that morning. He phoned his brother Robert and asked him to come to the White House, where they briefly discussed the sensational news. At 9:25 President Kennedy began his regular schedule, meeting astronaut Walter Schirra and his family. In a brief break, just before 10:00, the President went to Kenny O’Donnell’s office and, as O’Donnell later recalled, said, “You still think the fuss about Cuba is unimportant?”

“Absolutely,” O’Donnell answered. “The voters won’t give a damn about Cuba.”

Kennedy then gave O’Donnell the news. “I don’t believe it,” O’Donnell replied. “You better believe it,” Kennedy said and added drily, “Ken Keating will probably be the next President of the United States.”<sup>9</sup>

After two more routine meetings that morning, Kennedy was able to open up about the missiles again for about half an hour with Bohlen, who was paying a previously scheduled farewell call as he prepared to depart for Paris. Kennedy finished his meeting with Bohlen and went on to the Cabinet Room.

---

8. McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival* (New York: Random House, 1988), pp. 395–96.

9. Kenneth P. O’Donnell and David F. Powers, with Joe McCarthy, “*Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye*” (New York: Pocket Books, 1972), p. 369.



11:50 A.M.—1:00 P.M.

---

*We're certainly going to do [option] number one. We're going to take out these missiles.*

---

### Meeting on the Cuban Missile Crisis<sup>10</sup>

Kennedy was in the Cabinet Room with his five-year-old daughter, Caroline, when his advisers filed into the Cabinet Room, accompanied by Lundahl and other experts from NPIC who set up photograph displays on easels. As Caroline was taken back to the residence and the meeting began, Kennedy turned on the tape recorder.

**Marshall Carter:** This is the result of the photography taken Sunday, sir. There's a medium-range ballistic missile launch site and two new military encampments on the southern edge of the Sierra del Rosario in west-central Cuba.

**President Kennedy:** Where would that be?

**Carter:** West-central, sir. That's . . .

**Arthur Lundahl:** South of Havana. [*quieter, as an aside*] I think this [*unclear*] represents these three dots we're talking about.

**Carter:** Have you got the big pictures?

**Lundahl:** Yes, sir.

**Carter:** The President would like to see those.

The launch site at one of the encampments contains a total of at least 14 canvas-covered missile trailers measuring 67 feet in length, 9 feet in width. The overall length of the trailers plus the tow bars is approximately 80 feet. The other encampment contains vehicles and tents but with no missile trailers.

**Lundahl:** [*quietly to President Kennedy*] These are the launchers here. Each of these are places we discussed. In this instance the missile trailer is backing up to the launching point. The launch point of this particular vehicle is here. This canvas-covered [*unclear*] is 67 feet long.

**Carter:** The site that you have there contains at least eight canvas-

---

10. Including President Kennedy, George Ball, McGeorge Bundy, Marshall Carter, C. Douglas Dillon, Roswell Gilpatric, Sidney Graybeal, U. Alexis Johnson, Vice President Johnson, Robert Kennedy, Arthur Lundahl, Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, and Maxwell Taylor. Tape 28, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

covered missile trailers. Four deployed probable missile erector launchers. These are unrevetted.<sup>11</sup> The probable launch positions as indicated are approximately 850 feet, 700 feet, 450 feet—for a total distance of about 2,000 feet.

In Area Two, there are at least 6 canvas-covered missile trailers, about 75 vehicles, and about 18 tents. And in Area Number Three we have 35 vehicles, 15 large tents, 8 small tents, 7 buildings, and 1 building under construction. The critical one—do you see what I mean?—is this one.

**Lundahl:** [*quietly to President Kennedy*] There is a launcher right there, sir. The missile trailer is backing up to it at the moment. [*Unclear.*] And the missile trailer is here. Seven more have been enlarged here. Those canvas-covered objects on the trailers are 67 feet long, and there's a small building between the two of them. The eighth one is the one that's not on a particular trailer. [*Unclear*] backs up. That looks like the most-advanced one. And the other area is about 5 miles away. There are no launcher erectors on there, just missiles.

**President Kennedy:** How far advanced is this?

**Lundahl:** Sir, we've never seen this kind of an installation before.

**President Kennedy:** Not even in the Soviet Union?

**Lundahl:** No, sir. Our [*nine seconds excised as classified information*].<sup>12</sup> But from May of '60 on we have never had any U-2 coverage of the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> So we do not know what kind of a practice they would use in connection with—

**President Kennedy:** How do you know this is a medium-range ballistic missile?

**Lundahl:** The length, sir.

---

11. An erector launcher trailer can carry a missile and then be secured in place at a designated launch point. The missile launcher is then erected to the firing angle and the missile is fired from it. To say the site is *unrevetted* means that earthworks or fortifications to protect against attack or the blast from the missile have not been constructed.

12. In an earlier, less stringent declassification of this material, more of this sentence was left intact, reading (once errors were corrected): "Our last look was when we had TALENT coverage of [*three seconds excised as classified information*] and we had a 350-mile [range] missile erected just on hard earth with a kind of field exercise going on." TALENT was a codeword for overhead photography. The briefer was probably describing photography of the Tyuratam missile test range in the Soviet Union.

13. May 1960 was when Soviet air defenses shot down a CIA U-2 reconnaissance aircraft piloted by Francis Gary Powers. Then-President Eisenhower suspended further U-2 flights over the Soviet Union. Powers was captured and eventually repatriated to the United States.

**President Kennedy:** The what? The length?

**Lundahl:** The length of it, yes.

**President Kennedy:** The length of the missile? Which part? I mean which . . . ?

**Lundahl:** The length of the missile, sir, is—

**President Kennedy:** Which one is that?

**Lundahl:** This will show it, sir.

**President Kennedy:** That?

**Lundahl:** Yes. Mr. Graybeal, our missile man, has some pictures of the equivalent Soviet equipment that has been dragged through the streets of Moscow that can give you some feel for it, sir.

**Sidney Graybeal:** There are two missiles involved. One of them is our [designation] SS-3, which is 630 mile [range] and on up to near 700. It's 68 feet long. These missiles measure out to be 67 foot long. The other missile, the 1,100 [mile range] one is 73 foot long.

The question we have in the photography is the nose itself. If the nose cone is not on that missile it measures 67 feet—the nose cone would be 4 to 5 feet longer, sir—and with this extra length we could have a missile that'd have a range of 1,100 miles. The missiles that were known through the Moscow parade—we've got the data on that [*unclear*] on the pictures.

**President Kennedy:** Is this ready to be fired?

**Graybeal:** No, sir.

**President Kennedy:** How long . . . ? We can't tell that can we, how long before it can be fired?

**Graybeal:** No, sir. That depends on how ready the GSC [ground support for the missile] [is], how—

**President Kennedy:** Where does it have to be fired from?

**Graybeal:** It would have to be fired from a stable, hard surface. This could be packed earth. It could be concrete, or asphalt. The surface has to be hard. Then you put a flame deflector plate on that to direct the missile.

**Robert McNamara:** Would you care to comment on the position of nuclear warheads? This is in relation to the question from the President—when can these be fired?

**Graybeal:** Sir, we've looked very hard. We can find nothing that would spell nuclear warhead in terms of any isolated area or unique security in this particular area. The mating of the nuclear warhead to the missile—from some of the other short-range missile data—[it] would take about a couple of hours to do this.

**McNamara:** This is not fenced, I believe, at the moment?

**Lundahl:** Not yet, sir.

**McNamara:** This is important, as it relates to whether these, today, are ready to fire, Mr. President. It seems almost impossible to me that they would be ready to fire with nuclear warheads on the site without even a fence around it. It may not take long to place them there, to erect a fence. But at least at the moment there is some reason to believe the warheads aren't present and hence they are not ready to fire.

**Graybeal:** Yes, sir. We do not believe they are ready to fire.

**Maxwell Taylor:** However, there is no feeling that they can't fire from this kind of field position very quickly: isn't that true? It's not a question of waiting for extensive concrete pads and that sort of thing.

**Graybeal:** The unknown factor here, sir, is the degree to which the equipment has been checked out after it's been shipped from the Soviet Union here. It's the readiness of the equipment. If the equipment is checked out, the site has to be accurately surveyed—the position has to be known. Once this is known, then you're talking a matter of hours.

**Taylor:** Well, could this be an operational site except perhaps for the fact that at this point there are no fences? Could this be operational now?

**Graybeal:** There is only one missile there, sir, and it's at the actual, apparently, launching area. It would take them—if everything were checked out—it would still take them in the order of two to three hours before they could get that one missile up and ready to go, sir.

**Lundahl:** Collateral reports indicated from ground observers that convoys of 50 to 60 of these kinds of Soviet vehicles were moving down into the San Cristobal area in the first couple of weeks of August. But this is the first time we have been able to catch them on photography, at a location.

**Theodore Sorensen:** You say there is only one missile there?

**Graybeal:** There are eight missiles there. One of them is in what appears to be the position from which they're launched, in the horizontal, apparently near an erector to be erected in vertical position.

**Dean Rusk:** Near an erector? You mean something has to be built? Or is that something that can be done in a couple of hours?

**Graybeal:** Mobile piece of equipment, sir. We haven't any specific [*unclear*] on this, but here is the way we believe that it could actually be lifted. Something of this nature. [*Unclear*] evidence would be the erector's helping to raise the missile from its transporter up into a vertical position with the flame deflector on the ground.

**McNamara:** Am I correct in saying that we have not located any nuclear storage sites with certainty as yet?

This is one of the most important problems we face in properly interpreting the readiness of these missiles. It's inconceivable to me that the

Soviets would deploy nuclear warheads on an unfenced piece of ground. There must be some storage site there. It should be one of our important objectives to find that storage site.

**Lundahl:** May I report, sir, that two additional SAC [U-2] missions were executed yesterday. They were taken to the Washington area last night. They're currently being chemically processed at the Naval Center in Suitland and they're due to reach us at the National PI Center around 8:00 tonight.<sup>14</sup> Both of these missions go from one end of Cuba to the other, one along the north coast and one along the south. So additional data on activities, or these storage sites which we consider critical, may be in our grasp, if we can find them.

**McNamara:** And is it correct that there is, outside of Havana, an installation that appears to be hardened that might be the type of installation they would use for nuclear warheads, and therefore is a prospective source of such warheads?

**Lundahl:** Sir, I couldn't put my finger on that. The Joint Atomic Energy people may be looking at that and forming a judgment.<sup>15</sup> But from photos alone I cannot attest to that.

**Carter:** There would appear to be little need for putting this type of missile in there, however, unless it were associated with nuclear warheads.

**Rusk:** Don't you have to assume these are nuclear?

**McNamara:** Oh, I think there's no question about that. The question is one of readiness to fire, and this is highly critical in forming our plans. The time between today and the time when the readiness to fire capability develops is a very important thing. To estimate that, we need to know where these warheads are. And we have not yet found any probable storage of warheads. And hence it seems extremely unlikely that they are now ready to fire, or may be ready to fire within a matter of hours, or even a day or two.

*Twenty-four seconds excised as classified information.*<sup>16</sup>

---

14. These are references to the Naval Photographic Intelligence Center in Suitland, Maryland, and to the National Photographic Interpretation Center, directed by Lundahl, that was part of the CIA.

15. Lundahl was referring to the Joint Atomic Energy Intelligence Committee (JAEIC) of the U.S. Intelligence Board.

16. In an earlier, less stringent, declassification of this material, most of the next sentence was left intact, reading (once errors were corrected): Lundahl: ". . . If new types of radars, or known associated missile firing radars or associated with missile firing, are coming up on that, that might be another indicator of readiness. We know nothing of what those tapes [of electromagnetic emissions] hold, at the moment."

**Rusk:** When will those be ready? By the end of the day, do you think?

**Lundahl:** They're supposed to be in, sir. I think that's right. Isn't it, General Carter?

**Carter:** The readout from Sunday's [U-2 flights] should be available now. We have done some—

**Rusk:** Weren't there flights yesterday as well?

**Carter:** Two flights yesterday.

**Rusk:** You don't have the results from those yet?

**Carter:** No.

*The room is silent for about eight seconds.*

**President Kennedy:** Thank you.

**Lundahl:** Yes, sir.

**President Kennedy:** Well, when is . . . ? [Are] there any further flights scheduled?

**Carter:** There are no more scheduled, sir.

**President Kennedy:** These flights yesterday, I presume, cover the . . .

**Lundahl:** Well, we hope so, sir—

**McGeorge Bundy:** [*Unclear*], Mr. President. Because the weather won't have been clear all along the island. So we can't claim that we will have been—certainly we surely do not have up-to-date photographic coverage on the whole island. I should think one of our first questions is to—

**President Kennedy:** Authorize more flights.

**Bundy:**—consider whether we should not authorize more flights on the basis of COMOR priorities.<sup>17</sup>

There's a specific question of whether we want a closer and sharper look at this area. That, however, I think should be looked at in the context of the question of whether we wish to give tactical warning and any other possible activities.

**McNamara:** I would recommend, Mr. President, that you authorize such flights as are considered necessary to obtain complete coverage of the island. Now this seems to be ill defined. But I purposely define it that way because we're running into cloud cover on some of these flights and I would suggest that we simply repeat the flight if we have cloud cover and repeat it sufficiently often to obtain the coverage we require.

---

17. The acronym COMOR stands for the interagency Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance, a committee of the U.S. Intelligence Board. Chaired by James Reber, COMOR set guidelines and priorities for U.S. surveillance overflights of other countries.

**President Kennedy:** General Carter, can you go do that?

**Carter:** Yes, sir.

**McNamara:** Now this is U-2 flying.

**Carter:** U-2, sir.

**McNamara:** This specifically excludes the question that Mac [Bundy] raised of low-level flying, which I think we ought to take up later, after our further discussions of the possibilities here.<sup>18</sup>

**Lundahl:** I have one additional note, sir, if I may offer it.

Of the collateral information from ground observers as to where these kinds of trailers have gone, we don't have any indications elsewhere on the island of Cuba except for this San Cristóbal area, where we do have coverage. But we have no ground collateral which indicates there might be an equivalent thing going on somewhere else.

**President Kennedy:** In other words, the only missile base—intermediate-range missile base—that we now know about is this one. Is that correct? Is this one or two? This is one. . . .

**Carter:** There's three of them.

**Lundahl:** Three, sir.

**Bundy:** Three [*unclear*] associated. Do I understand that this is a battalion, as you estimate it, Mr. Graybeal?

**Graybeal:** Yes, sir. We estimate that four missiles make up a battalion. So that in this one that you're looking at, Mr. President, has eight missiles. That'd be two battalions out of a regiment size. This one in front of the table is a second separate installation from which we can see six missiles. So there are probably two more battalions there. The other missiles may be under the tree. The third installation has the tents, but there are no missiles identified anywhere in that area.

**President Kennedy:** These are the only [ones] we now know about?

**Graybeal:** Yes, sir.

**Lundahl:** Other than those cruise missiles that you're familiar with, those coastal ones. And the surface-to-air missiles.<sup>19</sup>

---

18. Low-level reconnaissance overflights went underneath clouds, low and fast, over their targets. These flights were carried out by air force or navy tactical reconnaissance units with aircraft like the F-101 or F8U. In September the CIA had asked McNamara to dispatch low-level overflights over Cuba but at that time he declined, preferring to leave the work to the U-2.

19. The Soviet SAM sites in Cuba were first identified after a U-2 overflight of Cuba on 29 August and the White House was briefed about this discovery on 31 August. The discoveries contributed to the first U.S. warning to the Soviets against deploying "offensive weapons" announced on 4 September. The same U-2 mission revealed another kind of mis-

**Unidentified:** Any intelligence on that thing?

**President Kennedy:** Mr. Rusk?

**Rusk:** Mr. President this is, of course, a very serious development. It's one that we, all of us, had not really believed the Soviets could carry this far. They seemed to be denying that they were going to establish bases of their own [in Cuba] and this one that we're looking at is a Soviet base. It doesn't do anything essential from a Cuban point of view. The Cubans couldn't do anything with it anyhow at this stage.

Now, 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 question then becomes whether we do it by a sudden, unannounced strike of some sort or we build up the crisis to the point where the other side has to consider very seriously about giving in, or even the Cubans themselves 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 intimately involved with 42 allies and confrontation in many places that any action that we take will greatly increase the risks of a direct action involving our other alliances and our other forces in other parts of the world.

So I think we have to think very hard about *two* major courses of action as alternatives. One is the quick strike. The point where we think there is the overwhelming, overriding necessity to take all the risks that are involved in doing that. I don't think this in itself would require an invasion of Cuba. You could do it with or without such an invasion—in other words, if we make it clear that 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. Or we're going to decide that this is the time to eliminate the Cuban problem by action [*unclear*] the island.

The *other* would be, if we have a few days from the military point of view, if we have a little time, then I would think that there would be another

---

sile site, near Banes in eastern Cuba, that CIA analysts needed more time to analyze. They finally judged (correctly) that this missile was a cruise missile (more akin to a small unguided jet aircraft, without a ballistic trajectory) with a range of 20 to 40 nautical miles, apparently designed for coastal defense. President Kennedy was briefed in person about this finding on 7 September (see Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, pp. 120–27).

President Kennedy was concerned that the nature of this arguably defensive system not be misunderstood and that news about it not leak out into the ongoing, volatile domestic debate over his response to the Soviet buildup in Cuba. A new codeword classification, PSALM, was thereupon created—with a tightly restricted distribution—for future reports on Soviet deployments in Cuba. A new, even more explicit, public warning against deployment of “offensive weapons” was announced by the White House on 13 September.



course of action, a combination of things, that we might wish to consider. First, that we stimulate the OAS procedure immediately for prompt action to make it quite clear that the entire hemisphere considers that the Rio Pact has been violated, and [*unclear*] over the next few days, under the terms of the Rio Pact.<sup>20</sup> The OAS could constitute itself as an organ of consultation promptly, although maybe it may take two or three days to get instructions from governments and things of that sort. The OAS could, I suppose, at any moment take action to insist to the Cubans that an OAS inspection team be permitted to come and itself look directly at these sites, provide assurances to the hemisphere. That will undoubtedly be turned down, but it will be another step in building up our position.

I think also that we ought to consider getting some word to Castro, perhaps through the Canadian ambassador in Havana or through his representative at the U.N. I think perhaps the Canadian ambassador would be the best, the better channel to get to Castro, get him apart privately and tell him that this is no longer support for Cuba, that Cuba is being victimized here, and that the Soviets are preparing Cuba for destruction, or *betrayal*. You saw the [*New York*] *Times* 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 this kind of a base is intolerable and not acceptable. The time has now come when he must, in the interests of the Cuban people, must now break clearly with the Soviet Union and prevent this missile base from becoming operational.

And I think there are certain military actions that we might well want to take straight away. First, to call up highly selected units, up to 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—we announce that we are conducting a surveillance of Cuba, over Cuba, and we will enforce our right to do so. We reject the condition of secrecy in this hemisphere in a matter of this sort.

---

20. The Organization of American States (OAS) was created after World War II as a collective organization of states in the Western Hemisphere for several cooperative purposes, including the task of responding (by a two-thirds vote) to aggression from a member or nonmember state, including economic or political sanctions. The founding documents were signed in Mexico City (1945) and especially the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, signed in Rio de Janeiro (1947) and usually referred to as the Rio Pact. The OAS, spurred by the United States, had adopted sanctions against Cuba in early 1962.

We reinforce our forces in Guantánamo.<sup>21</sup> 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, clearly, an overwhelming strike at any of these installations, including the SAM sites. And also to take care of any MiGs or bombers that might make a pass at Miami or at the United States. Build up heavy forces, if those are not already in position.

We then would move more openly and vigorously into the guerrilla field and create maximum confusion on the island [of Cuba]. We won't be too squeamish at this point about the overt/covert character of what is being done.

We review our attitude on an alternative Cuban government, and get Miro Cardona and his group in, Manuel Ray and his group, and see if they won't get together on a progressive junta that would pretty well combine all principal elements, other than the Batista group, as the leaders of Cuba. And have them, give them, more of a status—whether we proceed to full recognition or not is something else. But get the Cuban elements highly organized on this matter.

I think also that we need a few days to alert our other allies, for consultation in 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, and anyone else who's involved at this point, that if they're interested in peace they've got to stop their ships from Cuban trade at this point. In other words, isolate Cuba completely without, at this particular moment, a forceful blockade.

I think it would be important for you to consider calling in General Eisenhower, giving him a full briefing before a public announcement is made as to the situation and the courses of action which you might determine upon.

But I think that, by and large, there are these two broad alternatives: One, the quick strike.

The other, to alert our allies and Mr. Khrushchev that there is an utterly serious crisis in the making here, and that Mr. Khrushchev may not himself really understand that or believe that at this point.

I think then we'll be facing a situation that could well lead to general war. Now with that we have an obligation to do what has to be done, but

---

21. Guantánamo was and is a U.S. naval base on the eastern end of Cuba, with U.S. rights secured by a long-term treaty signed decades before Castro seized power.

to do it in a way that gives everybody a chance to pull away from it before it gets too hard.

Those are my reactions of this morning, Mr. President. I naturally need to think about this very hard for the next several hours, what I and 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 we ought to accept as 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 chaos in part of the East Coast or the area in a radius of 600 to 1,000 miles from Cuba.

Secondly, 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 should underlie our discussion.

Now, what kinds of military action are we capable of carrying out and what may be some of the consequences? 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 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. 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 invasion, both by air and by sea. Approximately seven days 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. 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 capabilities, and I think you may wish to hear General Taylor outline his.

**Taylor:** We're impressed, Mr. President, with the great importance of getting a strike with all the benefit of surprise, which would mean *ideally* that we would have all the missiles that are in Cuba above ground, where we can take them out.

That desire runs counter to the strong point the Secretary made, if the other optimum would be to get every missile before it could become operational. Practically, I think, our knowledge of the timing of the readiness is going to be so difficult that we'll never have the exact, 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 layout of the targets in as near an optimum position as possible, and then take them out without any warning whatsoever.

That does not preclude, I don't think Mr. Secretary, some of the things that you've been talking about. It's a little hard to say in terms of time, how much I've discussed. But we must do a good job the first time we go in there, pushing a hundred percent just as far, as closely, as we can with our strike. I'm having all the responsible planners in this afternoon, Mr. President, at 4:00, to talk this out with them and get their best judgment.

I would also mention among the military actions we should take, that once we have destroyed as many of these offensive weapons as possible, we should prevent any more coming in, which means a naval blockade. So I suppose that, and also, a reinforcement of Guantánamo and evacuation of dependents.

So really, in point of time, I'm thinking in terms of *three* phases.

One, an initial pause of some sort while we get completely ready and get the right posture on the part of the target, so we can do the best job.

Then, virtually concurrently, an air strike against, as the Secretary

said, missiles, airfields, and nuclear sites that we know of. At the same time, naval blockade. At the same time, reinforce Guantánamo and evacuate the dependents. I'd then start this continuous reconnaissance, the list that you have is connected, continuing over Cuba.

Then the decision can be made as we're mobilizing, with the air strike, as to whether we invade or not. I think that's the hardest question militarily in the whole business, and one which we should look at very closely before we get our feet in that deep mud in Cuba.

**Rusk:** There are certainly one or two other things, Mr. President. [Soviet foreign minister Andrei] Gromyko asked to see you Thursday [October 18]. 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. 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 can 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 shoot those missiles, want to shoot them off before they get knocked out by aircraft. So I'm not sure that this is necessarily the precise element, Bob.

**McNamara:** Well, I would strongly emphasize that I think our planning 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 those warheads.

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 would be excessive. 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.

**President Kennedy:** What is the advantage? There must be some major reason for the Russians to set this up. It must be that they're not satisfied with their ICBMs. What'd be the reason that they would . . . ?

**Taylor:** What it'd give them is, primarily, it makes a launching base for short-range missiles against the United States to supplement their rather defective ICBM system, for example. That's one reason.

**President Kennedy:** Of course, I don't see how we could prevent further ones from coming in by submarine. I mean, if we let them blockade the thing, they come in by submarine.

**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.

I think it's really rather unrealistic to think that we could carry out an air attack of the kind we're talking about. We're talking about an air attack of several hundred sorties because we don't know where these [Soviet] airplanes are.<sup>22</sup>

**Bundy:** Are you absolutely clear on your premise that an air strike must go to the whole air complex?

**McNamara:** Well, we are, Mac, because we are fearful of these MiG-21s.<sup>23</sup> 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.

We have a serious air defense problem. We're not prepared to report to you exactly what the Cuban air force is capable of; but I think we must assume that the Cuban air force is definitely capable of penetrating, in small numbers, our coastal air defense by coming in low over the water. And I would think that we would not dare go in against the missile sites, knock those out, leaving intact Castro's air force, and run the risk that he would use part or all of that air force against our coastal areas—either with or without nuclear weapons. It would be a very heavy price to pay in U.S. lives for the damage we did to Cuba.

**Rusk:** Mr. President, about why the Soviets are doing this, Mr. McCone suggested some weeks ago that one thing Mr. Khrushchev may have in mind is that 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 he has to live under fear of ours.

Also, we have nuclear weapons nearby, in Turkey and places like that.

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

**Taylor:** We have the Jupiter missiles.

**Bundy:** We have how many?

**McNamara:** About 15, I believe to be the figure.

---

22. A sortie is one mission by one airplane. If eight airplanes flew against a target, that would be 8 sorties. If the planes flew two missions in one day, that would be 16 sorties in the day.

23. The MiG-21 (NATO designation "Fishbed") was a short-range Soviet fighter-interceptor that could, in some configurations, carry a light bomb load against nearby targets.

**Bundy:** I think that's right. I think that's right.

**Rusk:** But then there are also delivery vehicles that could easily be moved through the air.

**McNamara:** Aircraft.

**Rusk:** Aircraft and so forth, route them through Turkey.

And Mr. McCone expressed 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 political, psychological flank.

I think also that Berlin is very much involved in this. For the first time, I'm beginning really to wonder whether maybe Mr. Khrushchev is entirely rational about Berlin. [Acting U.N. secretary-general] U Thant has talked about his obsession with it. And I think we have to keep our eye on that element.

But 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 [in 1956]. If they could provoke us into taking the first overt action, then the world would be confused and they would have what they would consider to be justification for making a move somewhere else.

But I must say I don't really see the rationality of 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 that this has been happening since August. Their TASS statement of September 12 [actually 11] 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 the 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 honestly believes, or at least affects to believe, that we have nuclear weapons in Japan. That combination . . .

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

**Bundy:** Yeah. They may mean Okinawa.

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

**Bundy:** Now it seems to me that it is perfectly possible that they are in that sense a bluff. That doesn't make them any less offensive to us, because we can't have proof about it.

**McNamara:** No. But it does possibly indicate a different course of action. 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.

**President Kennedy:** Doug, do you have any . . . ?

**Douglas Dillon:** No. The only thing I would say is that this alternative course of warning, and getting public opinion, and OAS action, and telling people in NATO and everything like that. It would appear to me to have the danger of getting us wide out in the open and forcing the Russians, the Soviets, to take a position that if anything was done they would have to retaliate.

Whereas a quick action, with a statement at the same time saying this is all there is to it, might give them a chance to back off and not do anything. Meanwhile, you've got to think that the chance of getting through this thing without a Russian reaction is greater under a quick strike than building the whole thing up to a climax, and then going through with what will be a lot of debate on it.

**Rusk:** That is, of course, a possibility, but . . .

**Bundy:** The difficulties. I share the Secretary of the Treasury's [Dillon'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 if they can live with Soviet MRBMs, why can't we? 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, 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 have exposed all of your allies and ourselves to all these great dangers without the slightest consultation, or warning, or preparation.

**Bundy:** You get all these noises again.

**President Kennedy:** But, of course, warning them, it seems to me, is warning everybody. And 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 that they're going to have warheads on them. If we come and attack, they're going to fire them. So then what'll we do? Then



we don't take them out. Of course, we then announce: "Well, if they do that, then we're going to attack with nuclear weapons."

**Dillon:** Yes, sir. That's the question that nobody—I didn't understand—nobody had mentioned is whether this takeout, this mission, was going to be able to deal with it with high explosives?

**President Kennedy:** How effective can the takeout be, do they think?

**Taylor:** It'll never be a hundred percent, Mr. President, we know. We hope to take out a vast majority in the first strike. But this is not just one thing, one strike—one day, but continuous air attack for whenever necessary, whenever we discover a target.

**Bundy:** You are now talking about taking out the air force as well, I think, speaking in those terms.

I do raise again the question whether we [*unclear*] the military problem. But there is, I would think, a substantial political advantage in limiting the strike in surgical terms to the thing that is in fact the cause of action.

**Alexis Johnson:** I suggest, Mr. President, that if you're involved in several hundred strikes, and against airfields, this is what you would do: Preinvasion. And it would be very difficult to convince anybody that this was not a preinvasion strike.

I think also, once you get into this volume of attack, that public opinion reaction to this, as distinct from the reaction to an invasion—there's very little difference. And from both standpoints it would seem to me that if you're talking about a general air attack program, you might as well think about whether we can eradicate the whole problem by an invasion just as simply, with as little chance of reaction.

**Taylor:** Well, I would think we should be in a position to invade at any time, if we so decide. Hence that, in this preliminary, we should be thinking that it's all bonus if we are indeed taking out weapons.

**President Kennedy:** Well, let's say we just take out the missile bases. Then they have some more there. Obviously they can get them in by submarine and so on. I don't know whether you just can't keep high strikes on.

**Taylor:** I suspect, Mr. President, that we'd have to take out the surface-to-air missiles in order to get in. To get in, take some of them out. Maybe [*unclear*].

**President Kennedy:** How long do we estimate this will remain secure, this information, until people have it?

**Bundy:** In terms of the tightness of our intelligence control, Mr. President, I think we are in unusually and fortunately good position. We set up a new security classification governing precisely the field of offensive

capability in Cuba just five days ago, four days ago, under General Carter. That limits this to people who have an immediate, operational necessity in intelligence terms to work on the data, and the people who have—

**President Kennedy:** How many would that be, about?

**Bundy:** Oh that will be a very large number, but that's not generally where leaks come from. And the more important limitation is that only officers with a policy responsibility for advice directly to you receive this.

**President Kennedy:** How many would get it over in the Defense Department, General, with your meeting this afternoon?

**Taylor:** Well, I was going to mention that. We'd have to ask for relaxation of the ground rules that Mac has just enunciated, so that I can give it to the senior commanders who are involved in the plans.

**President Kennedy:** Would that be about 50?

**Taylor:** No, sir. I would say that, at this stage, 10 more.

**McNamara:** Mr. President, I think, to be realistic, we should assume that this will become fairly widely known, if not in the newspapers, at least by political representatives of both parties within, I would say, I'm just picking a figure, I'd say a week. And I say that because we have taken action already that is raising questions in people's minds.

Normally when a U-2 comes back, we duplicate the films. The duplicated copies go to a series of commands. A copy goes to SAC. A copy goes to CINCLANT.<sup>24</sup> A copy goes to CIA. And normally the photo interpreters and the operational officers in these commands are looking forward to these. We have stopped all that, and this type of information is going on throughout the department.

And I doubt very much that we can keep this out of the hands of members of Congress, for example, for more than a week.

**Rusk:** Well, Senator Keating has already, in effect, announced it on the floor of the Senate.

**Bundy:** [*speaking over Rusk*] Senator Keating said this on the floor of the Senate on the 10th of October: "Construction has begun on at least a half-dozen launching sites for intermediate-range tactical missiles."

**Rusk:** That's correct. That's exactly the point. Well, I suppose we'll have to count on announcing it not later than Thursday or Friday of this week.

**Carter:** There is a refugee who's a major source of intelligence on

---

24. Commander in Chief, U.S. Forces, Atlantic. Headquartered in Norfolk, CINCLANT at this time was Admiral Robert Dennison.

this, of course, who has described one of these missiles in terms which we can recognize, who is now in this country.

**President Kennedy:** Is he the one who's giving Keating his stuff?

**Carter:** We don't know.

**Bundy:** My question, Mr. President, is whether, as a matter of tactics, we ought not to interview Senator Keating and check out his data. It seems to me that that ought to be done in a routine sort of way by an open officer of the intelligence agency.

**Carter:** I think that's right.

**President Kennedy:** You have any thoughts, Mr. Vice President?

**Vice President Johnson:** I agree with Mac that *that* ought to be done. I think that we're committed at any time that we feel that there's a buildup that in any way endangers, to take whatever action we must take to assure our security. I would think that the Secretary's evaluation of this thing being around all over the lot is a pretty accurate one. I wouldn't think it'd take a week to do it. I think they ought to [*unclear*] before then.

I would like to hear what the responsible commanders have to say this afternoon. I think the question we face is whether we take it out or whether we talk about it. And, of course, either alternative is a very distressing one. But, of the two, I would take it out—assuming that the commanders felt that way.

I'm fearful if we . . . I spent the weekend with the ambassadors of the Organization of American States. I think this organization is fine. But I don't think, I don't rely on them much for any strength in anything like this.

And I think that we're talking about our other allies, I take the position that Mr. Bundy says: "Well we've lived all these years [with missiles]. Why can't you? Why get your blood pressure up?" But the fact is the country's blood pressure *is* up, and they are fearful, and they're insecure, and we're getting divided, and I don't think that . . .

I take this little *State Department Bulletin* that you sent out to all the congressmen. One of the points you make: that any time the buildup endangers or threatens our security in any way, we're going to do whatever must be done immediately to protect our own security. And when you say that, why, they give unanimous support.

People are really concerned about this, in my opinion. I think we have to be prudent and cautious, talk to the commanders and see what they say. I'm not much for circularizing it over the Hill or with our allies, even though I realize it's a breach of faith, not to confer with them. We're not going to get much help out of them.

**Bundy:** There is an intermediate position. There are perhaps two or

three of our principal allies or heads of government we could communicate with, at least on a 24-hour notice basis—

**Vice President Johnson:** I certainly—

**Bundy:** —ease the . . .

**Vice President Johnson:** Tell the alliance we've got to try to stop the planes, stop the ships, stop the submarines and everything else they're [the Soviets] sending. Just not going to permit it. And then—

**Bundy:** Stop them from coming in there.

**Vice President Johnson:** Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** Well this is really talking about are two or three different potential operations.

One is the strike just on these three bases.

The second is the broader one that Secretary McNamara was talking about, which is on the airfields and on the SAM sites and on anything else connected with missiles.

Third is doing both of those things and also at the same time launching a blockade, which requires, really, the third and which is a larger step.

And then, as I take it, the fourth question is the degree of consultation. I don't know how much use consulting with the British . . . I expect they'll just object. Just have to decide to do it. Probably ought to tell them, though, the night before.

**Robert Kennedy:** Mr. President?

**President Kennedy:** Yes?

**Robert Kennedy:** We have the fifth one, really, which is the invasion. I would say that you're dropping bombs all over Cuba if you do the second, air and the airports, knocking out their planes, dropping it on all their missiles. You're covering most of Cuba. You're going to kill an awful lot of people, and we're going to take an awful lot of heat on it. And then—you know the heat. Because you're going to announce the reason that you're doing it is because they're sending in these kind of missiles.

Well, I would think it's almost incumbent upon the Russians then, to say, "Well, we're going to send them in again. And if you do it again, we're going to do the same thing to Turkey. And we're going to do the same thing to Iran."

**President Kennedy:** I don't believe it takes us, at least . . . How long does it take to get in a position where we can invade Cuba? Almost a month? Two months?

**McNamara:** No, sir. No, sir. It's a bare seven days after the air strike, assuming the air strike starts the first of next week. Now, if the air strike were to start today, it wouldn't necessarily be seven days after today, but I think you can basically consider seven days after the air strike.

**President Kennedy:** You could get six divisions or seven divisions into Cuba in seven days?

**Taylor:** No, sir. There are two plans we have. One is to go at maximum speed, which is the one referred to you by Secretary McNamara, about seven days after the strike. We put in 90,000 men in 11 days.

If you have time, if you can give us more time, so we can get all the advance preparation and prepositioning, we'd put the same 90,000 in, in five days. We really have the choice of those two plans.

**President Kennedy:** How would you get them in? By ship or by air?

**McNamara:** By air.

**Several:** Airdrop and ship.

**McNamara:** Simultaneous airdrop and ship.

**President Kennedy:** Do you think 90,000 is enough?

**Taylor:** At least it's enough to start the thing going. And I would say it would be, ought to be, enough.

**McNamara:** Particularly if it isn't directed initially at Havana, the Havana area. This is a variant. General Taylor and . . .

**President Kennedy:** We haven't any real report on what the state of the popular reaction would be to all this, do we? We don't know whether . . .

**Taylor:** They'd be greatly confused, don't you think?

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Taylor:** Great, great confusion and panic, don't you think? It's very hard to evaluate the effect from what the military consequences might be.

**McNamara:** Sometime today, I think, at the State Department, we will want to consider that. There's a real possibility you'd *have* to invade. If you carried out an air strike, this might lead to an uprising, such that in order to prevent the slaughter of the free Cubans, we would have to invade to reintroduce order into the country. And we would be prepared to do that.

**Rusk:** I would rather think if there were a complete air strike against all air forces, you might as well do it. Do the whole job.

**President Kennedy:** Well, now, let's decide what we ought to be doing.

**Robert Kennedy:** Could I raise one more question?

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** Is it absolutely essential that you wait seven days after you have an air strike? I would think that seven days, that's what you're going to have all—

**Taylor:** If you give less, you run the risk of giving up surprise. If you start moving your troops around in order to reduce that.

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah. The only thing is, there's been so much attention on Berlin in the last . . . Would you have to move them so that everybody would know it was Cuba?

**Taylor:** Well, it's troops, plus shipping even more so, you know. You're going to have to assemble the ships necessary, and that will be very very overt, and we can think of no way to cover that up.

**McNamara:** May I suggest, Max, that we mention this other plan we talked about. We should be prepared for a series of eventualities after the air strike starts. I think it's not probable, but it's conceivable that the air strike would trigger a nationwide uprising. And if there was strong opposition among the dissident groups, and if the air strike were highly successful, it's conceivable that some U.S. troops could be put in in less than seven days.

**Taylor:** That's correct. At first our air, our airdrops, and our Marines. Well, the airdrop at least, beginning in five days. That might do the trick if this is really a national upheaval.

**McNamara:** So we should have a series of alternative plans is all I'm suggesting, other than the seven days.

**Robert Kennedy:** I just think that five days, even a five-day period—the United States is going to be under such pressure by everybody not to do anything. And there's going to be also pressure on the Russians to do something against us.

If you could get it in, get it started so that there wasn't any turning back, they couldn't . . .

**President Kennedy:** But I mean the problem is, as I understand it . . . you've got two problems.

One is how much time we've got on these particular missiles before they're ready to go. Do we have two weeks? If we had two weeks, we could lay on all this and have it all ready to go. But the question really is whether we can wait two weeks.

**Bundy:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** I don't think we'll ever know, Mr. President, those operational questions, because with this type of missile, it can be launched very quickly with a concealed expedience—

**Bundy:** Do we have any intelligence—

**Taylor:**—so that even today, this one, this area, might be operational. I concede this is highly improbable.

**Bundy:** One very important question is whether there are other areas which conceivably might be even more operational that we have *not* identified.

**McNamara:** This is why, I think, the moment we leave here, Mac, we just have to take this new authority we have and put it—

**Bundy:** May I ask General Carter whether the intelligence, the collateral intelligence [information from human sources], relates only to this area, as I understood it this morning?

**Carter:** That's right. That's why we specifically covered this area on the one [U-2 flight] Sunday [October 14] because [*unclear*].

**McNamara:** May I go back for a second, however, to the point that was raised a moment ago? Mr. President, I don't believe that if we *had* two weeks, if we knew that at the end of two weeks we were going in, I don't believe we could substantially lessen the five- or seven-day period required after the air attack, prior to the invasion, for the size force we're talking about. Because we start with the assumption the air attack must take them by surprise. We would not be able to take the actions required to shorten the five- to seven-day period and still assure you of surprise in the air attack. And, therefore, we haven't been able to figure out a way to shorten that five- to seven-day period while maintaining surprise in the air attack.

**President Kennedy:** What are you doing for that five days? Moving ships, or where are the ships?

**McNamara:** Moving ships. And we have to move transport aircraft by the scores around the country. We should move ships. Actually, the ship movement would not be as extensive in the 7-day invasion as it would be in an 11-day [invasion] after the air strike.

**Taylor:** [*Unclear*] place after the air strike.

**McNamara:** We have been moving already, on a very quiet basis, munitions and POL. We will have by the 20th, which is Friday I guess [actually Saturday], we will have stocks of munitions, stocks of POL prepositioned in the southeast part of this country. So that kind of movement is beginning.

**President Kennedy:** What's POL?

**McNamara:** Petroleum, oil, and lubricants. So that kind of movement has already been taking place and it's been possible to do it quietly.

**President Kennedy:** What about armor, and so on? What about armor?

**McNamara:** The armor movement would be noticeable if it were carried out in the volume we require. And hence the point I would make is that, knowing ahead of time, two weeks ahead of time, that we would carry out the invasion, would not significantly reduce the five- to seven-day interval between the strike by air and the invasion time, given the size force we're talking about.

**Taylor:** I think our point of view may change somewhat with a tactical adjustment here, a decision that would take out only the known missile sites and not the airfields. There is a great danger of a quick dispersal

of all the interesting aircraft. You'd be giving up surprise. There's no [unclear] attack. Missiles can't run off quite as readily.

**President Kennedy:** The advantage of taking out these airplanes would be to protect us against a reprisal by them?

**Taylor:** Yes.

**President Kennedy:** I would think you'd have to assume they'd be using 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.

**Roswell Gilpatric:** But they still have 10 IL-28s and 20 to 25 MiG-21s.<sup>25</sup>

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

**Gilpatric:** There are eight airfields that are capable of mounting these jets. Eight—

**Bundy:** But, politically, if you're trying to get him to understand the limit and the nonlimit 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 going after all the operational airfields becomes a kind of—

**President Kennedy:** General—

**McNamara:** War.

**Gilpatric:** —the number of hours required for each type of air strike, if we were just going for the . . .

**McNamara:** Yeah, sure. Sure.

**President Kennedy:** Well, now, what is it we have, what is it we want to, need to, do in the next 24 hours to prepare for any of these three? It seems to me that we want to do more or less the same things, no matter what we finally decide.

---

25. The IL-28 (NATO designation "Beagle") was a twin-engined light/medium jet bomber of an early postwar design (production began in 1950) with a cruising radius of about 750 miles, able to carry 6,500 pounds of nuclear or conventional ("iron") bombs. On 28 September a Navy reconnaissance aircraft in the Atlantic had photographed a Soviet freighter carrying ten fuselage crates for these bombers to Cuba. The Soviet freighter arrived on 4 October. Due to delay in the Navy's transmission of its photos to CIA interpreters, the IL-28s were not identified until 9 October. McCone briefed President Kennedy about this discovery on 11 October. At that time Kennedy told McCone, "We'll have to do something drastic about Cuba" and said he was looking forward to the JCS operational plan that was to be presented the following week (see McCone to File, "Memorandum on Donovan Project," 11 October 1962, in *CIA Documents*, McAuliffe, p. 124; Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, pp. 172–74).



**Bundy:** We've authorized, Mr. President, we have a decision, for additional intelligence reconnaissance.

A minor decision that we'll talk to Keating. It seems to me—

**President Kennedy:** I don't think Keating will be that helpful.

**Bundy:** We'll leave that out.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** I think that then he'll be saying afterwards that we tried to . . .

**Bundy:** All right. The next item. I should think we need to know the earliest readiness for the various sizes of air strike and how long they would take to execute.

**President Kennedy:** Mean probability.

**Dillon:** One other question is: What, if anything, has to be done to be prepared for an eventuality of a Soviet action?

**Bundy:** [*Unclear*] alert [*unclear*].

**President Kennedy:** And then I think what we ought to do is to figure out: What are the minimum number of people that we really have to tell. I suppose, well, there's de Gaulle.

**Bundy:** You want de Gaulle. It's hard to say about Adenauer. You've got to tell, it seems to me, you're going to have to tell SACEUR, and the commandant.<sup>26</sup>

**Dillon:** I would think this business about the Soviet reaction, that might be helpful if we could maybe take some general war preparation type of action that would show them that we're ready if they want to start anything without, what you might, risk starting anything. You just don't know. . . .

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

**Rusk:** This is the point, whether we say something to the Cubans and the Soviets before any, before . . .

**President Kennedy:** I think, what we ought to do is, after this meeting this afternoon, we ought to meet tonight again at six, consider these various proposals.

In the meanwhile, we'll go ahead with this maximum, whatever is needed, from the flights. And, in addition, we will . . .

---

26. The acronym SACEUR stands for NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, Europe—always a U.S. officer. The SACEUR at that time was General Lauris Norstad. The commandant was the commandant of the U.S. Sector of Berlin, Major General Albert Watson.

I don't think we've 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 roll. Maybe we 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 present what we're going to do *anyway*. We're certainly going to do [option] number one. We're going to take out these missiles.

The questions will be whether, 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 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 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 to work out a contingency on that.

**Rusk:** We'll develop both tracks.

**President Kennedy:** I don't think we ought to do the OAS. I think that's a waste of time. I don't think we ought to do NATO.

We ought to just decide who we talk to, and how long ahead, and how many people, really, in the government. There's going to be a difference between those who know that—this will leak out in the next few days—there are these bases. Until we say, or the Pentagon or State, won't be hard. We've already said it on the . . . So let's say we've got two or three days.

**Bundy:** Well, let's play it, shall we, play it still harder and simply say that there is no evidence. I mean, we have to [*unclear*] be liars.

**President Kennedy:** We ought to stick with that until we want to do something. Otherwise we give ourselves away, so let's—

**Bundy:** May I make one other cover plan suggestion, Mr. President?

**President Kennedy:** Yes.

**Bundy:** There will be meetings in the White House. I think the best we can do is to keep the people with a specific Latin American business black and describe the rest as intensive budget review sessions.<sup>27</sup> But I haven't been able to think of any other.

**President Kennedy:** Nobody, it seems to me, in the State Department. I discussed the matter with Bohlen of the Soviet part and told him he could talk to [Llewellyn] Thompson. So that's those two. It seems to me

---

27. In this context the word *black* means to keep undercover, covert.

that there's no one else in the State Department that ought to be talked to about it in any level at all until we know a little more.

And then, as I say, in Defense we've got to keep it as tight as possible, particularly what we're going to do about it. Maybe a lot of people know about what's there. But what we're going to do about it really ought to be, you know, the tightest of all because [*unclear*] we bitch it up.

**McNamara:** Mr. President, may I suggest that we come back this afternoon prepared to answer three questions.

First, should we surface our surveillance? I think this is a very important question at the moment. We ought to try to decide today either yes or no.

**President Kennedy:** By "surface our"?

**McNamara:** I mean, should we state publicly that, that you have stated we will act to take out any offensive weapons. In order to be certain as to whether there are or are not offensive weapons, we are scheduling U-2 flights or other surveillance—

**Bundy:** [*chuckling*] This is covert reconnaissance.

**McNamara:** Well, all right, or reconnaissance flights to obtain this information. We'll make the information public.

**President Kennedy:** That'd be one. All right, why not?

**McNamara:** This is one question. A second question is: Should we precede the military action with political action? If so, on what timing?

I would think the answer is almost certainly yes. And I would think particularly of the contacts with Khrushchev. And I would think that if these are to be done, they must be scheduled, in terms of time, very, very carefully in relation to a potential military action. There must be a very, very precise series of contacts with him, and indications of what we'll do at certain times following that.

And, thirdly, we should be prepared to answer your questions regarding the effect of these strikes and the time required to carry them off. I think—

**President Kennedy:** How long it would take to get them organized.

**McNamara:** Exactly. We'll be prepared—

**President Kennedy:** In other words, how many days from tomorrow morning would it . . . How many mornings from tomorrow morning would it take to get the, to take out just these missile sites, which we need to know now. How long before we get the information about the rest of the island, do you figure, General?

**Bundy:** It could take weeks, Mr. President.

**President Kennedy:** Weeks?

**Bundy:** For complete coverage of a cloud-covered island.

**Unidentified:** Well, depending on the weather.

**Taylor:** Well, we've got about 80 percent now, don't we?

**Carter:** Yes, sir. It depends much on what we get out of yesterday's flight, sir. They won't be—

**Bundy:** There are clouded areas, Mr. President, as I understand it. And there are areas that are going to be very substantially in permanent, or nearly permanent, cloud cover.

**Carter:** We'll have preliminaries by six tomorrow morning.

**President Kennedy:** Well, there is the part of the island that isn't covered by this flight we're [expecting to learn about] by tomorrow morning. What about doing that tomorrow, plus the clouded part, doing low level? Have we got a plane that goes—

**Bundy:** We can certainly go low level, and we have been reluctant to do that.

The one thing to worry about on low level is that that will create a sense of tactical alert in the island. And I'm not sure we want to do that. Our guess is that the high-level ones have not, in fact, been detected.

**Taylor:** I think that's correct.

**Bundy:** No reactions.

**President Kennedy:** I would think that if we are going to go in and take out this, and any others we find, that we would at the same time do a general low-level photographic reconnaissance.

**Bundy:** You could at the same time do a low level of all that we have not seen. That would certainly be sensible.

**President Kennedy:** Then we would be prepared, almost any day, to take those out.

**Bundy:** As a matter of fact, for evidentiary purposes, someone has made the point this morning that if we go in on a quick strike, we ought to have a photographic plane take shots of the sites.

**President Kennedy:** All right. Well, now, I think we've got to watch out for this, for us to be doing anything quickly and quietly and completely. That's what we've got to be doing the next two or three days. So, we'll meet at 6:00?

**Robert Kennedy:** How long? Excuse me. I just wondered how long it would take, if you took it and had an invasion.

**Taylor:** To mount an invasion?

**Robert Kennedy:** No. How long would it take to take over the island?  
*Bundy carries on a side conversation about how to describe this meeting to the press.*

**Taylor:** Very hard to estimate, Bobby. But I would say that in five or six days the main resistance ought to be overcome. We might then be in there for months thereafter, cleaning that up.

**McNamara:** Five or seven days of air, plus five days of invasion, plus—

**President Kennedy:** I wonder if CIA could give us the state . . . the latest on his popular . . . so we get some idea about our reception there.

I just hate to even waste these six hours. So it may be that we will want to be doing some movements in the next six hours.

**Unidentified:** About the execution of the [*unclear*]?

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

*The meeting now begins to break up. Various separate conversations begin as some people leave. President Kennedy's next appointment was for a formal lunch with the crown prince of Libya.*

**President Kennedy:** I want to add [*unclear*], better also. Are you two coming to lunch?

**Rusk:** I was supposed to, but . . .

**President Kennedy:** George, are you supposed to come?

**Ball:** No.

**President Kennedy:** You went to check out [*unclear*].

**Rusk:** Ros [*Gilpatric*], were you supposed to go [*unclear*]? Could you—

**President Kennedy:** Six tonight?

**Bundy:** Six.

**President Kennedy:** All right, seven.

**Bundy:** Seven is better actually for you, Mr. President. Is 6:30 manageable? That would be still better because you're supposed to be out there [at a dinner party] at eight.

**President Kennedy:** Well, that's all right. That, then, seven. Between 6:30 and 7:00. As close to 6:30 as you can, be there.

How many would there be? I'd like to have, I think we ought to have the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff here. [*Unclear reply from Gilpatric.*] Well, then, you bring who you think ought to be brought.

**Bundy:** [*calling to departing participants*] And I urge everybody to use the East Gate rather than the West Gate.<sup>28</sup>

**President Kennedy:** I think we ought to get . . . What's Mr. McCone doing out there, General?

**Carter:** He's burying his stepson tomorrow morning.<sup>29</sup>

---

28. The West Gate was on the same side of the White House as the White House Press Room and was the usual path for observing the comings and goings of official visitors. The East Gate was the usual entrance for the residential side of the White House, used more for social functions and tours.

29. McCone had remarried in August. His wife's son, Paul Pigott, had died on 14 October

*Others are talking in the background.*

**Robert Kennedy:** He's back tomorrow.

**Unidentified:** I just talked to him on the phone. I think he'd rather come back.

**President Kennedy:** So, why don't . . . you discussed it with him? Is he familiar with this information?

**Carter:** Yes, sir. He's aware of what has happened.

**Robert Kennedy:** I talked to him about an hour ago.

**President Kennedy:** Is he coming here?

**Robert Kennedy:** He'll be here tomorrow morning. They're burying the child today, his son.

**President Kennedy:** Why don't we leave it in his judgment. [*Mixed voices.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** I think we might tell him. He said he's going to talk to you about this. Maybe just tell him about the meeting tonight.

**President Kennedy:** All right. Now the other question is on—he's [McCone] the man to talk to the General, Eisenhower. Where is the General now? Eisenhower?

I'll take care of that. I'll have [*unclear*]. I want to get [*unclear*].

**Bundy:** [*apparently to Dillon*] It's too complicated. [*Dillon makes an unclear reply.*] Yeah.

**Rusk:** George, the President wants you to take my place at lunch [with the Libyan crown prince].

**Ball:** All right. But I've got . . . You know that I've got a 1:45 speech. Look, look, maybe they can reschedule that. [*Rusk makes an unclear reply.*] They can reschedule that.

**Rusk:** That's fine.

*There is a brief, unclear exchange between President Kennedy, McNamara, and Taylor about reconnaissance flights and then Kennedy leaves, with the tape machine still running.*

**Taylor:** [*Unclear*] mission pilots [*unclear*]. If we can make a decision here to use whatever facilities we have. [*Mixed voices.*]

**McNamara:** [*Unclear*] hold off on this thing until tomorrow. [*Unclear*] first thing.

**Bundy:** But you will run the reconnaissance?

**McNamara:** Yeah, I was just talking to him. I'm going to get there right now. And I would suggest in this period we get [*unclear names*] and every-

---

from injuries suffered in an auto racing accident in California. McCone had left Washington to accompany the body to Seattle for the funeral.

body else and sit down at the table and figure out where these planes are. And consider what camps there are. [*Mixed voices.*]

Why don't you come down with, drive back [with us]? Why don't you ride—pick up your car and drive over with us to the Pentagon and have lunch with us over there? Why don't you call from here [*unclear names*] and come over, or anybody else you choose? [*Unclear.*] And then we can sit down [*unclear*] and sort out in great detail and see what we really need.

**Vice President Johnson:** [*concerned about improving his jet transport and communications as he travels*] I have [*unclear*] authority. I wonder if there's any good reason why you shouldn't go to somebody and put [*unclear*]. If you had immediate [*unclear*] or something else, I'm away from you for four or five hours. I have a Grumman Gulfstream that I've leased. I want you to lease it for MATS [Military Air Transport Service], after the election. Let me use it for the [Lockheed] Jetstar. It's a hell of a lot better for these small airfields. When I think about [*unclear*].

Anyway, I have a lease now and what I'd like to have is the best communication that you have that you're . . . if it can be done.

**McNamara:** Oh sure, sure.

**Vice President Johnson:** As it is now, I'm going to get 100–200 miles from Washington on the [*unclear reference to communication*].

**McNamara:** Oh sure.

6:30–8:00 P.M.

---

*I think any military action does change the world. And I think not taking action changes the world. And I think these are the two worlds that we need to look at.*

---

### Meeting on the Cuban Missile Crisis<sup>30</sup>

The morning meeting had ended with an understanding that the Pentagon team would analyze possibilities for a quick air strike, possibly followed by an invasion. Rusk and others at State would study how the adminis-

---

30. Including President Kennedy, George Ball, McGeorge Bundy, Marshall Carter, C. Douglas Dillon, Roswell Gilpatric, U. Alexis Johnson, Vice President Johnson, Robert Kennedy, Edwin Martin, Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, Theodore Sorensen, and Maxwell Taylor. Tapes 28 and 28A, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

tration could act promptly and effectively against the missiles without surprising allies in the hemisphere and Europe and possibly losing their support.

While this went on, Kennedy kept to his announced schedule. He presided over a formal lunch for the crown prince of Libya. Adlai Stevenson was present. After lunch, Kennedy invited Stevenson to the family quarters. Showing Stevenson the U-2 photos, Kennedy said, "I suppose the alternatives are to go in by air and wipe them out or to take other steps to render the weapons inoperable." Stevenson's position was: "Let's not go into an air strike until we have explored the possibilities of a peaceful solution."

During the afternoon, Stevenson took part in the meetings at the State Department. So did Soviet experts Bohlen and Thompson and the assistant secretary for Latin America, Edwin Martin.

At Justice, Robert Kennedy had meanwhile held in his own office a meeting of those involved in Operation Mongoose. Describing the "general dissatisfaction" of the President with progress thus far, the Attorney General focused discussion on a new and more active program of sabotage that had just been prepared by the CIA. Pressed by the CIA representative (Richard Helms) to explain the ultimate objective of the operation and what to promise the Cuban exiles, Robert Kennedy hinted the President might be becoming less averse to overt U.S. military action. He wondered aloud how many Cubans would defend Castro's regime if the country were invaded. After discussing the possibility of having Cuban émigrés attack the missile sites, he and the rest of the group seemed to agree this was not feasible.

At the Pentagon, the Joint Chiefs of Staff conferred with CINCLANT, the commanders of SAC and the Tactical Air Command (TAC), and the general commanding the 18th Airborne Corps. McNamara joined later. Presuming that the Soviets would not initiate a nuclear war against the United States, the JCS favored an attack, regardless of whether the missiles were operational. They nevertheless approved several prudential steps to increase U.S. readiness for nuclear war. After McNamara left, the JCS agreed that they did not favor use of low-level reconnaissance flights over Cuba, fearing that they would "tip our hand." They also agreed they would rather do nothing than limit an air strike only to MRBMs.<sup>31</sup> In the last 40 minutes before returning to the White

---

31. Based on notes taken from transcripts of JCS meetings in October–November 1962. The notes were made in 1976 before these transcripts were apparently destroyed. They have since been declassified and are available from the National Security Archive, in Washington, D.C.



House, McNamara and Gilpatric worked out an outline of three alternative courses of action, which McNamara would present at the meeting.

From 4:00 on, Kennedy himself had been occupied with his regular schedule. He was able to return to the missile problem only as his advisers gathered in the Cabinet Room at 6:30. Taylor arrived a bit late, after the meeting began. President Kennedy activated the tape recorder as the meeting opened with the intelligence briefing.

**President Kennedy:** Find anything new?

**Marshall Carter:** Nothing on the additional film, sir. We have a much better readout on what we had initially.

There's good evidence that there are back up missiles for each of the four launchers at each of the three sites, so that there would be twice the number, for a total of eight which could eventually be erected. This would mean a capability of from 16 or possibly 24 missiles.

We feel, on the basis of information that we presently have, that these are solid propellant, inertial guidance missiles with 1,100-mile range, rather than the oxygen propellant [and] radar controlled [type]. Primarily because we have no indication of any radar, or any indication of any oxygen equipment. And it would appear to be logical from an intelligence estimate viewpoint that if they are going to this much trouble, that they would go ahead and put in the 1,100 miles because of the tremendously increased threat coverage. I'll let you see the map.

**President Kennedy:** What is this map?

**Carter:** That shows the circular range capability.

**President Kennedy:** When was this drawn? Is this drawn in relation to this information?

**Carter:** No, sir. It was drawn in some time ago, I believe. But the ranges there are the nominal ranges of the missiles rather than the maximum. That's a 1,020 [mile] circle, as against 1,100.

**President Kennedy:** Well, I was just wondering whether . . . San Diego de los Baños is where these missiles are?

**Carter:** Yes, sir.

**President Kennedy:** Well, I wonder how many of these [maps] have been printed out.

**McGeorge Bundy:** The circle is drawn in red ink *on* the map, Mr. President.

**President Kennedy:** Oh, I see. It was never printed?

**Carter:** No, that's on top.

**President Kennedy:** I see. It isn't printed.

**Carter:** It would appear that with this type of missile, with the solid propellant and inertial guidance system, that they could well be operational within two weeks, as we look at the pictures now. And once operational they could fire on very little notice. They'll have a refire rate of from four to six hours, for each launcher.

**President Kennedy:** What about the vulnerability of such a missile to bullets?

**Robert McNamara:** Highly vulnerable, Mr. President.

**Carter:** They're vulnerable. They're not nearly as vulnerable as the oxygen propellant, but they are vulnerable to ordinary rifle fire.

We have no evidence whatsoever of any nuclear warhead storage near the field launchers. However, ever since last February we have been observing an unusual facility which now has automatic antiaircraft weapon protection. This is at Bejucal. There are some similarities but also many points of dissimilarity between this particular facility and the national [nuclear] storage sites in the Soviet Union. It's the best candidate for a site, and we have that marked for further surveillance. However, there is really totally inadequate evidence to say that there is a nuclear storage capability now.

These are field-type launchers. They have mobile support, erection, and check-out equipment. And they have a four-in-line deployment pattern in launchers which is identical, complexes about five miles apart, representative of the deployments that we note in the Soviet Union for similar missiles.

**President Kennedy:** General, how long would you say we had before these, at least to the best of your ability for the ones we now know, will be ready to fire?

**Carter:** Well our people estimate that these could be fully operational within two weeks. This would be the total complex. If they're the oxygen type, we have no . . . it would be considerably longer, since we don't have any indication of oxygen refueling there, nor any radars.

**Alexis Johnson:** This wouldn't rule out the possibility that one of them might be operational very much sooner.

**Carter:** Well, one of them could be operational much sooner. Our people feel that this has been being put in since, probably, early September. We have had two visits of a Soviet ship that has an eight-foot hold capacity sideways. And this, about so far, is the only delivery vehicle that we would have any suspicion that they came in on. And that came in late August, and one in early September.

**George Ball:** Why would they have to be sideways though?

**Carter:** Well, it's just easier to get them in, I guess.

**President Kennedy:** Well, that's fine.

**Dean Rusk:** The total readout on the flights yesterday will be ready tonight, you think?

**Carter:** It should be finished pretty well by midnight.

**President Kennedy:** Now wasn't that supposed to have covered the whole island? Was it?

**Carter:** Yes, sir. In two throws [flight paths].

**President Kennedy:** Except for . . .

**Carter:** But part of the central and, in fact, much of the central and part of the eastern [portions of Cuba] was cloud covered. The western half was in real good shape.

**President Kennedy:** I see. Now what have we got laying on for tomorrow?

**Carter:** There are seven, six or seven—

**McNamara:** I just left General Carroll.<sup>32</sup> We're having ready seven U-2 aircraft: two high-altitude U-2s, five lesser-altitude U-2s; six equipped with an old-type film, one equipped with a new type, experimental film, which hopefully will increase the resolution.

We only need two aircraft flying tomorrow if the weather is good. We will put up only two if the weather is good. If the weather is not good, we'll start off with two and we'll have the others ready to go during the day as the weather improves. We have weather aircraft surrounding the periphery of Cuba, and we'll be able to keep track of the weather during the day over all parts of the island. Hopefully, this will give us complete coverage tomorrow. We are planning to do this, or have the capability to do this, every day thereafter for an indefinite period.

**Carter:** This is a field-type missile. And from collateral evidence, not direct, that we have with the Soviet Union, it's designed to be fielded, placed, and fired in six hours.

It would appear that we have caught this in a very early stage of deployment. It would also appear that there does not seem to be the degree of urgency in getting them immediately in the position. This could be because they have not been surveyed. Or it could also be because it is the shorter-range missile, and the radars and the oxygen have not yet arrived.

**President Kennedy:** There isn't any question in your mind, however, that it is an intermediate-range [actually medium-range] missile?

---

32. General Joseph Carroll, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

**Carter:** No. There's no question in our minds at all. These are all the characteristics that we have seen with live ones.

**Rusk:** You've seen actual missiles themselves and not just the boxes, have you?

**Carter:** No, we've seen . . . in the picture there is an actual missile.

**Rusk:** Yeah. Sure there is [*tone is serious, not sarcastic*].

**Carter:** Yes. There's no question in our mind, sir. And they are genuine. They are not a camouflage or covert attempt to fool us.

**Bundy:** How much do we know, Pat? I don't mean to go behind your judgment here, except that there's one thing that would be really catastrophic, [which] would be to make a judgment here on a bad guess as to whether these things are . . . We mustn't do that.

How do we really know what these missiles are, and what their range is?

**Carter:** Only that from the readout that we have now, and in the judgment of our analysts, and of the Guided Missile and Astronautics Committee which has been convening all afternoon, these signatures are identical with those that we have clearly earmarked in the Soviet Union, and have fully verified.<sup>33</sup>

**Bundy:** What made the verification? That's really my question. How do we know what a given Soviet missile will do?

**Carter:** We know something from the range firings that we have vetted for the past two years. And we know also from comparison with the characteristics of our own missiles as to size and length and diameter. As to these particular missiles, we have a family of Soviet missiles for which we have all accepted the specifications.

**Bundy:** I know that we have accepted them, and I know that we've had these things in charts for years. But I don't know how we know.

**Carter:** Well, we know from a number of sources, including our IRONBARK sources, as well as from range firings which we have been vetting for several years, as to the capabilities.<sup>34</sup> But I would have to get the analysts in here to give you the play-by-play account.

**Rusk:** Pat, we don't know of any 65-foot Soviet missile that has a range of, say, 15 miles, do we?

---

33. The Guided Missile and Astronautics Intelligence Committee (GMAIC) was another interagency committee of the U.S. Intelligence Board.

34. The word *IRONBARK* was a codeword for information passed to the United States by Colonel Oleg Penkovsky, an officer in Soviet military intelligence. Penkovsky had already fallen under suspicion and was arrested six days later (on 22 October, Washington time). He was later executed by the Soviet government.

**Carter:** Fifteen miles? No, we certainly don't.

**Rusk:** In other words, if they are missiles this size, they are missiles of considerable range, I think.

**McNamara:** I tried to prove today—I am satisfied—that these were not MRBMs. And I worked long on it. I got our experts out, and I could not find evidence that would support any conclusion *other* than that they are MRBMs. Now, whether they're 1,100 miles, 600 miles, 900 miles is still a guess in my opinion. But that they are MRBMs seems the most probable assumption at the moment.

**Bundy:** I would apparently agree, given the weight of it.

**President Kennedy:** Is General Taylor coming over?

**McNamara:** He is, Mr. President.

**President Kennedy:** Have you finished, General?

**Carter:** Yes, sir. I think that's it.

**Rusk:** Mr. President, we've had some further discussions with people this afternoon and we'll be working on it, probably this evening. But I might mention certain points that some of us are concerned about.

The one is the chance that this might be the issue on which Castro would elect to break with Moscow if he knew that he were in deadly jeopardy. Now this is one chance in a hundred, possibly. But in any event we are very much interested in the possibility of a direct message to Castro, as well as Khrushchev, [which] might make some sense here before an actual strike is put on. Mr. Martin, perhaps you would outline the kind of message to Castro that we had in mind.

**Edwin Martin:** This would be an oral note, message through a third party, first describing just what we know about what exists in the missile sites, so that he knows that we are informed about what's going on.

Second, to point out that the issues this raises as far as U.S. security is concerned: It's a breach of two of the points that you have made public. First the ground-to-ground missile and, second, and obviously, it's a Soviet-operated base in Cuba.

Thirdly, this raises the greatest problems for Castro, as we see it. In the first place, by this action the Soviets have threatened him with attack from the United States, and therefore the overthrow of his regime—used his territory to put him in this jeopardy. And secondly the Soviets are talking to other people about the possibility of bargaining this support and these missiles against concessions in Berlin and elsewhere, and therefore are threatening to bargain him away. In these circumstances, we wonder whether he realizes the position that he's been put in and the way the Soviets are using him.

Then go on to say that we will have to inform our people of the

threat that exists here, and we mean to take action about it in the next day or so. And we'll have to do this unless we receive word from *him* that *he* is prepared to take action to get the Soviets out of the site. He will have to show us that, not only by statements—privately or publicly—but by action. That we intend to keep close surveillance by overflights of the site to make sure, to know, what is being done. But we will have to know that he is doing something to remove this threat, in order to withhold the action that we intend, we will be compelled, to take.

If Castro feels that an attempt by him to take the kind of action that we're suggesting to him would result in serious difficulties for him within Cuba, we at least want him to know that, ask to convey to him and remind him of the statement that you, Mr. President, made a year and a half ago, to the effect that there are two points that are nonnegotiable. One is the Soviet tie and presence. And the second is aggression in Latin America. This is a hint, but no more than that, that we might have sympathy and help for him in case he ran into trouble trying to throw the old-line Communists and the Soviets out.

**Rusk:** Yes.

**Martin:** And give him 24 hours to respond.

**Rusk:** The disadvantage in that is, of course, the advance notice if he judges that . . . We would not, in this approach here, say exactly what we would do. But it might, of course, lead him to bring up mobile anti-aircraft weapons around these missiles themselves, or take some other action that will make the strike there more difficult. But there is that move.

There are two other problems that we are concerned about. If we strike these missiles, we would expect, I think, maximum Communist reaction in Latin America. In the case of about six of those governments, unless the heads of government had some intimation requiring some preparatory steps from the security point of view, one or another of those governments could easily be overthrown. I'm thinking of Venezuela, for example, or Guatemala, Bolivia, Chile, possibly even Mexico. And therefore the question will arise as to whether we should not somehow indicate to them, in some way, the seriousness of the situation so they can take precautionary steps, whether we tell them exactly what we have in mind, or not.

The other is the NATO problem. We would estimate that the Soviets would almost certainly take some kind of action somewhere. For us to take an action of this sort without letting our closer allies know of a matter which could subject them to very great danger is a very far reaching decision to make. And we could find ourselves isolated, and the alliance crumbling, very much as it did for a period during the Suez

affair, but at a moment of much greater danger over an issue of much greater danger than the Suez affair for the alliance.

I think that these are matters that we'll be working on very hard this evening. But I think I ought to mention them because it's necessarily a part of this problem.

**President Kennedy:** Can we get a little idea about what the military thing is? Well, of course, [number] one, is to suggest taking these out.

**McNamara:** Yes, Mr. President. General Taylor has just been with the Chiefs, and the unified commanders went through this in detail.

To take out only the missiles, or to take out the missiles and the MiG aircraft and the associated nuclear storage facilities, if we locate them, could be done in 24 hours warning. That is to say, 24 hours between the time of decision and the time of strike, starting with a time of decision no earlier than this coming Friday [October 19] and with the strike therefore on Saturday [October 20], or anytime thereafter with 24 hours between the decision and the time of strike.

General Taylor will wish to comment on this, but the Chiefs are strong in their recommendation *against* that kind of an attack, believing that it would leave too great a capability in Cuba undestroyed. The specific number of sorties required to accomplish this end has not been worked out in detail. The capability is for something in excess of 700 sorties per day. It seems highly unlikely that that number would be required to carry out that limited an objective, but at least that capability is available in the Air Force alone, and the Navy sorties would rise on top of that number. The Chiefs have also considered other alternatives extending into the full invasion. You may wish to discuss [that] later. But that's the answer to your first question.

**President Kennedy:** That would be taking out these three missile sites, plus all the MiGs?

**McNamara:** Well, you can go from the three missile sites, to the three missile sites plus the MiGs, to the three missile sites plus MiGs plus nuclear storage plus airfields, and so on up through the potential offensive.

**President Kennedy:** Just the three missiles [sites], however, would be—

**McNamara:** Could be done with 24-hours notice, and would require a relatively small number of sorties. Less than a day's air attack, in other words.

**President Kennedy:** Of course, all you'd really get there would be . . . what would you get there? You'd get the, probably, you'd get the missiles themselves that have to be on the . . .

**McNamara:** You'd get the launchers and the missiles on the—

**President Kennedy:** The launchers are just what? They're not much, are they?

**McNamara:** No. They're simply a mobile launch device.

**Maxwell Taylor:** This is a point target, Mr. President. You're never sure of having, absolutely, getting everything down there. We can certainly do a great deal of damage because we can whip [*unclear*]. But, as the secretary says here, there was unanimity among all the commanders involved in the Joint Chiefs 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 Soviets have been willing to give nuclear warheads to these missiles, there is just as good reason for them to give a nuclear capability to these bases. We don't think we'd ever have a chance to take them again, so that we'd lose this 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 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.

**President Kennedy:** That would be taking out some of those fighters, bombers, and—

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

**President Kennedy:** Think you could do that in one day?

**Taylor:** We think that [in] the first strike we'd get a great majority of this. We'll never get it all, Mr. President. But we then have to come back day after day, for several days. We said five days, perhaps, to do the complete job. Meanwhile we could then be making up our mind as to whether or not to go ahead and invade the island.

I'm very much impressed with the need for a time, something like five to seven days, for this air purpose, because of the parachute aspect of the proposed invasion. You can't take parachute formations, close formations of troop carrier planes in the face of *any* air opposition, really. So the first job, before there is any land attack including parachutes, is really cleaning out the MiGs and the accompanying aircraft.

**McNamara:** Mr. President, could I outline three courses 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 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, attempt-



ing to solve it. This seemed to me likely to lead to no satisfactory result, and it almost stops subsequent military action. Because the danger of starting military action *after* they acquire a nuclear capability is so great, I believe we would decide against it, particularly if that nuclear capability included aircraft as well as missiles, as it well might at that point.

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 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 into the future, we would be prepared to immediately attack the Soviet Union in the event that Cuba made any offensive move against this country.

**Bundy:** Attack who?

**McNamara:** The Soviet Union. In the event that Cuba made *any* offensive move against this country. Now this lies short of military action against Cuba, direct military action against Cuba. It has some major defects.

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 is not 20 sorties or 50 sorties or 100 sorties, but probably several hundred sorties. 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. And to move from that into the more extensive air attacks against the MiGs, against the airfields, against the potential nuclear storage sites, against the radar installations, against the SAM sites, means—as Max suggested—possibly 700 to 1,000 sorties per day for five days. 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.

To move beyond that, into an invasion following the air attack, means the application of tens of thousands, between 90 and over 150,000 men, to the invasion forces.

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 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 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. [It] either forces us to accept an unsatisfactory uprising, with all of the adverse comment that would result, or would force an invasion to support the uprising.

**Rusk:** Mr. President, may I make a very brief comment on that?

I think that any course of action involves heavy political involvement. It's going to affect all sorts of policies, positions, 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 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 strength of Cuba.

**President Kennedy:** I think the difficulty, 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 . . . we would secure a good deal of political support after my statement. And that the fact that we indicated our desire to restrain, this really would put the burden on the Soviets.

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 . . . If we did the note, message, to Khrushchev . . . I don't think 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, [but] he's not going to suddenly back down, change. I don't think he plays it that way.

So having a note to Khrushchev. It seems to me 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 . . .

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

**President Kennedy:** That's right.

**Bundy:** —in the [September 11] TASS statement and his other messages.

**President Kennedy:** But he's initiated the danger, really, hasn't he? He's the one that's playing God, not us.

**McNamara:** So we could—

**Rusk:** And his statement to Kohler on the subject of his visit and so forth, completely hypocritical.<sup>35</sup>

*At this point, about 30 minutes into this meeting, the recording was interrupted, apparently while the reels were being changed on the tape recorder in the basement. About a minute of conversation appears to have been lost before recording resumed.*<sup>36</sup>

**McNamara:** There is a great possibility they can place them in operational conditions quickly unless, as General Carter said, the system may have a normal reaction time, set up time, of six hours. Whether it has six hours or two weeks, we don't know how much time has started.

Nor do we know what air-launch capabilities they have for warheads. We don't know what air-launch capability they have for high explosives. It's almost certainly a substantial high explosive capability, in the sense that they could drop one or two or ten high-explosive bombs some place along the East Coast. And that's the minimum risk to this country we run as a result of advance warning, too.

**Taylor:** I'd like to stress this last point, Mr. President. We are very vulnerable to conventional bombing attack, low-level bombing attacks, in the Florida area. Our whole air defense has been oriented in other directions. We've never had low-level defenses prepared for this country.

---

35. The U.S. ambassador to Moscow, Foy Kohler, had met with Khrushchev earlier in the morning of 16 October (Moscow time). His report on their long conversation had arrived in Washington during the afternoon (Washington time), so Rusk and others would have read the report just before this meeting. In the initial summary report of that conversation (Moscow 970, 16 October 1962), Khrushchev promised that he would not do anything to worsen relations until after the U.S. congressional elections in early November. He planned to visit New York later in November for a meeting of the U.N. General Assembly and would then renew the dialogue on Berlin and other matters. Khrushchev said the Americans "could be sure he would take no action before meeting which would make situation more difficult."

36. At this point Tape 28 ends and the recording resumes on Tape 28A.

So it would be entirely possible for MiGs to come through with conventional weapons and do some amount, some damage.

**President Kennedy:** We're not, talking overall, not a great deal of damage. If they get one strike.

**Taylor:** No. But it certainly is [*unclear*]—

**Douglas Dillon:** What if they carry a nuclear weapon?

**President Kennedy:** Well, if they carry a nuclear weapon . . . you assume they wouldn't do that.

**Taylor:** At minimum, I think we could expect some conventional bombing.

**Rusk:** I would not think that they would use a nuclear weapon unless they're prepared for general nuclear war. I just don't see that possibility.

**Bundy:** I would agree.

**Rusk:** That would mean that—you know we could be just utterly wrong—but we've never really believed that Khrushchev would take on a general nuclear war over Cuba.

**Bundy:** May I ask a question in that context?

**President Kennedy:** We certainly have been wrong about what he's trying to do in Cuba. There isn't any doubt about that. Not many of us thought that he was going to put MRBMs on Cuba.

**Bundy:** No. Except John McCone.

**Carter:** Mr. McCone.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Bundy:** But the question that I would like to ask is, quite aside from what we've said and we're very hard locked on to 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. They said: "Substantially." My own personal view is: Not at all.

**Bundy:** Not so much.

**McNamara:** 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, is because of—<sup>37</sup>

---

37. Carter was referring to the Special National Intelligence Estimate, "The Military Buildup in Cuba," of September 19, which had concluded that the Soviet Union "could derive considerable military advantage" from deploying MRBMs and IRBMs in Cuba but that such a development was incompatible with Soviet practice and policy because "it would indicate a far greater willingness to increase the level of risk in U.S.-Soviet relations than the U.S.S.R. has displayed thus far. . . ." in *CIA Documents*, McAuliffe, document 33.

**Bundy:** That's what they said themselves in [the] TASS statement.

**Carter:** That's what they said themselves. But then, going behind that—

**President Kennedy:** But why? Didn't they think they'd be valuable enough?

**Bundy:** Doesn't improve anything in the strategic balance.

**Carter:** Doesn't improve anything. That was what the estimators felt, and that the Soviets would not take the risk.<sup>38</sup>

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 missiles and cruise-type missiles? He just couldn't understand *why* the Soviets were so heavily 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 from a cold-blooded point of view, Mr. President, you're quite right in saying that these are just a few more missiles targeted on the United States. However, they can become a very, rather important, adjunct and reinforcement to the strike capability of the Soviet Union. We have no idea how far they will go.

But more than that, these are, to our nation it means a great deal more, as we all are aware, if they have them in Cuba and not over in the Soviet Union.

**Bundy:** Oh, I ask the question with an awareness of the political . . . [chuckles]

**President Kennedy:** Well, let's say . . . I understand, but let's just say that they get these in there. And then you can't . . . They get sufficient capacity, so we can't . . . with warheads. Then you don't want to knock them out because that'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 from 90 miles away. Geography doesn't mean that much. . . .

---

38. Carter was partly in error. In fact, as indicated in the previous note, the estimators thought the deployment would improve the Soviet military position. This was a unanimous view in the intelligence community. Every lower-level expert, whether in State, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the armed forces, or the CIA, all believed (and separately wrote) that MRBMs and IRBMs in Cuba would materially improve the Soviet position in the strategic balance of power.

**Taylor:** We would have to target them with our missiles and have the same kind of pistol pointed at the head situation as they have in the Soviet Union at the present time.

**Bundy:** No question. If this thing goes on, an attack on Cuba becomes general war. And that's really the question: Whether . . .

**President Kennedy:** That's why it shows the Bay of Pigs was really right. If we had done it right. That was [a choice between] better and better, and worse and worse.

**Taylor:** I'm impressed with this, Mr. President. We have a war plan over there for you. [It] calls for a quarter of a million American soldiers, marines, and airmen to take an island we launched 1,800 Cubans against, a year and a half ago. We've changed our evaluations about it.

**Robert Kennedy:** Of course, the other problem is in South America a year from now. And the fact that you've got these things in the hands of Cubans here, and then, say, some problem arises in Venezuela. And you've got Castro saying: "You move troops down into that part of Venezuela; we're going to fire these missiles." [*Unclear interjection by Douglas Dillon.*] I think that's the difficulty, rather than the [*unclear*]. I think it gives the [*unclear*] image.

**President Kennedy:** It makes them look like they're coequal with us. And that . . .

**Douglas Dillon:** We're scared of the Cubans.

**Robert Kennedy:** We let the . . . I mean, like, we'd hate to have it in the hands of the Chinese.

**Dillon:** I agree with that sort of thing very strongly.

**Edwin 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.

**Dillon:** Yeah. That is the point.

**Martin:** Yeah. The psychological factor of our having taken it.

**Dillon:** Taken it. That's the best [way of putting it].

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, and the fact that if you go there, we're gonna fire it.

**President Kennedy:** What's that again, Ed? What are you saying?

**Martin:** Well, it's a psychological factor that we have sat back and let them do it to us. That is more important than the direct threat. It is a threat in the Caribbean. . . .

**President Kennedy:** I said we weren't going to [allow it].

**Bundy:** That's something we could manage.

**President Kennedy:** Last month I said we weren't going to [allow

it]. Last month I should have said 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 I would think that our risks increase.

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, so where are we now? Where is the . . . ? I don't think the message to Castro's got much in it.

Let's just 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, let the NATO people who have the right to some warning: Macmillan, de Gaulle. How much does this diminish . . . ? Not [telling them] that we're going to do anything, but the existence of them, without any say about what we're gonna do.

Let's say, 24 hours ahead of our doing something about it, we inform Macmillan. We make a public statement that these have been found on the island. That would be a notification, in a sense, 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 you're going to have a [*unclear*] in *this* country.

**President Kennedy:** Oh, I understand *that*. We'll be talking about . . . Say we're going to move on a Saturday. And we would say on a Friday that these MRBMs, that the existence of this, presents the gravest threat to our security and that appropriate action must be taken.

**Robert Kennedy:** Could you stick planes over them? And say you made the announcement at six, 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 or five that night. I don't . . . is that . . . ?

**Taylor:** I don't think anything like that [would work]. I can't visualize doing it successfully that way. I think that anything that shows our intent to strike is going to flush the airplanes and the missiles into concealment. These are really mobile missiles.

**President Kennedy:** They can just put them—

**Taylor:** They can be pulled in under trees and forest and disappear almost at once, as I visualize it.

**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 is a very very great danger to this coast. I don't know exactly how to appraise it, because I don't know 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 40-minute countdown. Something like that's been estimated.

**Roswell Gilpatric:** So you would say that the strike should precede *any* public discussion?

**McNamara:** I believe so, yes. If you're going to strike. I think, before you make any announcements, you should decide whether you're going to strike. If you are going to strike, you shouldn't make an announcement.

**Bundy:** That's right.

**Dillon:** What is the advantage of the announcement earlier? Because it's to build up sympathy, or something, for doing it. But you get the simultaneous announcement of what was there, and why you struck, with pictures and all—I believe would serve the same [purpose].

**Ball:** Well, the only advantage is it's a kind of ultimatum in which there is an opportunity of a response which would preclude it [the strike]. I mean it's more for the appearance than for the reality. Because obviously you're not going to get that kind of response.

But I would suppose that there is a course which is a little different, which is a private message from the President to the prime . . . to . . .

**Alexis Johnson:** To Macmillan and to de Gaulle.

**Ball:** And that you're going to have to do this. You're compelled, and you've got to move quickly, and you want them to know it. Maybe two hours before the strike, something like that, even the night before.

**Dillon:** Well, that's different.

**Ball:** But it has to be kept on that basis of total secrecy. And then the question of what you do with these Latin American governments is another matter. I think if you notify them in advance, it may be all over.

**President Kennedy:** That's right. They could take . . .

The Congress would take; [we would have to take] the Congress along.

**Bundy:** I think that's just not right.

**President Kennedy:** I'm not completely . . . I don't think we ought to abandon just knocking out these missile bases, as opposed to . . . That's a much more defensible [and] explicable, politically, or satisfactory in



every way, action than the general strike which takes us into the city of Havana, and it is plain to me, takes us into much more hazardous . . . shot down . . .

Now, I know the Chiefs say: "Well, that means their bombers can take off against us." But . . .

**Bundy:** Their bombers take off against us. Then *they* have made a general war against Cuba of it, which then becomes much more their decision.

We move this way and the political advantages are *very* strong, it seems to me, of the small strike. It corresponds to "the punishment fits the crime" in political terms. We are doing only what we warned repeatedly and publicly we would have to do. 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 . . .

**President Kennedy:** Well, here's . . . Let's look, tonight. It seems to me we ought to go on the assumption that we're going to have the general, number two we would call it, course number two, which would be a general strike and that you ought to be in position to do that, then, if you decide you'd like to do number one.

**Bundy:** I agree.

**Robert Kennedy:** Does that encompass an invasion?

**President Kennedy:** No. I'd say that's the third course.

Let's first start with, I'd just like to first find out, the air, so that I would think that we ought to be in position to do [options] one and two, which would be:

One would be just taking out these missiles and whatever others we'd find in the next 24 hours.

Number two would be to take out all the airplanes.

And number three is to invade.

**Dillon:** Well, they'd have to take out the SAM sites also, Mr. President.

**President Kennedy:** OK, but that would be in two, included in number two. Of course, that's a terrifically difficult—

**Dillon:** Well, that may be [option] three and invasion [is option] four.

**Taylor:** In order to get in to get the airfields, there's a certain number we'd have to get.

**Martin:** Well, isn't there a question whether any of the SAM sites are operational?

**Taylor:** We're not sure yet.

**President Kennedy:** OK. Well, let's say we've decided we're going the whole way. So let's say that number two is the SAM sites plus the air.

**Bundy:** It's actually to clear the air, to win the air battle.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, well, whatever.

Now, it seems to me we ought to be preparing now, in the most covert way, to do one and two, with the freedom to make the choice about number one depending on what information we have on it. I don't know what kind of moves that requires, and how much is that going to . . . ?

**McNamara:** Mr. President, it requires no action other than what's been started. And you can make a decision prior to the start, Saturday or any time thereafter.

**President Kennedy:** Well, where do we put all these planes?

**Taylor:** You recall we have this problem, Mr. President. We're going to get new intelligence that will be coming in from these flights and that's gonna have to be cranked into any strike plans we're preparing. So there is that factor of time. The Secretary has given you the minimum time to make a decision now, so that we can brief the pilots and then crank in the new intelligence. I would point out that—

**McNamara:** If I may, Max, to answer the question you asked: As I understand it, we don't have to decide now we're going to do it. All we have to decide is if we want Sweeney to be prepared to do it.<sup>39</sup>

**Taylor:** That's correct.

**McNamara:** And Sweeney has said that he will take the tape that comes in tomorrow and process it Thursday and Friday [October 18 and 19] and prepare the mission folders for strikes on Saturday [October 20] or earlier, every day thereafter.

**Taylor:** Yes. The point is that we'll have to brief pilots. We're holding that back. And there'll be, I would say, 400 pilots will have to go to be briefed in the course of this. So I'm just saying this is widening the whole military scope of this thing very materially, if that's what we're supposed to do at this time.

**President Kennedy:** Well, now, when do we start briefing the pilots?

**Taylor:** They'll need at least 24 hours on that, when this new intelligence comes in.

**President Kennedy:** In other words, then, until tomorrow. All I was thinking of—at least until—

---

39. General Walter Sweeney, commander of USAF Tactical Air Command. Sweeney had earlier been placed in charge of all tactical strike planning under the relevant operational CINC, which was CINCLANT (Admiral Dennison).

**Bundy:** Can they be briefed in such a way that they're secure? They have no access to—

**McNamara:** Let's go back just a second, now. The President does not have to make any decision until 24 hours before the strike, except the decision to be prepared. And the process of preparation will not, in itself, run the risk of overt disclosure of the preparation.

**Bundy:** Doesn't it imply briefing, the preparation?

**Taylor:** It does, but—

**McNamara:** It implies the preparation of mission folders.

**Taylor:** Say, 24 hours before they go, they start a briefing.

I'd like to say this, Mr. President, the more time you can give, the better. Because they can then do a lot more rehearsing and checking out of all these pilots. So, while I accept the time cycle, I—

**President Kennedy:** Well, now, let's say you give a pilot . . . I mean, how does he find his way down to a SAM site off of one of those things?

**Taylor:** Well, they'll give him a target folder with all the possible guidance, and so on, to hit the target.

**President Kennedy:** They know how to do that.

**Taylor:** Yes, sir. They're well trained in that procedure.

**McNamara:** Mission folders have already been prepared on all the known targets. The problem is that we don't have the unknown targets, specifically these missile launchers and the nuclear storage, and we won't have that until tomorrow night at the earliest. And it'll be processed photographically on Thursday, interpreted Thursday night, turned into target folders on Friday, and the mission could go Saturday. This is Sweeney's estimate of the earliest possible time for an air strike against the missiles. Decision by the President on Friday, strike on Saturday.

As General Taylor pointed out, if we could have either another day of preparation, which means no strike till Saturday, and/or alternatively more than 24 hours between the time of decision and the first strike, it will run more smoothly.

**President Kennedy:** Right. Well, now, what is it, in the next 24 hours, what is it we need to do in order, if we're going to do, let's first say, one and two by Saturday or Sunday? You're doing everything that is . . .

**McNamara:** Mr. President, we need to do two things, it seems to me.

First, we need to develop a specific strike plan limited to the missiles and the nuclear storage sites, which we have not done. This would be a part of the broader plan, but I think we ought to estimate the minimum number of sorties. Since you have indicated some interest in that possibility, we ought to provide you that option. We haven't done this.

**President Kennedy:** OK.

**McNamara:** But that's an easy job to do.

The second thing we ought to do, it seems to me, as a government, is to consider the consequences. I don't believe we have considered the consequences of any of these actions satisfactorily. And because we haven't considered the consequences, I'm not sure we're taking all the action we ought to take now to minimize those.

I don't know quite what kind of a world we live in after we have struck Cuba, and we've started it. We've put, let's say, 100 sorties in, just for purposes of illustration. I don't think you dare start with less than 100. You have 24 objects. Well, you 24 vehicles, plus 16 launchers, plus a possible nuclear storage site. Now that's the absolute minimum that you would wish to kill. And you couldn't possibly go in after those with less than, I would think, 50 to 100 sorties.

**Taylor:** And you'll miss some.

**McNamara:** And you'll miss some. That's right.

Now after we've launched 50 to 100 sorties, what kind of a world do we live in? How do we stop at that point? I don't know the answer to this. I think tonight State and we ought to work on the consequences of any one of these courses of actions, consequences which I don't believe are entirely clear to any of us.

**Ball:** At any place in the world.

**McNamara:** At any place in the world, George. That's right. I agree with you.

**Taylor:** Mr. President, I should say that the Chiefs and the commanders feel so strongly about the dangers inherent in the limited strike that they would prefer taking *no* military action rather than to take that limited first strike. They feel that it's opening up the United States to attacks which they can't prevent, if we don't take advantage of surprise.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah. But I think the only thing is, the chances of it becoming a much broader struggle are increased as you step up the . . . Talk about the dangers to the United States, once you get into beginning to shoot up those airports. Then you get into a lot of anti-aircraft. And you got a lot of . . . I mean you're running a much more major operation, therefore the dangers of the worldwide effects, which are substantial to the United States, are increased. That's the only argument for it [the limited strike].

I quite agree that, if you're just thinking about Cuba, the best thing to do is to be bold, if you're thinking about trying to get this thing under some degree of control.

**Theodore Sorensen:** In that regard, Mr. President, there is a combination of the plans which might be considered, namely the limited strike

and then the messages, or simultaneously the messages, to Khrushchev and Castro which would indicate to them that this was none other than simply the fulfilling of the statements we have made all along.

**President Kennedy:** Well, I think we . . . in other words, that's a matter we've got to think about tonight. I don't . . .

Let's not let the Chiefs knock us out on this one, General, because I think that what we've got to be thinking about is: If you go into Cuba in the way we're talking about, and taking all the planes and all the rest, then you really haven't got much of an argument against invading it.

**Martin:** It seems to me a limited strike, plus planning for invasion five days afterwards to be taken unless something untoward occurs, makes much more sense.

**Taylor:** Well, I would be . . . personally Mr. President, my inclination is all against the invasion, but nonetheless trying to eliminate as effectively as possible every weapon that can strike the United States.

**President Kennedy:** But you're not for the invasion?

**Taylor:** I would not be, at this moment. No, sir. We don't want to get committed to the degree that shackles us with him in Berlin.

**McNamara:** This is why I say I think we have to think of the consequences here. I would think a forced invasion [an invasion forced the United States], associated with assisting an uprising following an extensive air strike, is a highly probable set of circumstances. I don't know whether you could carry out an extensive air strike of, let's say, the kind we were talking about a moment ago—700 sorties a day for five days—without an uprising in Cuba. I really—

**Alexis Johnson:** Based on this morning's discussion we went into this, talked to some of your people, I believe, a little bit. And we felt an air strike, even of several days, addressed to military targets primarily, would not result in any substantial unrest. People would just stay home and try to keep out of trouble.

**McNamara:** Well, when you're talking about military targets, we have 700 targets here we're talking about. This is a very damned expensive target system.

**Taylor:** That was in that number [*unclear*], Mr. Secretary. But that's not the one I recommended.

**McNamara:** Well, *neither* is the one I'd recommend.

**President Kennedy:** What does that include? Every anti-aircraft gun? What does that include?

**Taylor:** This includes radar and all sorts of things.

**McNamara:** Radar sites, SAM sites, and so on. But whether it's 700 or 200, and it's at least 200 I think—

**Taylor:** More in the order of 200, I would say.

**McNamara:** It's at least 200. You can't carry that out without the danger of an uprising.

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

**Taylor:** Nothing permanent about it.

**Robert Kennedy:** Where are we six months from now? Or that we're in any better position? Or aren't we in a worse position if we go in and knock them out, and say: "Don't do it"? I mean, *obviously*, they're gonna have to do it then.

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

**Robert Kennedy:** Then we're going to have to sink Russian ships. Then we're going to have to sink Russian submarines.

**Taylor:** Right. Right.

**Robert Kennedy:** Now, [think] whether it wouldn't be the argument, if you're going to get into it at all, whether we should just get into it, and get it over with, and take our losses. And if he wants to get into a war over this . . .

Hell, if it's war that's gonna come on this thing, he sticks those kinds of missiles in after the warning, then he's gonna get into a war over six months from now, or a year from now on something.

**McNamara:** Mr. President, this is why I think tonight we ought to put on paper the alternative plans and the probable, and possible consequences thereof, in a way that State and Defense could agree on. Even if we disagree, then 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.

**President Kennedy:** If it doesn't increase very much their strategic strength, why is it—can any Russian expert tell us—why they . . . ? After all Khrushchev demonstrated a sense of caution over Laos. Berlin, he's been cautious—I mean, he hasn't been . . .

**Ball:** Several possibilities, Mr. President. One of them is that he has given us word now that he's coming over in November to the U.N. He may be proceeding on the assumption, and this lack of a sense of apparent urgency would seem to support this, that this isn't going to be discovered at the moment and that, 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 we'll yield some of our interests in Berlin and some arrangement for it. I mean that—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.

**President Kennedy:** Why does he put these in there, though?

**Bundy:** Soviet-controlled nuclear warheads.

**President Kennedy:** 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 goddamn dangerous, I would think.

**Bundy:** Well, we did, Mr. President.

**Alexis Johnson:** We did it. We did it in England.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, but that was five years ago.<sup>40</sup>

**Alexis Johnson:** That's when we were short. We put them in England too when we were short of ICBMs.

**President Kennedy:** But that was during a different period then.

**Alexis Johnson:** But doesn't he realize he has a deficiency of ICBMs vis-à-vis our capacity perhaps? In view of that 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 was missing a golden opportunity to add to his strategic capability.

**Ball:** Yes. I think you look at this possibility that this is an attempt to add to his strategic capabilities.

A second consideration is that it is simply a trading ploy, that he wants this in so that he can—

**Alexis Johnson:** It's not inconsistent. If he can't trade then he's still got the other.

*Various speakers begin talking simultaneously.*

**Bundy:** —political impact in Latin America.

**Carter:** We are now considering these, then, Soviet missiles, a Soviet offensive capability.

**Ball:** You have to consider them Soviet missiles.

---

40. In late 1957, in the wake of fears arising from the Soviet Sputnik flight and concerns about Soviet missiles targeted at Europe, the United States had publicly offered to deploy intermediate-range ballistic missiles, Jupiters, on the territory of its European allies. The Jupiters were not actually deployed to Turkey (and Italy) until 1961–62. A similar type of missile, the Thor, was deployed to England; those are the ones Johnson is talking about.

**Carter:** It seems to me that if we go in there lock, stock, and barrel, we can consider them entirely Cuban.

**Bundy:** Ah, well, what we say for political purposes and what we think are not identical here.

**Ball:** But, I mean, any rational approach to this must be that they are Soviet missiles, because I think Khrushchev himself would never, would never, risk a major war on a fellow as obviously erratic and foolish as Castro.

**Taylor:** His second lieutenant.

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, I want to say, can I say that one other thing is whether we should also think of whether there is some other way we can get involved in this, through Guantánamo Bay or something. Or whether there's some ship that . . . you know, sink the *Maine* again or something.<sup>41</sup>

**Taylor:** We think, Mr. President, that under any of these plans we will probably get an attack on Guantánamo, at least by fire. They have artillery and mortars easily within range, and with any of these actions we take we'll have to give air support to Guantánamo and probably reinforce the garrison.

**President Kennedy:** Well that's why, it seems to me, that if we decide that we are going to be in a position to do this, either [strike options] one and two, Saturday or Sunday, then I would think we would also want to be in a position, depending on what happens, either because of an invasion, attack on Guantánamo, or some other reason, to do the inva—to do the eviction.

**Taylor:** Mr. President, I personally would just urge you not to set a schedule such as Saturday or Sunday—

**President Kennedy:** No I haven't.

**Taylor:** —until all the intelligence that could be . . .

**President Kennedy:** That's right. I just wanted, I thought, we ought to be moving. I don't want to waste any time, though, if we decide that time is not particularly *with* us. I just think we ought to be ready to do something, even if we decide not to do it. I'm not saying we should do it.

**Taylor:** All of this is moving, short of the briefing. We've held back, we've restricted people. . . .

---

41. A reference to the mysterious explosion that sank the USS *Maine* while it was visiting Havana harbor during a period of tension between the United States and Spain over the conditions of Spanish rule in Cuba. Robert Kennedy is echoing the belief that this incident precipitated the U.S. declaration of war that began the Spanish-American War in 1898.



**President Kennedy:** I understand.

What about, now, this invasion? If we were going to launch that, what do you have, what do we have to be doing now so that ten days from now we're in a position to invade, if that was the need?

**Taylor:** I would say that my answer would be largely planning, particularly in the field of mobilization, just what we will want to recreate after we earmark these forces to Cuba.

I might say that air defense measures we're starting to take already. We moved more fighters into the southeastern United States and are gradually improving some of our patrol procedures, under the general guise of preparations for that part of the country. We don't think there'd be any leaks there that might react against our military planning. But I repeat that our defenses have always been weak in that part of the country.

**President Kennedy:** Mr. Secretary, is there anything that, or any of these contingencies, if we go ahead, that . . . the next 24 hours . . . We're going to meet again tomorrow on this in the afternoon. Is there anything . . .

**McNamara:** No, sir. I believe that the military planning has been carried on for a considerable period of time and is well under way. And I believe that all the preparations that we can take without the risk of preparations causing discussion and knowledge of this, either among our public or in Cuba, have been taken and are authorized. All the necessary reconnaissance measures are being taken and are authorized.

The only thing we haven't done, really, is to consider fully these alternatives.

**Bundy:** Our principal problem is to try and imaginatively to think what the world would be like if we do this, and what it will be like if we don't.

**McNamara:** That's exactly right. We ought to work on that tonight.

**Sorensen:** This may be incidental, Mr. President, but if we're going to get the prisoners out, this would be a good time to get them out.<sup>42</sup>

**President Kennedy:** I guess they're not gonna get . . . Well . . .

**Bundy:** You mean, take them out. [*Laughs.*]

---

42. Sorensen was referring to long-standing negotiations between the Kennedy administration and Castro, carried on by intermediaries, to obtain the release of Cuban exiles imprisoned after the failed landing at the Bay of Pigs. The most recent intermediary, lawyer James Donovan, had persuaded Castro to accept some exchange of food and drugs rather than money, but his negotiations were still in progress at the time of the crisis. The negotiations eventually succeeded, and the released prisoners arrived in the United States at the end of 1962.

**Sorensen:** No. What I meant was, if we're gonna trade them out . . .

**President Kennedy:** They're on the Isle of Pines, these prisoners?

**Robert Kennedy:** No, some of them are. They're split up.

**Bundy:** If you can get them out alive, I'd make that choice.

**President Kennedy:** There's no sign of their getting out now, is there? The exchange?

**Robert Kennedy:** No, but they will take a few weeks.

**President Kennedy:** A few weeks.

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah. You know they're having that struggle between the young Cuban leaders and the [unclear] . . .

**Bundy:** We have a list of sabotage options, Mr. President. It's not a very loud noise to raise at a meeting of this sort, but I think it would need your approval. I take it you are in favor of sabotage.

The one question which arises is whether we wish to do this in naval areas, international waters, or in positions which may—mining international waters or mining Cuban waters may hit . . . Mines are very indiscriminate.

**President Kennedy:** Is that what they [the Special Group-Augmented that dealt with covert action against Castro] are talking about? Mining?

**Bundy:** That's one of the items. Most of them relate to infiltration of raiders, and will simply be deniable, internal Cuban activities.

The question that we need guidance from you on is whether you now wish to authorize sabotage which might have its impact on neutrals, or even friendly ships.

**President Kennedy:** I don't think we want to put mines out right now, do we?

**McNamara:** Should wait for 24 hours at least before any [unclear].

**Bundy:** Well, let's put the others into action then in Cuba, the internal ones, not the other ones.

**President Kennedy:** Mr. Vice President, do you have any thoughts? Between [strike options] one and two?

**Vice President Johnson:** I don't think I can add anything that is essential.

**President Kennedy:** Let's see, what time are we going to meet again tomorrow? What is it we want to have by tomorrow from the . . .

We want to have from the Department [of State] tomorrow, in a little bit more concise form, whether there is any kind of a notification we would have to give. How much of a [unclear]?

And, number two, what do you think of these various alternatives we've been talking about.

Three, whether there is any use in bringing this to Khrushchev in the

way of, for example . . . Do we want to, for example . . . Here is Dobrynin now, he's repeated . . .<sup>43</sup>

I've got to go to see Schroeder. Let's meet at . . . why don't we meet at twelve? What time do I get back tomorrow night [from Connecticut]?<sup>44</sup>

**Sorensen:** Reasonably early. Get back about 7:45.

**President Kennedy:** Can we meet here at nine?

**Bundy:** Mr. Secretary, some of us are in trouble with the dinner for Schroeder tomorrow night.

**President Kennedy:** OK. Well, why don't we . . . I don't think we'll have anything by noon tomorrow, will we?

**Bundy:** Do you want to wait until Thursday morning [October 18], Mr. President?

**President Kennedy:** Looks to me like we might as well. Everybody else can meet if they want to, if they need to. Well, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, can call [meetings]—

**McNamara:** I think it'd be very useful to meet, or else stay afterwards tonight for a while.

**Bundy:** It would be a great improvement not to have any more intense White House meetings. The cover will grow awfully thin. If we could meet at the State Department tomorrow . . .

**President Kennedy:** All right. Then I could meet you, Mac, when I get back tomorrow and just as well, whatever the thing is. And then we can meet Thursday morning.

The question is whether . . . I'm going to see Gromyko on Thursday and I think the question that I'd really like to have some sort of a judgment on is whether we ought to do anything with Gromyko, whether we ought to say anything to him, whether we ought to indirectly give him sort of an ultimatum on this matter, or whether we just ought to go ahead without him.<sup>45</sup> It seems to me that he said we'd be . . . The ambassador [Dobrynin] told the attorney general, as he told Bohlen the other day, that they were not going to put these weapons there. Now either he's lying, or he doesn't know.

Whether the Attorney General saw [might see] Dobrynin, not act-

---

43. Anatoly Dobrynin was Soviet ambassador to the United States.

44. President Kennedy was scheduled to see West German foreign minister Gerhard Schroeder on Wednesday morning, 17 October. He was then scheduled to take a brief campaign trip after lunch to Connecticut and return late on Wednesday evening.

45. Andrei Gromyko, foreign minister of the Soviet Union, had just arrived in the United States for a series of meetings.

ing as if we had any information about them, [and] say that: "Of course, they must realize that if this ever does happen that this is going to cause this . . ." Give a very clear indication of what's going to happen.

Now I don't know what would come out of that. Possibly nothing. Possibly this would alert them. Possibly they would reconsider their decision, but I don't think we've had any clear evidence of that, and it would give them . . . We'd lose a week.

**Sorensen:** You mean tell them that . . .

**President Kennedy:** Well, not tell them that we know that they've got it. But merely, in the course of a conversation, Dobrynin, having said that they would never do it . . . The Attorney General, who sees Dobrynin once in a while, would . . .

**Sorensen:** How would we lose a week?

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Sorensen:** How would we lose a week?

**President Kennedy:** Oh, we would be . . . what Bobby would be saying to them, in short, is: "If these ever come up, that we're going to do . . . the President stated that we would have to take action. And this could cause the most far reaching consequences." On the possibility that that might cause them to reconsider their action.

I don't know whether he [Dobrynin] is, they are, aware of what I said. I can't understand their viewpoint, if they're aware of what we said at the press conferences [of September 4 and 13]. As I say, I've never . . . I don't think there's any record of the Soviets ever making this direct a challenge ever, really, since the Berlin blockade.

**Bundy:** We have to be clear, Mr. President, that they made this decision, in all probability, before you made your statements. This is an important element in the calendar.

**Dillon:** They didn't change it.

**Bundy:** No, indeed they didn't change it. But they . . . It's quite a different thing.

**Dillon:** There was either a contravenance on one . . .

**Bundy:** My, I wouldn't bet a *cookie* that Dobrynin doesn't know a bean about this.

**President Kennedy:** You think he *does* know.

**Robert Kennedy:** He didn't know. He didn't even know [*unclear*], in my judgment.

**Carter:** Oh, yes. There's evidence of sightings in late August, I think, and early September, of some sort.

**Gilpatric:** It seems to me, Mr. President, in your public presentation

simultaneous or subsequent to an action, your hand is strengthened somewhat if the Soviets have lied to you, either privately or in public.

**Bundy:** I'll agree to that.

**Alexis Johnson:** And therefore, without knowing, if you ask Gromyko, or if Bobby asks Dobrynin again, or if some other country could get the Soviets to say publicly in the U.N.: "No, we have no offensive . . ."

**Robert Kennedy:** But TASS, of course, said they wouldn't.

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

**Unidentified:** That was a while back.

**Robert Kennedy:** —said that they wouldn't send offensive weapons to Cuba.

**Bundy:** Yeah, the TASS statement I read this morning. . . . No, the TASS statement. It's . . .

**Dillon:** We don't know if Khrushchev's in control [*unclear*].

**Bundy:** No, we don't have any detail on that.

**President Kennedy:** Well, what about my . . . the question would be therefore what I might say to Gromyko about this matter, if you want me to just get in the record, by asking him whether they plan to do it.

**Bundy:** Putting it the other way around, saying that we are putting great weight upon the assurance of his.

**Ball:** Well, I think what you get is to call their attention to the statement that you've made on this. And that this is your public commitment and you are going to have to abide by this, and you just want assurances from him that they're living up to what they've said, that they're not going to . . .

**President Kennedy:** Well, let's say he said: "Well, we're not planning to."

**Bundy:** [*reading from TASS statement of September 11*] "The government of the Soviet Union also authorized TASS to state that there is no need for the Soviet Union to shift its weapons for the repulsion of aggression for a retaliatory blow to any other country, for instance, Cuba. Our nuclear weapons are so powerful in their explosive force, the Soviet Union has so powerful rockets to carry these nuclear warheads, that there is no need to search for sites for them beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union."

**President Kennedy:** What date was that?

**Bundy:** September 11th.

**Dillon:** When they were all there.

**Carter:** Or certainly on the way.

**President Kennedy:** But isn't that . . . But, as I say, we haven't . . . really ever had a case where it's been quite this. . . . After all, they backed

down in [supporting the] Chinese Communists in '58. They didn't go into Laos. Agreed to a cease-fire there.<sup>46</sup> We haven't had [unclear].

*Several speakers begin conversing simultaneously.*

**Bundy:** I was troubled before by the absence of a nuclear storage site. That's very queer.

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Bundy:** I'm as puzzled as Bob is by the absence of a nuclear storage site.

**Taylor:** We don't know enough about it yet, and we [unclear] . . .

**Bundy:** I understand that. We may learn a lot overnight.

**Martin:** Isn't it puzzling, also, there are no evidence of any troops protecting the sites?

**Taylor:** Well there are troops there. At least there are tents, presumably they have some personnel.

**Bundy:** But they look like [unclear]. It's as if you would walk over the fields and into those vans.

**President Kennedy:** Well it's a goddamn mystery to me. I don't know enough about the Soviet Union, but if anybody can tell me any other time since the Berlin blockade where the Russians have given us so clear a provocation, I don't know when it's been. Because they've been awfully cautious, really. The Russians . . . I've never . . .

Now, maybe our mistake was in not saying some time before this summer, that if they do this we're going to act. Maybe they'd gone in so far that it's . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah, but then why did they put that [TASS] statement in?

**President Kennedy:** This was following my statement, wasn't it?

**Robert Kennedy:** September 11th.

**President Kennedy:** When was my statement?

[to General Taylor, who had started to speak] What?

**Taylor:** [From the] ground up. Well, I was asking Pat [Carter] if they had any way of getting quick intelligence. That means somebody in there and out of there so we can really take a look at the ground.

**Ball:** No, this [TASS statement] is two days before your statement [but seven days after the White House statement of September 4].

---

46. President Kennedy was referring to the most recent of several confrontations in the Taiwan Straits, in 1958, when China shelled offshore islands under Taiwan's control and threatened to invade Taiwan, then linked by a mutual defense treaty with the United States. He was also referring to a Communist insurgency against a pro-Western government in Laos that became the recipient of significant U.S. aid. Heading off the threat of direct U.S. intervention, a negotiated cease-fire in Laos took effect in May 1961, followed by negotiations about neutralizing the country.

**Carter:** We can try it. Your problems about exfiltration and your problems with training an individual as to what to look for are not handled in 24 hours.

**McNamara:** A better way would be to send in a low-flying airplane, and we have today put those on alert. But we would recommend against using the low-flying planes until shortly before the intention to strike.

**Taylor:** That was considered by the commanders today, and they're all of the opinion that the loss of surprise there was more serious than the information we'd get from that.

**Ball:** I would think it would be very valuable to have them go in shortly before the strike, just to build the evidence. I mean, then you've got pictures that really show what was there. . . .

**President Kennedy:** Now with these great demonologists, did Bohlen and Thompson, did they have an explanation of why the Russians are sticking it to us quite so . . . ?

I wonder what we're going to say up in Connecticut. We expect the domestic [unclear]. [Chuckles.] Don't care for the . . .

*Overlapping discussions about schedules for Wednesday, October 17, follow.*

**President Kennedy:** We're going to be discussing [unclear] budget [in a Cabinet meeting on October 18].

What about Schroeder? Do I have anything we want to say to Schroeder?<sup>47</sup>

**Bundy:** We haven't a lot on that, Mr. President, which we'll have for you early in the morning. I don't think it's very complicated. The big issue that has come up is Schroeder makes a very strong case for refusing visas on the ground that he thinks that that would undermine morale in Berlin in a very dangerous way. I think that's the principal issue that's between us.

**President Kennedy:** I wonder if we could get somebody to give me something about what our position should be on that.

**Bundy:** You want that? Yeah, very happy to. You want it tonight?

**President Kennedy:** No, no. Just in the morning.

*The meeting is breaking up. There are more fragments of simultaneous conversations.*

**President Kennedy:** That's very good, General. Thank you.

---

47. The principal subject at the forthcoming meeting with Schroeder was to be the contingency that the Soviets or East Germans might require formal visas for entry to East Germany or East Berlin. For the West Germans this prospect skirted too close to diplomatic recognition of the East German regime.

**Carter:** Mr. McCone is coming in tonight.

*Fragments of other discussions are heard. Someone mentions a man named Riley, possibly Rear Admiral Riley, director of the Joint Staff, who is waiting for McNamara, who answers: "Is he in Mac's office? Yeah I'll go down to see him." At the same time Carter is talking to President Kennedy.*

**Carter:** I would suggest that we get into this hot water partly because of this.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah. I want to talk to him in the morning. I'd like to just debrief [*unclear*] Mr. McCone [*unclear*] General Eisenhower.

**Bundy:** He won't be . . . Does he get back tonight?

**Carter:** Coming in tonight, yes, sir.

**Bundy:** Could you have him come in in the morning?

**Carter:** I'm going in to meet him in the morning.

**Bundy:** Could he come in then at 9:30?

**Carter:** Sure.

*President Kennedy leaves the Cabinet Room. The recording machine is still running as McNamara, Bundy, Ball, and a few others begin their own informal discussion of the crisis issues.*

**McNamara:** Could we agree to meet, midafternoon?

**Ball:** Any time you say, Bob.

**McNamara:** And then guide our work tonight and tomorrow on that schedule? Why don't we say three? This'll give us some time to cover what we've done, and then do some more tomorrow night if necessary [*unclear*].

**Bundy:** Would it be disagreeable to make it a little earlier? I ought to get to a four [o'clock] meeting with Schroeder.

**McNamara:** I thought he said two, I think. We have really plenty of time between now and then. At two P.M. we'll do it at State.

Now, could we agree what we're gonna do? I would suggest that—

Max, I would suggest that we, and I don't . . . In fact, I know [*unclear*]. [*Taylor replies.*]

I would suggest that we divide the series of targets up by, in effect, numbers of DGZs and numbers of sorties required to take those out, for a series of alternatives starting only with the missiles and working up through the nuclear storage sites and the MiGs and the SAMs, and so on, so we can say: "This target system would take so many aiming points, and so many objects would take so many sorties to knock out."<sup>48</sup>

Not because I think these are reasonable alternatives—

---

48. The DGZs are Designated Ground Zeros, the precise aim points for explosives.



**Bundy:** They're not really going to be realistic, even, but they give—

**McNamara:** —but they give us an order of magnitude to [give to] the President, to get some idea of this. And this we can do, and this can be done very easily.

But the most important thing we need to do is this appraisal of the world after any one of these situations, in great detail.

**Bundy:** Sure, that's right.

**McNamara:** And I think probably this is something State would have to do, and I would strongly urge we put it on paper. And we, I'll, be happy to stay now or look at it early in the morning, or something like that, in order that we may inject disagreement if we—

**Bundy:** What I would suggest is that someone be deputied to do a piece of paper which really is: What happens?

I think the margin is between whether we [do the] take out the missiles only strike, or take a lot of air bases. This is tactical, within a decision to take military action. It doesn't overwhelmingly, it may substantially, but it doesn't overwhelmingly change the world.

I think any military action *does* change the world. And I think *not* taking action changes the world. And I think these are the two worlds that we need to look at.

**McNamara:** I'm very much inclined to agree, but I think we have to make that point: Within the military action [there is] a gradation.

**Bundy:** I agree, I agree. Oh, many gradations. And it can have major effects. I don't mean to exaggerate that now.

The question is: How to get ahead with that, and whether . . . I would think, myself, that the appropriate place to make this preliminary analysis is at the Department of State. I think the rest of us ought to spend the evening, really, to some advantage separately, trying to have our own views of this. And I think we should meet in order, at least, to trade pieces of paper, before 2:00. Tomorrow morning, if that's agreeable.

**McNamara:** Why don't we meet tomorrow morning? And with pieces of paper, from State, and—maybe you don't feel this is reasonable, but I would strongly urge that, tonight, State—

**Bundy:** Well, who is State's de facto [person in charge for this]? Are you all tied up tonight? Or what?

**Ball:** No, no. The situation is that the only one who's tied up tonight is the Secretary, and he is coming down at eleven from his dinner to look at what we will have done in the meantime.

**Martin:** Alex [Johnson] is back waiting for him.

**Ball:** Oh, good. We'll have Alex; we'll have Tommy [Llewellyn Thompson]. Well, we've kept this to our . . . this has been . . .

**Bundy:** But you have Tommy? I . . .

**Martin:** I talked to him this afternoon some.

**Bundy:** Do you have any . . . ? I'd be fascinated by this, the first sense of how *he* sees this.

**Martin:** Well the argument was really between Hilsman's demonologists, who were already cut in because they [*unclear*], who thought this was a low-risk operation.<sup>49</sup> Tommy thought it was a high-risk operation by the Soviets, in other words, that they were taking real chances. The other people rather thought that they probably had miscalculated us and thought this wasn't a risky operation. You know, from the way they were going at it, either impatient like the SAM sites hadn't been set up to protect it—the various factors which suggest to them that they didn't think anything was going to happen. Tommy leaned the other way.

**McNamara:** Could I suggest that tonight we actually draft a paper, and it start this way:

Just a paragraph or two of the knowns. The knowns are that the SAMs are here. Let's say, the probable knowns, because we're not certain of any of them. The probabilities are the SAM system isn't working today. This is important. The probabilities are that these missiles are not operational today. The probabilities are that they won't be operational in less than *x* days, although we can't be certain. Pat said two weeks. I'm not so sure I'd put it that far. But there's just two or three of these knowns.

I would put in there, by the way, the number of [*unclear*] they're unprotected. Another known I'd put in is that they have about 50*x* MiG-15s, -17s, and -19s. That they have certain crated—I've forgotten—say 10*x* crated MiG-21s, only one of which we believe to have been assembled. That they have *x* crated IL-28s, none of which we believe to have been assembled. This is, in a sense, the problem we face there.

**Bundy:** You should state, or the [Central Intelligence] Agency should state the military knowns.

**McNamara:** Well, we can do this in just ten seconds, a very, very simple statement, I think. But then I would follow that by the alternatives, not all of them, but the more likely alternatives that we consider open to us. And I would hope we could stay just a second here and see if we could sketch them out now.

**Bundy:** I'd like to throw one in of a military kind—shall we get them in order, and you [*unclear*]?

---

49. Roger Hilsman was assistant secretary of state for intelligence and research. A demonologist is a Kremlinologist, or an expert on the Soviet Union.

I would like to throw one in that I do not think the army and the Chiefs would normally consider. And that is the possibility of genuinely making a quite large-scale strike, followed by a drop, followed by a recovery of the people dropped to get these things, and not simply to increase the chance that we've hit most of them. There's always incompleteness in a military, in an *air*, operation. But if these things are what the pictures show, you could drop a battalion of paratroopers and get them. Now what you do with a battalion, I grant you, is a hell of a problem.

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

**McNamara:** This, as opposed to an air attack on them?

**Bundy:** This would be supplementary to an air attack. I mean, how are you gonna know that you've got them? And if you haven't got them, what have you done?

**Ball:** Well this, of course, raises the question of: Having gotten this set, what happens to the set that arrives next week?

**McNamara:** Oh, I think . . . Let me answer Mac's question first. How do we know we've got them? We will have photo recon, military, with the strike. Sweeney specifically plans this and—

**Bundy:** Proving a negative is a hell of a job.

**McNamara:** Pardon me?

**Bundy:** Proving a negative is a hell of a job.

**Carter:** Yeah, but the [*unclear*] on the ground very well [*unclear*], Mac.

**Bundy:** It's true.

**McNamara:** Terrible risk to put them [paratroopers] in there.

**Bundy:** I agree, I think it's probably a bad idea, but it troubles me [*unclear*].

**McNamara:** I think the risk troubles me. It's too great in relation to the risk of not knowing whether we get them.

**Bundy:** Well . . .

**McNamara:** But, in any case, this is a small variant of one of the plans.

**Bundy:** That's right, it's a minor variant of one of the plans.

**McNamara:** It seems to me that there are some major alternatives here. I don't think we discussed them fully enough today. And I'd like to see them laid out on the paper, if State agrees.

The first is what I still call the political approach. Let me say it: a non-military action. It doesn't start with one and it isn't going to end with one. And I, for that reason, call it a political approach. And I say it isn't going to end with one because, once you start this political approach, I don't think you're going to *have* any opportunity for a military operation.

**Ball:** It becomes *very* difficult.

**McNamara:** But at least I think we ought to put it down there.

**Ball:** You're right.

**Bundy:** And it should be worked out. I mean, what is the maximum—

**Unidentified:** Your ride is waiting downstairs.

**Ball:** Very good, thank you.

**McNamara:** Yeah, it should definitely be worked out. What, exactly, does it involve? And what are the chances of success of it? They're not zero. They're plus, I think.

**Gilpatric:** We did an outline this morning along these lines.

**McNamara:** All right. That's [alternative] one, anyway.

**Bundy:** But, do you see, it's not just the chances of success. It ought to be examined in terms of the pluses and minuses of nonsuccess, because there is such a thing as making this thing pay off in ways that are of some significance, even though we don't act, or go with that.

**McNamara:** I completely agree with that. And this is my second alternative, in particular, and I want to come to in a moment. But the first one, I completely agree it isn't . . . I phrased it improperly. It's not the chances of success. It's the results that are following this [*unclear*].

**Bundy:** Following this. Yep.

**McNamara:** Now, the second alternative, I'd like to discuss just a second because we haven't discussed it fully today, and I alluded to it a moment ago.

I'll be quite frank. I don't think there *is* a military problem there. This is my answer to Mac's question—

**Bundy:** That's my honest [opinion?] too.

**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 if Cuba should possess a capacity to carry out offensive actions against the U.S., the U.S. would act.

**Unidentified:** That's right.

**Unidentified:** You can't get around that one.

**McNamara:** Now it's that problem. This is a domestic political problem. In the announcement we didn't say we'd go in and not [that] we'd kill them. We said we'd act. Well, how will we act? Well, we want to act to prevent their use. That's really the [*unclear*].

Now, how do we act to prevent their use? Well, first place, we carry out open surveillance, so we know what they're doing. At 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.

**Ball:** There are two kinds of blockade: a blockade which stops ships from coming in; and simply a seizure—I mean simply a search.

**McNamara:** A search, that's right.

**Ball:** Yeah.

**Martin:** Well, it would be the 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?

**Martin:** And you have to remove what you're looking for if you find it.

**McNamara:** Absolutely. Absolutely. And then an ultimatum. 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 a full nuclear strike.

Now this alternative doesn't seem to be a very acceptable one. But wait until you work on the others.

**Bundy:** That's right. [*Laughter.*]

**McNamara:** This is the problem, but I've thought something about the others this afternoon.

**Ball:** Bob, let me ask you one thing that seems slightly irrelevant. What real utility would there be in the United States if we ever actually captured one of these things and could examine it and take it apart?

**McNamara:** Not very much. No, no.

**Ball:** Would we learn anything about the technology that would be meaningful?

**McNamara:** No, no. I don't . . . Pat may disagree with me. . . .

**Carter:** No.

**McNamara:** Well, in any case, that's an alternative [the blockade]. I'd like to see it expressed and discussed.

**Martin:** If it takes two hours to screw a [war]head on, as a guy [Sidney Graybeal] said this morning, two to four hours. . . .

**McNamara:** Oh, by the way, that should be one of the knowns in this initial paragraph.

**Martin:** Yeah. They've got all night. How are we gonna surveil them during the night? I think because there are some gaps in the surveillance.

**McNamara:** Oh, well, it's really . . . yes. It isn't the surveillance, it's the ultimatum that is the key part in this.

**Martin:** Yeah.

**McNamara:** And really, what I tried to do was develop a little package that meets the action requirement of that paragraph I read. Because, as I suggested, I don't believe it's primarily a military problem. It's primarily a domestic political problem.

**Carter:** Well, as far as the American people are concerned, action means military action, period.

**McNamara:** Well, we have a blockade. Search and removal of offensive weapons entering Cuba. Mac again, I don't want to argue for this because I don't—

**Carter:** No. I think it's an alternative.

**McNamara:** —think it's 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.

**Ball:** Now, one of the things to look at is whether the actual operation of a blockade isn't a greater involvement almost than a military action.

**McNamara:** Might well be, George.

**Bundy:** I think so.

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

**Ball:** No.

**Carter:** It's a series of single, unrelated acts, not by surprise. This coming in there, on a Pearl Harbor [kind of surprise attack], just frightens the hell out of me as to what goes beyond. The Board of National Estimates have been working on this ever since . . .

**Bundy:** What goes beyond what?

**Carter:** 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. There's a whole hell of a lot of things . . .

**Bundy:** Are they working on a powerful reaction in your [agency]?

**Carter:** Yes, sir. Which goes back to [what] Mr. Secretary—

**Bundy:** Good.

**Martin:** Because this is the central point.

**McNamara:** Well, that then takes me into the third category of action. I'd lump them all in the third category. I call it overt military action of varying degrees of intensity, ranging . . .

And if you feel there's any difference in them, in the kind of a world we have after the varying degrees of intensity, you have to divide category three into subcategories by intensity, and probable effect on the world thereafter. And I think there is, at least in the sense of the Cuban

uprising, which I happen to believe is a most important element of category three. It applies to some elements, some categories in category three, but not all.

But, in any event, what kind of a world do we live in? In Cuba what action do we take? What do we expect Castro will be doing after you attack these missiles? Does he survive as a political leader? Is he overthrown? Is he stronger, weaker? How will he react?

How will the Soviets react? What can . . . How could Khrushchev afford to accept this action without some kind of rebuttal? I don't think he can accept it without some rebuttal. It may not be a substantial rebuttal, but it's gonna have to be some. Where? How do we react in relation to it?

What happens if we do mobilize? How does this affect our allies' support of us in relation to Berlin? Well, you know far better than I the problems. But it would seem to me if we could lay this out tonight, and then meet at a reasonable time in the morning to go over a tentative draft, discuss it, and then have another draft for some time in the afternoon . . .

**Ball:** One kind of planning, Bob, that we didn't explicitly talk about today, which is to look at the points of vulnerability around the world, not only in Berlin, not only in Turkey.

**McNamara:** Sure. Iran.

**Ball:** Iran and all of them.

**McNamara:** And Korea.

**Ball:** What precautionary measures ought to be taken.

**McNamara:** Yes, yes.

**Ball:** These are both military and political.

**McNamara:** Exactly. And we call it a worldwide alert. Under that heading we've got a whole series of precautionary measures that we think should be taken. All of our forces should be put on alert. But, beyond that, mobilization, redeployment, movement, and so on.

Well, would it be feasible to meet at some time in the morning? Mac, what would you think?

**Bundy:** I ought to join the President for the meeting with Schroeder, and I'll be involved in getting started for that from about 9:30 on. I could meet any time before that.

**Carter:** Well, now, the President was going to see Mr. McCone at 9:30.

**Bundy:** That's right.

**McNamara:** Well, why don't we meet at 8:30.

**Bundy:** Fine.

**McNamara:** Let's try that.

**Bundy:** OK.

**McNamara:** Now, there's not much we can do to help. I'd be happy to, though, if you think of anything we can do. We'll go to work tonight and get these numbers of sorties, by target systems, laid out. [Admiral] Riley's up in Mac's office and I'll go down there now and get them started on it.

**Carter:** I think Mr. McCone could be helpful to you all in the morning.

**McNamara:** Well, I think he should try to stay here at 8:30.

**Carter:** He's been worrying about this for a heck of a long time.

**Ball:** Sure.

This small informal meeting then breaks up. The recording picks up a few fragments of conversation. Bundy and Ball talk about eating supper together. Bundy and Ball apparently refer to the secretarial problems that arose from informing so few people about the crisis. Then there is silence. After a few minutes a man comes in to clean the room. Evelyn Lincoln walks in, speaks briefly to him, and apparently she turns off the machine.

Everyone was still trying to conceal the start of the crisis by appearing to maintain their known schedules. President Kennedy went to another farewell dinner for Bohlen, hosted by columnist Joseph Alsop. At the dinner he drew Bohlen aside and they had a long, animated, private conversation. Kennedy reportedly asked Bohlen if he could stay, but Bohlen feared that delaying his long-planned departure for Paris might arouse unwanted notice and comment.

Meetings resumed that evening at the State Department, winding up in Rusk's office at about 11:00 P.M. McNamara slept at the Pentagon that night. McCone returned to Washington.

### Wednesday, October 17, 1962

As arranged on Tuesday, Kennedy's advisers had met at 8:30 Wednesday morning, October 17, in a conference room on the seventh floor of the State Department. McCone, now back in Washington, joined them. There, Ball reiterated his opposition to any military action, expressing doubt that the Soviet leaders really understood what they had done. Thompson