

ExComm meeting, October 16, 1962

The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962

Executive Committee Meeting Excerpts

Participants:

McGeorge Bundy
assistant to the president for
national security affairs

George Ball

under secretary of state

C. Douglas Dillon
secretary of the Treasury

Lyndon B. Johnson
vice president

John F. Kennedy
president

Robert F. Kennedy
attorney general

Arthur Lundahl
director, National Photographic
Interpretation Center

Edwin Martin

assistant secretary of state for
inter-American affairs

Gen. Maxwell Taylor

chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

Marshall Carter
deputy director, Central
Intelligence Agency

Robert McNamara

secretary of defense

Dean Rusk
secretary of state

Sidney Graybeal
Central Intelligence Agency
and other unidentified participants

Washington, October 16, 1962, 11:50 a.m.

[McGeorge Bundy had informed the president about the U-2
photographs of the missile sites at 8:45 a.m. October 16, and
Kennedy immediately called for a meeting of his principal

advisers at 11:45 a.m.]

John Kennedy: Secretary Rusk?

Dean Rusk: Yes. [Well?], Mr. President, this is a, of course, a widely serious development. It's one that we, all of us, had not really believed the Soviets could, uh, carry this far. Uh,

they, uh, seemed to be denying that they were going to establish bases of their own but it's plain [unintelligible] is a

Soviet base, thus making it essentially a Cuban point of view. The Cubans couldn't deal with it anyhow, so ... Now, um, I do think we have to set in motion a chain of events that

will eliminate this base. I don't think we can sit still. The questioning becomes whether we do it by sudden, unannounced strike of some sort, or we, uh, build up the crisis to the point where the other side has to consider very

seriously about giving in, or, or even the Cubans

themselves, uh, take some, take some action on this. The thing that I'm, of course, very conscious of is that there is no such thing, I think, as unilateral action by the United States.

It's so eminently involved with 42 allies and confrontation in many places, that any action that we take, uh, will greatly

increase the risks of direct action involving, uh, our other alliances and our other forces in other parts of the world. Um, so I think we, we have to think very hard about two major, uh, courses of action as alternatives. One is the quick strike. At the point where we make the, that is the, uh, overwhelming,

overriding necessity to take all the risks that are involved doing that. I don't think this in itself would require an invasion of Cuba. I think that with or without such an invasion, in other

words if we make it clear that, uh, what we're doing is eliminating this particular base or any other such base that

is established. We ourselves are not moved to general war, we're simply doing what we said we would do if they took certain action. Uh, or we're going to decide that this is the time to eliminate the Cuban problem by actually eliminating the island.

The other would be, if we have a few days—from the military point of view, if we have the whole time—uh, then I would

think that, uh, there would be another course of action, a combination of things that, uh, we might wish to consider.

Um, first, uh, that we, uh, stimulate the OAS [Organization of American States] procedure immediately for prompt action to make it quite clear that the entire hemisphere considers that

the Rio Pact has been violated that acts, whatever actions we take in, under the terms of the Rio Pact. The OAS could constitute itself an organ of consultation promptly, although maybe, it may take two or three days to get, uh, instructions from governments and things of that sort. The OAS could, I

suppose, at any moment, uh, take action to insist to the Cubans that an OAS inspection, uh, team be permitted to come and, itself, look directly at these sites, provide assurance to the hemisphere. That will undoubtedly be turned down, but it will be another step in building up the, uh,

building a position.

I think also that we ought to consider getting some word to

Castro, perhaps through the Canadian ambassador in Havana or through, uh, his representative at the U.N. Uh, I think perhaps the Canadian ambassador would be the best, the better channel to get to Castro priv-, privately and tell him that, uh, this is no longer support for Cuba, that Cuba is being

victimized here, and that, uh, the Soviets are preparing Cuba
for destruction or betrayal.

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

And I think there are certain military, um, uh, actions that we
could, we might well want to take straight away. First, to, uh,
to call up, uh, highly selective units no more than 150,000.

Unless we feel that it's better, more desirable to go to a
general national emergency so that we have complete
freedom of action. If we announce, at the time that we
announce this development—and I think we do have to
announce this development some time this week—uh, we
announce that, uh, we are conducting a surveillance of Cuba,
over Cuba, and we will enforce our right to do so. We reject
the mission of secrecy in this hemisphere in any matters of
this sort. We, we reinforce our forces in Guantanamo. We
reinforce our forces in the southeastern part of the United
States—whatever is necessary from the military point of view
to be able to give, to deliver an overwhelming strike at any of
these installations, including the SAM sites. And, uh, also to
take care of any, uh, MIGs or bombers that might make a
pass at Miami or at the United States. Build up heavy forces,
uh, if those are not already in position.

That, uh, we then would move openly and vigorously into the,

into the guerrilla field, and, uh, create maximum confusion on the island, uh, won't be too squeamish at this point about the overtness, the covert counter [unintelligible] of what is being done.

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

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

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

But I think that, by and large, there are, there are these two broad alternatives: one, the quick strike; the other, to alert our

allies and Mr. Khrushchev that there is utterly serious crisis in the making here, and that, uh ... Mr. Khrushchev may not himself really understand that or believe that at this point. I think we'll be facing a situation that could well lead to general war; that we have an obligation to do what has to be done but do it in a way that gives, uh, everybody a chance to, uh, pull away from it down before it gets too hard. Those are my, my reactions of this morning, Mr. President. I naturally need to think about this very hard for the next several hours, uh, what I and what my colleagues at the State Department can do about it.

Robert 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, uh, foundations for our further thinking. My first is that if we are to conduct an air strike against these installations, or against any part of Cuba, we must agree now that we will schedule that prior to the time these missile sites become operational. I'm not prepared to say when that will be, but I think it is extremely important that our talk and our discussion be founded on this premise: that any air strike will be planned to take place prior to the time they become operational. Because, if they become operational before the

air strike, I do not believe we can state we can knock them out before they can be launched; and if they're launched there is almost certain to be, uh, chaos in part of the east coast or the area, uh, in a radius of six hundred to a thousand miles from Cuba.

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

Now, what kinds of military action are we capable of carrying out and what may be some of the consequences? Uh, we could carry out an air strike within a matter of days. We would be ready for the start of such an air strike within, within a matter of days. If it were absolutely essential, it could be done almost literally within a matter of hours. I believe the chiefs would

prefer that it be deferred for a matter of days, but we are prepared for that quickly. The air strike could continue for a matter of days following the initial day, if necessary. Uh, presumably there would be some political discussions taking place either just before the air strike or both before and during.

In any event, we would be prepared, following the air strike, for an air, invasion, both by air and by sea. 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. Uh, I would think of the mobilization coming not before the air strike but either concurrently with or somewhat following, say possibly five days afterwards, depending upon the possible invasion requirements.

The character of the mobilization would be such that it could be carried out in its first phase at least within the limits of the

authority granted by Congress. There might have to be a second phase, and then it would require a declaration of a

national emergency.

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

choice.

Speaker?: Almost too [unintelligible] to Cuba.

Speaker?: Yes.

Maxwell Taylor: Uh, we're impressed, Mr. President, with the great importance of getting a, a strike with all the benefit of surprise, uh, which would mean ideally that we would have all the missiles that are in Cuba above ground where we can take them out. Uh, that, that desire runs counter to the strong point the Secretary made if the other optimum would be to get every missile before it could, becomes operational. Uh, practically, I think the, our knowledge of the timing of the readiness is going to be so, so, uh, difficult that we'll never have the, the exact

permanent, uh, the perfect timing. What we'd like to do is to look at this new photography, I think—and take any additional—

and try to get the, the layout of the targets in as near an optimum, uh, position as possible, and then take 'em out without any warning whatsoever. That does not preclude, I don't think, Mr. Secretary, some of the things you've been talking about. It's a little hard to say in terms of time how much I'm discussing. But we must do a good job the first time we go in there, uh, pushing a 100 percent just as far, as closely as we can with our, with our strike. I'm having all the responsible planners in this afternoon, Mr. President, at four o'clock, to talk this out with 'em and get their best judgment.

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

all. ... And also a reinforcement of Guantanamo and evacuation of dependents. So, really, the, in point of time, I'm,

I'm thinking in terms of three phases.

One, a, an initial pause of some sort while we get completely ready and get, get the right posture on the part of the target, so we can do the best job. Then, virtually concurrently, an air strike against, as the Secretary said, missiles, airfields, uh,

unclear sites that we know of. At the same time, naval blockade. At the same time, reinforce Guantanamo and evacuate the dependents. I'd then start this continuous reconnaissance, the list that you had, continue over Cuba.

Then, then the decision can be made as we, as we're mobilizing, uh, with the air strike as to whether we invade or

not. I think that's the hardest question militarily in the whole business—one which we should look at very closely before we get our feet in that deep mud in Cuba.

Dean Rusk: There are st-, one or two things, Mr. President, uh.

Gromyko asked to see you Thursday. Uh, it may be of some interest to know what he says about this, if he says anything. He may be bringing a message on this subject. Uh, but that ... I just want to remind you that you are seeing him and that may be relevant to this conflict. I'm not suggesting that necessarily, that you delay it or anything else you have to do at this point.

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

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

Dean Rusk: Yes, [unintelligible] ...

Robert McNamara: If we saw a warhead on the site and we knew that that launcher was capable of launching that warhead, I would ... Frankly, I would strongly urge against the air attack, to be quite frank about it, because I think the danger to this country in relation to the gain that would accrue would

be excessive, uh, ... 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.

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

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

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

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

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

Robert 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 airplanes are.

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

Robert McNamara: Well, we are, Mac ...

McGeorge Bundy: ... air complex? [Appears to be a repeat of the words above.]

Robert McNamara: ... because we are fearful of these MIG 21s. We don't know where they are. We don't know what they're capable of. If there are nuclear warheads associated with the launchers, you must assume there will be nuclear warheads associated with aircraft. Even if there are not nuclear warheads associated with aircraft, you must assume that those aircraft have high explosive potential. We have a serious air defense problem. We're not prepared to report to you exactly, uh, 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, a very heavy price to pay in U.S. lives for the, the damage we did to Cuba.

Dean Rusk: Still, about why the Soviets are doing this, um, Mr.

McCone suggested some weeks ago that one thing Mr. Khrushchev may have in mind is that, uh, uh, he knows that we have a substantial nuclear superiority, but he also knows that we don't really live under fear of his nuclear weapons to the extent that, uh, he has to live under fear of ours. Also we have nuclear weapons nearby, in Turkey and places like that. Um. ...

John Kennedy: How many weapons do we have in Turkey?

Maxwell Taylor?: We have Jupiter missiles ...

McGeorge Bundy?: Yeah. We have how many?

Robert McNamara?: About fifteen, I believe it is.

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

Speaker?: [unintelligible]

Dean Rusk: But then there are also delivery vehicles that are,
could easily ...

Robert McNamara: Aircraft.

Dean Rusk: ... be moved through the air, aircraft and so forth.

Dean Rusk: Route 'em through Turkey.

Dean Rusk: Um, and that Mr. McCone expresses the view that Khrushchev may feel that it's important for us to learn about living under medium-range missiles, and he's doing that to sort of balance that, uh, that political, psychological plank. I think also that, uh, Berlin is, uh, very much involved in this. Um, for the first time, I'm beginning really to wonder whether maybe Mr. Khrushchev is entirely rational about Berlin. We've kind of talked about his obsession with it. And I think we have to, uh, keep our eye on that element. But, uh, they may be thinking that they can either bargain Berlin and Cuba against each other, or that they could provoke us into a kind of action in Cuba which would give an umbrella for them to take action with respect to Berlin. In other words like the Suez-Hungary combination. If they could provoke us into taking the first overt action, then the world would be confused and they would have, uh, what they would consider to be justification for making a move somewhere else. But, uh, I must say I don't really see the rationality of, uh, the Soviets pushing it this far unless they

grossly misunderstand the importance of Cuba to this country.

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

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

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

McGeorge Bundy: Yeah. They may mean Okinawa.

Speaker?: Right.

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

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

Robert McNamara: No.

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

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

McGeorge Bundy: Yeah.

Robert McNamara: ... and therefore, while I'm not suggesting how we should handle this, I think this is one of the most important actions we should take: to ascertain the location of the nuclear warheads for these missiles. Later in the discussion we can revert back to this. There are several alternative ways of approaching it.

John Kennedy: Doug, do you have any ...

C. Douglas Dillon: No. The only thing I'd, would say is that, uh, this alternative course of, of warning, getting, uh, public opinion, uh, OAS action and telling people in NATO and everything like that, would appear to me to have the danger of, uh, getting us wide out in the open and forcing the Russians to, uh, Soviets to take a, a position that if anything was done, uh, they would, uh, have to retaliate. Whereas, uh, a, a quick action, uh, with a statement at the same time saying this is all there is to it, might give them a chance to, uh, back off and not do anything. Meanwhile, I think that the chance of getting through this thing without a Russian reaction is greater under a quick, uh, strike than, uh, building the whole thing up to a, a climax then going through. ... It will be a lot of debate on it.

Dean Rusk: That is, of course, a possibility, but, uh. ...

McGeorge Bundy: The difficulties of—I, I share the secretary of the Treasury's feeling a little bit—the difficulties of organizing the OAS and NATO; the amount of noise we would get from our allies saying that, uh, they can live with Soviet MRBMs, why can't we; uh, the division in the alliance; the

certainty that the Germans would feel that we were jeopardizing Berlin because of our concern over Cuba. The

prospect of that pattern is not an appetizing one ...

Dean Rusk: Yes, but you see ...

McGeorge Bundy: ... [unintelligible]

Dean Rusk: ... uh, uh, everything turns crucially on what happens.

McGeorge Bundy: I agree, Mr. Secretary.

Dean Rusk: And if we go with the quick strike, then, in fact,

they do back it up, then you've exposed all of your allies and

ourselves to all these great dangers without ...

McGeorge Bundy: You get all these noises again.

Dean Rusk: ... without, uh, the slightest consultation or, or

warning or preparation.

John Kennedy: But, of course, warning them, uh, it seems to

me, uh, if you warn everybody. Uh, uh, uh, obviously you

can't sort of announce that in four days from now you're going to take them out. They may announce within three days

they're going to have warheads on 'em; if we come and attack then they're going to fire them. Then what'll, what'll we

do then? We don't take 'em out. Of course, we then announce,

well, if they do that, then we're going to attack with nuclear

weapons.

C. Douglas Dillon: Yes, sir, that's the question that nobody, I

didn't understand, nobody had mentioned, is whether this s-,

uh, "take-out," this mission, uh, was [unintelligible] to deal

with ...

Speaker?: I don't know.

C. Douglas Dillon: ... high explosives?

Speaker?: High explosives, yes.

John Kennedy: How effective can the take-out be, do they

think?

Maxwell Taylor: It'll never be a 100 percent, Mr. President, we know. Uh, 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 di-, discover a target.

McGeorge Bundy: They're now talking about taking out the air force as well. ... I [could you tell that in the staff?].

Speaker?: [unintelligible]

McGeorge Bundy: I do raise again the question whether, uh, whether we [unintelligible] the problem, 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.

Robert McNamara: I suggest, Mr. President, that if you're involved in several hundred strikes, this is what you would— and against airfields—this is what you would do, pre-invade. And, uh, it would be very difficult to convince anybody that this was not a pre-invasion strike. I think also once you get this volume of attack that public opinion reaction, uh, to this, as distinct from the reaction to an invasion, uh, there's very little difference. And, uh, from both standpoints, it would seem to me that if you're talking about a, 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.

Maxwell Taylor: Well, I would think we would have, should be in a position to invade at any time if we so desired. Hence

that, uh, in this preliminary, we should be, uh, it's all bonus if

we are indeed taking out weapons [unintelligible] ...

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

Maxwell Taylor: I suspect, Mr. President, 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 [unintelligible].

John Kennedy: How long will, do we estimate this will remain secure, this, uh, information, uh, people have it?

McGeorge 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, uh, new security classification governing precisely the field of offensive capability in Cuba just five days ago, four days ago, under

General Carter. That, uh, limits this, uh, to people who have an immediate, operational necessity in intelligence terms to work on the data and the people who have ...

John Kennedy: How many would that be, about?

McGeorge 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 the policy responsibility for advice directly to you'll receive this ...

John Kennedy: How many would get it over in the Defense

Department, General, with your meeting this afternoon?

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

John Kennedy: Would that be about fifty?

Maxwell Taylor: By then ... No, sir. I would say that, uh, within, at this stage ten more.

Robert McNamara: Well, Mr. President, I, 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, I'm just picking a figure—I'd say a week.

[Several speakers speak at once; conversation is unintelligible.]

Robert McNamara: And I say that because we have, 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 [Commander in Chief, U.S. Forces Atlantic]. A copy goes to CIA. And normally, uh, the photo interpreters and the, and the operational officers in these commands are looking forward to these. We have stopped all that, and this, this type of information is going on throughout the department. And I, I doubt very much that we can keep this out of the hands of, uh, of members of Congress, for example, for more than a week.

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

McGeorge Bundy: Senator Keating said this on the floor of the Senate on the tenth of October ...

Dean Rusk: That's correct.

McGeorge Bundy: ... "Construction has begun on at least a half-dozen launching sites for intermediate range tactical missiles."

Dean Rusk: Well, that's, that's exactly the point. I think we can count on announcing this not later than Thursday or Friday of

this week.

Marshall Carter: There is a refugee who's a major source of intelligence on this, of course, who has described one of these missiles in terms which we can recognize, who is now in this country.

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

Marshall Carter: We don't know.

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

Speaker?: I think that's right.

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

Lyndon Johnson:: I agree with Mac that that ought to be done. I think that, uh, we're committed at any time that we feel that there's a build up that in any way endangers to take whatever action we must take to assure our security. I would think the Secretary's evaluation of this thing being around all over the lot is a pretty accurate one, I would think it'd take a week to do it.

Maybe a little before then.

I would, uh, like to hear what the responsible commanders have to say this afternoon. I think the question with the base is whether we take it out or whether we talk about it, and, uh, both, either alternative is a very distressing one, but of the two, I would take it out.

John Kennedy: Well, uh, the, uh ...

Lyndon Johnson:: Assuming these 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 'em much for any strength in anything like this. And, I, the fact that we're talking about our other allies, uh, I take the position that Mr. Bundy says, We ought to be living all these years with [unintelligible] 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, uh, I don't think that, uh ... I take this little State Department Bulletin that you sent out to all the congressmen. One, one of the points you make—that any time the build up 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 the, give unanimous support. People are really concerned about this, in my opinion. Uh, I think we have to be prudent and cautious, talk to the commanders and see what they say, what they're ... I'm not much for circularizing it over the Hill or our allies, even though I realize it's a breach of faith. It's the one not to confer with them. We're not going to get much help out of them.

McGeorge Bundy: There is an intermediate position. There are perhaps two or three of our principal allies or heads of government we could communicate, at least on a 24-hour notice basis. Certainly ease, ease the ...

Lyndon Johnson: Tell allies, we've got to try to stop the planes, stop the ships, stop the submarines and everything else from sending. Just not going to permit it. And then stop them from coming in.

Speaker?: Yeah.

John Kennedy: Uh, eh, well, this, which ... What you're really talking about are two or three different, uh, potential operations. One is the strike just on this, these three bases. One, 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, uh, missiles. Third is doing both of those things and also at the same time launching a blockade, which requires really the, uh, the, uh, third and which is a larger step. And then, as I take it, the fourth question is the, uh, degree of consultation. I don't know how much use consulting with the British has been. They'll just object.

Speaker?: Um.

John Kennedy: Just have to decide to do it. Probably ought to tell them, though, the night before.

Robert Kennedy: Mr. President.

John Kennedy: Yes.

Robert Kennedy: We have the fifth one, really, which is the invasion. I would say that, uh, you're dropping bombs all over Cuba if you do the second, uh, air, 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, uh, we're going to take an awful lot of heat on it ...

Speaker?: Yeah.

Robert Kennedy: ... and, uh, and then, uh, you know, the heat, you're going to announce the reason that you're doing it is because, uh, 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, we're going to do the same thing to

Turkey, or We're going to do the same thing to Iran.

[Discussion of which targets might be attacked.]

John Kennedy: I think we ought to, what we ought to do is, is, uh, after this meeting this afternoon, we ought to meet tonight

again at six, consider these various, uh, proposals. In the meanwhile, we'll go ahead with this maximum, whatever is needed from the flights, and, in addition, we will ... I don't think we got much time on these missiles. They may be So it may be that we just have to, we can't wait two weeks while we're getting ready to, to roll. Maybe just have to just take them out, and continue our other preparations if we decide to do that.

That may be where we end up. I think we ought to, beginning right now, be preparing to. ... Because that's what we're going to do anyway. We're certainly going to do number one; we're going to take out these, uh, missiles. Uh, the questions will be whether, which, what I would describe as number two, which would be a general air strike. That we're not ready to say, but we should be in preparation for it. The third is the, is the, uh, the general invasion. At least we're going to do number one, so it seems to me that we don't have to wait very long. We, we ought to be making those preparations.

McGeorge Bundy: You want to be clear, Mr. President, whether we have definitely decided against a political track. I, myself, think we ought ...

Maxwell Taylor: Well, we'll have ...

McGeorge Bundy: ... to work out a contingency on that.

Dean Rusk: We, we'll develop both tracks.

John Kennedy: I think we ought to do the OAS. I think that's a legal 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, uh, uh, bases, until we say or the Pentagon or State won't be harsh. We've already said it on the [unintelligible]. So we, let's say, we've got two or three days.

McGeorge Bundy: Well, let's play it, shall we play it still harder and, uh, simply say that there's no evidence ... I mean we have to ...

John Kennedy: We ought to stick the battle plan till we want to do something.

McGeorge Bundy: ... [unintelligible] the alliance [unintelligible].

John Kennedy: Otherwise we give ourselves away, so let's ...

McGeorge Bundy: May I make one other cover plan suggestion

...

John Kennedy: Yes.

McGeorge Bundy: ... Mr. President? 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," but I haven't been able to think of any other ...

John Kennedy: Nobody, it seems to me, in the State Department. I discussed the matter with, uh, Bohlen of the Soviet bloc and told him he could talk to Thompson. So that's those two. It seems to me that there's no one else in the State Department that ought to be talked to about it ...

Speaker?: [unintelligible] in the department.

John Kennedy: ... in any level at all, and, uh, until we know a little more. And then, as I say, in Defense we've got to keep it as tight as possible . . .

Speaker?: [unintelligible]

John Kennedy: ... 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 otherwise we botch it up.

Robert McNamara: Mr. President, may I suggest that we come back this afternoon prepared to, to answer three questions. First, should we surface our surveillance? I think this is a very important ...

Speaker?: Very important point.

Robert McNamara: ... question at the moment. We ought to try to decide today either yes or no.

John Kennedy: By "surface our" ...

Robert McNamara: I mean we should state publicly ...

John Kennedy: Oh.

Robert McNamara: ... that, that you have stated we will, we'll 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 ...

McGeorge Bundy: What's the skull number, commissar?

[Laughs]

Robert McNamara: ... or reconnaissance flights to, uh, to obtain this information. We'll make the information, uh, public.

John Kennedy: There may not be one. All right, why not?

Robert McNamara: This is one question. A second question is: Should we precede the military action with political action? If

so, on what, uh, timing? I would think the answer's almost certainly, yes. And I wouldn't, 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, 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, the effect of these strikes and the time required to carry them off. I think ...

John Kennedy: How long would it take to get 'em organized.

Robert McNamara: E-, e-, exactly. We'll be prepared ...

John 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] ...