The recording stopped at that point. It sounds as if it was turned off.

The idea for using Mongoose teams of Cuban agents to sabotage the missile sites or other installations in Cuba would be reviewed more formally the next day, October 26.

Friday, October 26, 1962

During the previous evening, surveillance aircraft over the Atlantic Ocean successfully pinpointed the location of the Marucla, a Lebanese ship carrying dry cargo to Cuba under Soviet charter. This ship was an ideal answer to the dilemmas that the White House had wrestled with on October 25. The destroyers Pierce and Kennedy trailed the Marucla during the night and boarded her after sunrise on the morning of October 26. The Greek crew of the ship complied with all requests. President Kennedy was awake and, from the Mansion, followed these developments. Later in the morning, at 9:20, he came into his office in the West Wing of the White House.

10:10 –11:20 A.M.

Well, now the quarantine itself won’t remove the weapons. So we’ve only got two ways of removing the weapons. One is to negotiate them out— in other words, trade them out. Or the other is to go in and take them out. I don’t see any other way you’re going to get the weapons out. . . .

Why should the Soviets take these things out? I don’t see why they should. . . . The Soviets aren’t going to take them out.

1. Destroyers are commonly named after war heroes, and these were no exception. The full names of the destroyers were USS John R. Pierce (DD 753) and USS Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. (DD 850). The Kennedy had been named after President Kennedy’s elder brother, a pilot who had lost his life after volunteering to fly an exceptionally dangerous mission in Western Europe during World War II. That a ship so named should be carrying out the first boarding of a vessel was a coincidence, but one that was certainly noticed.
Executive Committee Meeting of the National Security Council on the Cuban Missile Crisis

President Kennedy’s attention on October 25 had focused almost exclusively on the operation of the quarantine and the related diplomacy involving U Thant. After the immediate crisis on the quarantine line had passed, by the morning of October 26, his attention began to turn uneasily to the missiles still in Cuba, some already ready for action and others being readied. This was the time when Robert Kennedy remembered a growing private worry that “this cup was not going to pass and that a direct military confrontation between the two great military powers was inevitable. Both ‘hawks’ and ‘doves’ sensed that our combination of limited force and diplomatic efforts had been unsuccessful. If the Russians continued to be adamant and continued to build up their missile strength, military force would be the only alternative.”

Kennedy’s advisers had been working on what to do next to obtain the removal of the Soviet missiles already in Cuba. These issues had been broached on the evening of October 25 and, as advisers gathered on the morning of October 26, all were armed with folders of papers prepared by their staffs. Before the ExComm meeting, Bundy told Ball that McNamara and Robert Kennedy were “all steamed up about getting a think tank going like the ones we had last week” in order to work out alternative plans. As in the previous week, they wanted to hold those meetings in the State Department around midday.

The advisers this morning included Adlai Stevenson and John J. McCloy, both of whom had come down from New York. Back on October 22, Kennedy had tracked down McCloy in Europe and flown him back to the United States to act as Stevenson’s assistant. Ostensibly, the aim was to make the U.S. delegation at the United Nations more bipartisan, since McCloy was a prominent Republican. In reality it was done, at Lovett’s suggestion, because of fear that Stevenson might be too weak a negotiator. McCloy, a Wall Street lawyer with extensive government service, had


the reputation of being very tough. Just before the ExComm meeting Ball (who had breakfast with McCloy that morning) stressed to Bundy how “clear and strong” McCloy was. Ball hoped the President would find ways of making it clear to Stevenson that McCloy should be in on all the talks in New York. Bundy promised to get the word to the President.  

The Security Council had had its debate and reached a dead end, given the Soviet veto power. Yet Stevenson’s staff would be seeing U Thant that morning; Stevenson would see him in the afternoon. So one key task for the Kennedy administration that day was to work out the instructions to guide Stevenson and McCloy in their talks at the United Nations, where U Thant would be trying to broker a deal.

The State Department was toying with other ideas too. One was to propose a Latin American nuclear-free zone resolution in the U.N. General Assembly that might help show the strength of world opinion in support of the U.S. cause. Other diplomatic possibilities were being analyzed, including the older idea of a direct approach to Castro and bargaining chips that might be offered at a possible summit meeting with Khrushchev.

A political-military track was also being prepared, one that would use military means to increase political pressure on Cuba or the Soviet Union. Here the main idea was to extend the quarantine, possibly to include a cut-off of POL, which Rostow had advocated the previous evening.

The military track had also advanced. The largest concentration of U.S. armed forces since the Korean War was massing in the southeastern United States. Several different options for air strikes were readied. Under the contingency plan prepared and preferred by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, designated Operation Scabbards, a massive air strike would hit Cuba 12 hours after the President gave the order. Strikes would continue for seven days, then troops would begin going ashore. These preparations fueled speculation about an imminent invasion, speculation that was featured prominently in the newspapers delivered to the White House on Friday morning, October 26.

Intelligence analysts worked in shifts around the clock to comprehend the miles of film delivered by the U-2 and low-level reconnaissance flights. Castro had also delivered another speech on the evening of October 25, denouncing the U.S. actions and warning that the U.S. reconnaissance flights would not be tolerated.

When the meeting began, at 9:59, President Kennedy did not immediately turn on the tape recorder. McCone began with a substantial

5. Ibid., p. 220.
intelligence briefing. As on previous days, he read the highlights of that morning’s Watch Committee report, which were as follows:

Surveillance of 25 October shows that the construction of IRBM and MRBM bases in Cuba is proceeding largely on schedule; low-level photography confirms that the MRBM bases will use the 1,020-nautical-mile SS-4 missile. No additional sites, launchers, or missiles have been located, but there is road construction around Remedios which suggests the fourth IRBM site we have been expecting there. We estimate that it would cost the U.S.S.R. more than twice as much and take considerably longer to add to its ICBM strike capability from the U.S.S.R. as great an increment as the potential salvo from Cuban launching sites.

Only 2 Soviet freighters, and 5 tankers, 1 of them already past the quarantine line, still are headed for Cuba. The Belovodsk, with 12 Mi-4 helicopters, is in the North Atlantic; the Pugachev appears to have slowed or stopped several days west of the Panama Canal. A total of 16 dry-cargo ships now are carried as having turned back toward the U.S.S.R. on 23 October.

Two Soviet civil air flights are scheduled for Havana with passengers; cargo, if any, is not known. One may be turned back by Guinea today. A TU-114 is scheduled via Senegal to reach Havana 1 November.

There are further indications that some Soviet and satellite elements, particularly air and ground elements in Eastern Europe and European Russia, are on an alert or readiness status. No major deployments have been detected, however. . . . There is some evidence that additional tactical aircraft have been placed on five-minute alert in East Germany, where two areas along the West German border have been closed off for exercises.

Moscow highlights Khrushchev’s acceptance of U Thant’s appeal in a bid to start U.S.-Soviet negotiations. Peiping [Beijing], however, is irritated that the Soviet response to U.S. action is not stronger. The Communists still deny there are any offensive weapons in Cuba.

There is no major change or significant new development in non-bloc reaction to the crisis. Most of the OAS nations have offered to participate in some form in the quarantine, and NATO members have agreed with minor reservations to deny landing and overflight rights to Soviet planes bound for Cuba.6

McCone then distributed and summarized another intelligence memorandum, and provided a bit more detail on the status of the missiles in Cuba. He reviewed the latest interagency appraisal, which emphasized that "rapid construction activity" was continuing. The "activity apparently continues to be directed toward achieving a full operational capability as soon as possible. Camouflage and canvas covering of critical equipment is also continuing. As yet there is no evidence indicating any intention to move or dismantle these sites."  

McCone then went over the movements of nonbloc ships to Cuba, emphasizing the possibility that such ships could also be used as arms carriers by the Soviets. As requested the previous day, he also reviewed intelligence analysis of Cuban internal reaction to the crisis. He reported on the celebration that took place in Havana when the Bucharest arrived. While on the subject of Cuban internal opinion, McCone turned to the status of Operation Mongoose.

Early in the crisis the CIA had been pressured, especially by Robert Kennedy, to do more with Operation Mongoose against Castro. A plan was developed to land ten 5-man teams of Cuban exiles, by submarine, in Cuba to collect intelligence and conduct sabotage operations, perhaps even using these agents to try to destroy the Soviet missile sites. The project was prepared hastily, with the apparent support of McNamara and civilian officials at the Pentagon, outside of the normal Mongoose supervision channels. By October 25 the idea had become tangled in disagreements between the CIA operators (including Edward Lansdale, who was supposed to be running Mongoose) and the Pentagon.

McCone decided that the CIA would not be prodded into launching this intelligence and sabotage mission on its own. He ordered that the planned operation be suspended and told the ExComm what he had done. If there was a military requirement, he said, then that requirement should be established by McNamara and by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In other words (perhaps with keen memories of the Bay of Pigs), McCone was telling the administration that if the President and the Pentagon wanted to go after military targets in Cuba with the CIA, then the administration—and the military—would have to take clear responsibility for it. A meeting to decide how to proceed was arranged to take place in the

Pentagon that afternoon, a meeting which would now include the hitherto bypassed Mr. Lansdale.8

This was the point, about ten minutes into the meeting (10:10), when President Kennedy flipped on the tape recorder.

**John McCone:** . . . unilaterally, and this is what we’re gonna do, and get this thing on track.

**President Kennedy:** I think as long as . . . This afternoon, it seems to me, we ought to get it arranged as to how, what those areas, where CIA functions without any . . .

**McGeorge Bundy:** Mr. President, my suggestion is that we should reconstitute Mongoose as a subcommittee of this committee in the appropriate way, and I think we can work that out this afternoon.

**McCone:** I think that’s good because this matter you called me about last night, you see, which is as to what kind of a government [there should be in Cuba]. And have this all part of Mongoose.

**President Kennedy:** Yes. I called Mr. McCone last night and I then told Mr. [Edwin] Martin that I thought we ought to be making a crash program on . . . The problem becomes, then, what if [there is an] invasion? What kind of people—how many Cubans we’ll have, what would be the civil government arrangement and all that?

**Bundy:** These are very important matters.

**President Kennedy:** Well, now, who will take on that?

**Bundy:** Mr. President, I think if we could make that a part of the discussion at the Mongoose meeting this afternoon, because it really is . . . the paramilitary, the civil government, the correlated activities to the main show that we need to reorganize.

**President Kennedy:** We need to get somebody in charge at State, CIA, and Defense, on this question of—

**McCone:** There’s a meeting going on . . .

**Bundy:** Post-Castro’s Cuba is the most complex landscape.

**McCone:** There’s a meeting going on right now, of a working group. And we put that in operation this morning, in order to meet your requirement of having something at six tonight.

8. See and compare both McCone to File, “Meeting of the NSC Executive Committee, 26 October 1962, 10:00 A.M.,” 26 October 1962, in CIA Documents, McAuliffe, p. 317, and the “Summary Record of the 6th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council,” 26 October 1962, in FRUS, 11: 221.
President Kennedy: Fine.

McCone: However, this is a subject that we’re going to take up at this meeting this afternoon.

President Kennedy: And the other thing is an analysis, unless we may [already] have it, of the Cuban community in greater Miami—of those Cubans who would be doctors, and all the rest who would be useful, if we have an invasion of Cuba, [could] be useful during the immediate invasion period in various functions. I would think probably the CIA. But this would all be part of the matter which I hope we can discuss today.

McCone: I don’t think that . . . I think we ought to have a plan under which the Lansdale organization, the Mongoose organization, is utilized in the interior. Because it’s got a lot of knowledge now. It’s well organized—[nine seconds excised as classified information].

The problem there is if we have to get within 12 miles and we intercept their high-frequency communications. If it gets out [beyond 12 miles, reception] it deteriorates pretty rapidly. The question is whether there is too great a risk for it to go in [so close to Cuba]. Maybe you have [unreadable].

Robert McNamara: I think, Mr. President, this is an operational matter and we ought to watch very carefully. I have by frequent contacts between Defense and CIA. The Navy was very much concerned about the vulnerability of this ship and the loss of security if its personnel were captured.

It’s been standing 10 miles off of the island of Cuba in the midst of the possible operations, and it seemed wise to draw it out 20, 30 miles to take it out of the range of capture, at least temporarily. I think perhaps we should put it back in if the activity quiets down. But I think this is an operational problem.

Unidentified: I agree, Mr. President.

Twenty-two seconds excised as classified information.

There is an unclear exchange between President Kennedy and Bundy; the President uses the word speaker; then he appears to leave the room.

Bundy: [Let’s] take a couple of minutes on administrative business which I think we can do while the President is out on the phone.

I want to be sure that the whole committee knows that we have three operating subcommittees now: One on Berlin under Mr. Nitze. One on

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9. McCone appears to be referring to the electronic intelligence ship, USS Oxford, located in international waters just outside of the 12-mile territorial limit.
forward plans under Mr. Rostow. One on communications in which Mr. [William] Orrick is the chairman, but we expect most of the executive and operating work to be done through the Defense Communications Agency.

This last is a matter of real interest. We are hoping to get action while everybody is steamed up to break a number of bottlenecks, in and outside, national and international, which affect the command and control problem of our foreign affairs.

There is a problem on civil defense. Mr. [Steuart] Pittman would like authority to announce acceleration of the current defense program at a meeting tomorrow. This has been reviewed, I think, with Mr. Gilpatric, and reviewed on our side. The general guideline is that we should look as if we were . . . Now it is a good time do all the things we wanted to do, but not create a crash or panicked atmosphere which will make louder noise. Is that all right with you, Ros? [Gilpatric agrees.]

We have already talked about what I was going to mention, an additional matter, namely this organization of the Lansdale enterprise [Operation Mongoose], and that will be up this afternoon.

I'd like to take one moment to mention the difficulty of the security problem [avoiding leaks to the press] on forward planning, in the phase in which we now find ourselves. I don't think we should be misled by our success last week. That success occurred when very few people in the government knew that there was a problem, and we were not under pressure to discuss it with large groups.

We now have a major operation [the quarantine] which is day to day, and the difference between everybody knowing about that, and nobody knowing what we're now deciding to do next, is a very serious and difficult one. I think it means that those concerned with action choices will have to be even more guarded than they were last week, or we shall find ourselves tipping our hands as to the kinds of alternatives that were under committee discussion yesterday.

President Kennedy returns to the room.

I've gotten past item two, which is . . .

President Kennedy: All right. Secretary McNamara?

McNamara: Yes, Mr. President, first the status of the quarantine. We are on board, at the present time, a Lebanese freighter [the Marucla], chosen yesterday because it was a nonbloc ship. We wished to indicate quarantine procedures by stopping it and boarding it with the least possible chance of violence. It turned out later that this ship was under charter to the Soviet Union. We are, in any event, on board at the present time.
The boarding has been successful. The ship cooperated by making boarding arrangements. It will be some time before we determine what is on board. I would suggest, Mr. President, that we release now the information that we are on board. It won’t be held long. There is information being transmitted in the clear. Single sideband radio.

**Unidentified:** We fully agree with—

**President Kennedy:** The only question that I’ve got is, how do we justify stopping this ship and then letting the East German one [the Völkerfreundschaft] go forward? What’ll we say is the explanation for that?

**McNamara:** A general cargo ship.

**Unidentified:** It loaded at Riga. It loaded at Riga.

**McNamara:** Under charter of the Soviet Union.

**Unidentified:** Yes, it loaded at Riga with Soviet cargo.

**President Kennedy:** This Lebanese one [the Maruda]?

**Unidentified:** Yes, this Lebanese ship.

**President Kennedy:** All right. Do you want to have Pierre [Salinger] come in here, Mrs. [Evelyn] Lincoln?

**Evelyn Lincoln:** Yes.

**President Kennedy:** The Defense Department ought to announce this right now.

**Bundy:** That’s right. It’s all organized that way.

**President Kennedy:** Ros, do you want to just tell Pierre to call [Defense Department spokesman] Arthur Sylvester?

Now, the only question I’ve got is how do we still justify searching this ship. Will we have to announce that we let the other one through?10

**McNamara:** I don’t believe we have announced it.

**Bundy:** We have tried to lick that. When it does come up, it’s that we don’t want to begin with a passenger ship seems to me the best way of explaining it. That is, in fact, exactly what controlled the decision, as I recall the discussion.

**McNamara:** I wouldn’t go so far as to say we don’t want to begin . . . but it was a passenger ship.

**Bundy:** It’s not a target . . . Well.

**Unidentified:** We don’t stop passenger ships.

**President Kennedy:** Just say there were passengers there.

**Maxwell Taylor:** We made no decision not to stop that thing.

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10. In addition to the Bucharest and the Völkerfreundschaft, the British tanker Suiaco, bound for Jamaica, and a Polish ship bound for New Orleans had also been allowed to proceed through the quarantine line without inspection.
Bundy: No, we did not.

McNamara: It was a passenger ship. That's all we have to say.

Unidentified: This was the first dry-cargo ship originating in a Soviet port that has gone through the line. Is this correct?

Bundy: That's right.

McNamara: I believe that to be the case. I won't guarantee that it is so.

Unidentified: Mr. President, we've had an eye on [unclear].

McNamara: Exactly.

In any case, it has been successful and I think a good story should be put out immediately.

Now, secondly, as to possible intercepts during the day, there appear to be none. There are no nonbloc ships; nor are there any bloc ships within easy range of the quarantine ships. There are four Soviet ships approaching the quarantine zone, but many of them are far, far away, some as far away as 3,000 miles. We anticipate that the Grozny, which appeared to be dead in the water yesterday at the time the SAC airplane passed over, will reach the barrier tomorrow night at 11 P.M. This is the tanker with the deck load. We had considered the possibility of advancing to meet her today. We have done nothing further to accomplish that. We can still work on it, but it is unlikely that we can intercept her today even if we went all out to do so. So I would suggest no action on that.

The Karl Marx, another tanker, will reach the barrier on the 31st of October at 2:00 A.M., Eastern Daylight Time. The Belovodsk, a cargo ship, will reach the barrier at 7:00 P.M. on the 30th of October. The Mir, another tanker, will reach the barrier on the 1st of November. Beyond that, there are no other Soviet ships that appear to be approaching the barrier. So there's very little quarantine activity with respect to Soviet ships that we can anticipate in the next few days, with the possible exception of the Grozny.

Now in relation to that, as well as to other action, I would suggest that we consider announcing late today that we are continuing surveillance of the buildup of offensive weapons in Cuba. Based on that surveillance we find that the assembly of IL-28s [bombers] has continued at an accelerated pace. Therefore, acting under your authority, I am adding to the prohibited list bomber fuel, and the materials from which it is manufactured.

President Kennedy: We couldn't . . . What we're trying to get at now is tankers?

Bundy: Does that bring in POL [petroleum, oil, and lubricants]?

McNamara: This is POL.

President Kennedy: What about tying it in . . . The missiles are the
more dramatic offensive weapons. Because everybody has bombers everywhere. So is there some way that we could tie it into the construction of these missile sites, rather than just the bombers?

McNamara: Well, we could do bomber fuel and associated petroleum products that are used for . . . [Unclear exchange]

Bundy: [Unclear] is whether you want at the end to have the bombers there. If you want to get them out, this is as good a time as any to tie them into . . .

President Kennedy: No, I’d rather . . . What we’re dealing with once again is the same problem, of stopping tankers, and I would rather tie as much as we could to the missiles.

McNamara: Can’t we do it to both?

President Kennedy: Yeah, that’s what I [unclear interjection]. The missiles . . . I would say that we ought to have . . . It seems to me, that in view of the fact that the missile work is going on, the sites are going on, we are tying up that fuel which contributes to that work. And, in view of the fact that the work on the missile sites is going on, we are also tying up aviation [fuel] because of the bombers. So that we—I think the missiles are the dramatic one. Bombers—hell, they might say: “We can just [unclear] your bombers every place.”

Dean Rusk: Mr. President, can we break that into two pieces? I think that there would be some advantage in our having a real shot at the U Thant talks for 24 hours before we consider putting on the POL. We really need to have a round there, to see if—

President Kennedy: Wouldn’t we be better then to say something about, that the work is going on, and that this must come to a stop, and then tomorrow say it isn’t stopped, and therefore move to POL?

Bundy: Well, the 24 hours, I think that doesn’t bother the Secretary very much. The point of not losing the momentum is of concern here, and that’s a timing problem.

Taylor: Mr. President, should we announce every day that when we have evidence that work has continued, that we view the fact with mounting indignation?

McCone: Yes, this is an awfully important point.

President Kennedy: Yeah. Well, that’s why it seems to me what we’re going to do is really give them a 24-hour notice that if they don’t stop the work or assurances, then we’re going to start . . .

Bundy: Perhaps, Mr. President, the consideration here we might . . . If we agree that this is the next step on the line of pressure, we might leave the timing until we’ve talked about the U Thant thing, and see just what— [Unclear exchange]
McNamara: — will report on that.

Douglas Dillon: I’d like to raise one thing about agreeing that this is the next step on the line of pressure.

I think we’ve got to decide very quickly whether we want to proceed down this area, or this track, or not. Because I think it leads to quite different consequences. If we follow this track [moving to blockade POL] we’ll be sort of caught up in events, not of our own control. We will have to stop a Soviet ship with what appears to be peaceful cargo on it. We will run into Soviet reactions around the world, which could be similar. I mean they might shoot at an American ship. We might wind up in some sort of a naval encounter all around the world with the Soviet Union which would have nothing to do with the buildup of the missile bases in Cuba.

The end result of that would be, we either go on to a possible general war, or pressures get so extreme that we have to stop, both sides, doing this sort of thing. Meanwhile the missiles continue in Cuba.

This is the problem of this alternative track, of getting back onto the basic thing, that this work does not stop. This [missile work in Cuba] is not stopping. That [should be] our primary effort of acceleration, instead of increasing confrontation direct with the Soviet Union at sea, which is not as clearly connected with these missile bases. It’s difficult to do, what you said, to connect this [confrontation at sea] with the missile bases.

If we put the confrontation there by preparing for air action to hit these bases if there is no . . . if they continue working. This decision would mean that we consider this seriously that it would color the way we handle the U Thant negotiations, we put great pressure on to do something to get inspectors in there to stop this thing. It also would allow us, if we wanted to, to be more relaxed in stopping one of these Soviet ships, if we knew that we were going to do this other action if nothing stops. So if we could . . .

Rusk: That’s right. I think we ought to go to the political track before you come to a decision on the attack now.

Dillon: So, I think this is a very major decision, whether you want to build up the blockade, which puts the confrontation, U.S.-U.S.S.R., at sea, or whether you want to divert the confrontation, the escalation . . .

Bundy: I’m not sure it’s as sharp as you make it, but this is the range of choices.

McNamara: Nor am I. I don’t believe . . . There are alternative courses.

Let me go to another subject then. We conducted daylight surveil-
lance yesterday with approximately ten aircraft of missile sites and the
IL-28 airfield. There's no question but what—construction work is con-
tinuing. We can measure it. And we can show it.

I would suggest that today we do two things. One, announce that it
is our policy to continue surveillance day and night.

Secondly, that we send out immediately, and issue orders from here to
do so, eight to ten aircraft to go on daylight surveillance today. They are on
alert status. They can be off and over the targets by noon time, Cuban time.

And thirdly, that following our announcement that we are carrying out
daylight and nighttime surveillance, that we send out four aircraft tonight
on nighttime surveillance. These would be using flares, roughly ten flares
per target. It's thrown out of the airplane at about 5,000 feet, opening and
becoming, operating at about 2,000 feet, illuminating the target area and
the surrounding territory and serving as the basis for photographs.

And further I would suggest that we state that it is our intention to
continue surveillance in order to determine the extent to which develop-
ment of the offensive weapon systems is continuing.

Rusk: Mr. President, I wonder really again, on the nighttime recon-
naissance, whether we ought to start that tonight, until we've had a
-crack at the U Thant discussions.

Dillon: Why is that provocative?

Rusk: Well, these flares are pathfinder flares, typically. They are fre-
quently used with bombs right behind them. We're not sure what the interpretation of the other side would be.

Dillon: There won't be any bombs now.

McNamara: There won't be any bombs behind [them]. We would
tell them in advance that they were for—

Roswell Gilpatric: By telling them in advance that you're... if that's
the point you're making.

President Kennedy: I don't see anything wrong with saying: “Day
and nighttime surveillance.”

Adlai Stevenson: Is it necessary to announce it at all?

Bundy: It's very important to announce it, because otherwise the
danger the Secretary speaks of is real.

11. During night bombing raids in World War II, an initial wave of scout aircraft often would
drop flares or incendiary explosives to mark the targets for the oncoming bombers. He may
have been referring to the German use of such devices in bombing raids against London in
1940-41 or to the British use of the devices (since the British relied primarily on bombing
raids at night) in their missions against German targets. The adjective pathfinder comes from
the British use of such flares.
Rusk: They might think there was something big behind it.
Stevenson: No, I say it’s unnecessary to announce any surveillance. Continue it, but why announce it?
President Kennedy: So what we’re trying to do is to build up this case that they’re continuing the work. Because sooner or later we’re going to have to do something about that. So that’s all we’re trying to do here.
McCone: Yeah. On the other hand, by announcing it, it destroys one part of this thing, and that is to simulate an attack.
Bundy: They’ll never believe it until it happens. Once they understand—
Stevenson: I don’t see any point in announcing it, Mr. President. I should think that would be the last thing you would want to do—
President Kennedy: All right.
Stevenson: I would continue it and then make your announcements, from time to time, as to what the status was.
President Kennedy: Well, what we’re trying to do is to emphasize the fact that this buildup is going on and that we’re observing it. So why wouldn’t we announce it?
George Ball: I just think we shouldn’t . . .
Dillon: You have announced it. You said you’re going to continue—
Bundy: We’re doing it under OAS requirements.
McNamara: And I would go further, and periodically release information resulting from it.
President Kennedy: If we’re going to . . . The question will come as to what our surveillance of the last four days has shown.
McNamara: Yes.
President Kennedy: Why don’t we wait on this surveillance until we get the political talks, because what . . . It really depends on whether we’re going to issue a statement this morning saying work is going on and must cease and so on. Look, you want to put the day ones on . . . Just get them going. We can announce it later.
McNamara: Colonel [Ralph] Steakley [Air Force reconnaissance expert], Max, has been . . . [Pause]
Rusk: Mr. President, on the political side, first I think we all greatly appreciate the job that Adlai Stevenson did in the Security Council last night. He put [Soviet U.N. ambassador Valerian] Zorin in the position where Zorin made himself ridiculous. And this kind of attitude throughout the U.N. has been very helpful on things of that sort.
I do hope that we will . . . We are continuing, Mr. Wilson, the constant barrage of the Cubans.
Donald Wilson: Yes, sir.
Rusk: Because we do . . . One of the possible outs here is to produce such pressures there, in Cuba, as to cause something to crack on the island.

President Kennedy: When will those leaflets drop? When do they drop?
Wilson: Well, whenever you order.
President Kennedy: Oh, they’re not dropped yet.
Wilson: No, sir.

President Kennedy: The problem about the drop, let me just say very quickly, the problem about the drop of the leaflets is that, if we have decided to do an air strike, we may want to drop the leaflets, some leaflets, 15 minutes ahead of time. We don’t want to get them so used to leaflets dropping that they don’t bother to read them when the key moment comes. [Someone laughs.]

So I’m not sure I’d drop these leaflets over the missile sites. I think I’d drop them in Havana, Santiago, and a few other places. Just do it once, if we’re going to do it.

Bundy: There’s no need telling the people on the missile sites that there are missiles in Cuba.

Wilson: Mr. President, now that we’re on leaflets, there is one major problem. What I showed you last night is the outline of the leaflet. We are using one of the pictures that has been released of an intermediate range site, and it just isn’t very good. When the leaflet is this size; that’s the way they make them at Fort Bragg.12

What I would like to recommend, if you want to go ahead with a leaflet drop, we’ve got the wording, we have the older picture down there. But I got a report this morning [that] it looks very bad.

President Kennedy: How about that one that appeared in the front pages of the [Washington] Post, with the sort of square up in the left-hand corner which shows that—

Wilson: It doesn’t come up too well. What I would like to request is the one that Ambassador Stevenson showed yesterday be sent immediately to Fort Bragg by CIA with a man accompanying it, and a negative, if we want to do this right away. Pierre [Salinger] tells me—I have not seen it, but Pierre tells me it is a very convincing . . .

President Kennedy: So why don’t you pick, of all the pictures we’ve put out . . . There’s no objection to whichever one you pick. So why don’t you pick . . .?

Wilson: The ones we’ve put out so far, Mr. President, are not . . .

12. Fort Bragg, in North Carolina, was the headquarters for the U.S. Special Forces as well as for the Army’s psychological warfare activities.
T here's only been four that we put out on the offensive sites and none of them come up to . . .

Bundy: Donny, there are some special restrictions on some of these pictures. But I think the President’s good decision is that everything is waived, and you get the one you like best.

President Kennedy: Among those that have been, in one place or another, released.

Wilson: OK. Including yesterday at the U.N. All right, sir.

John McCloy: If I may make a suggestion on that. I’ve been up talking to the delegations up there, that have been going over this briefing of those sites there, with some effect I think. They’re rather taken aback by the speed with which these things occurred. But one of the things that’s been most impressive to them, that we didn’t have the second time but we had the first time, was that picture of the big bomb going through Red Square.13 Now, that isn’t the same bomb, the same missile that we have down there but it’s a smaller, it looks as if it’s half a city block long. And I’d stick that in there. Because that made them raise their eyebrows. At least, there’s nothing defensive about this affair. This is really out of this world, in terms of size. That ought to go back up again [unclear] with that second briefing we had yesterday.

The other thing that I think we ought to do is to stress just as strongly as we can—I assume that you’re intensifying all your pressure on the island of Cuba now—but to give them a political . . . Because if they don’t give a damn — if you want to be fools enough to have a Castro government, you can have him. But at this point I don’t think you ought to give them a chance to say we’re trying to attack the government. But this is where this man is bringing you. But one thing that we’re not going to . . . But [say]: “He’s [Castro] bringing you [the Cuban people] to a point of disaster, and a point of risk.”

President Kennedy: We’ve got a pretty good message. In any case, you can have all, any of the pictures, and do it whatever way you think best, that have been released.

Wilson: All right, sir, I think I’d better do that now. But I’m going to need to get with Mr. [unclear] shop.

McNamara: Let me just add that there are 18 separate photographs, specially selected, that are available for Time magazine. Be sure you include that line. They have the best of the lot.

13. The first time was the first briefings on Tuesday, 23 October, and the second the briefings on Thursday, 25 October.
McCone (?): Who has that? [Voices answer: "Pierre has it."]
Wilson: All right, sir.14
Rusk: Mr. President. The political track. We've moved three, possibly four, moves beyond the ones actually in the Security Council at the present time. The first would be discussions with U Thant. Stevenson and McCloy will be having [discussions] with the [acting] secretary-general [U Thant] in the next day or two beginning this afternoon, I believe.
McCloy: Beginning at 11:30 this morning. Yost is attending for him [referring to Stevenson].15
Rusk: Oh, I see. So we need instructions on that quite urgently. Now we—
President Kennedy: I asked about this. [saying to Stevenson] I said you're going to see him at four? Is that correct?
Stevenson: I'm going to go back and see him, but meanwhile he had sent for us at 11:30 and I didn't want to appear to be indifferent to his request, so I'm sending someone else.
Rusk: The objective of these talks, preliminary talks, would be to set up a situation in which further discussion could occur. But it is absolutely essential, that there be minimum requirements before any further talks can go forward.
These would be: no more offensive arms delivered to Cuba; no further buildup of missile sites or long-range bomber facilities; and any existing Cuban nuclear strike capability would be rendered inoperable. In other words, there has to be a U.N. takeover of the, assurance on the sites, that they are not in operating condition. Now we have to insist upon that very hard, because the whole object here has to be to get rid of this nuclear threat in Cuba.
Now, this is going to be very difficult to achieve because the other side is going to be very resistant to U.N. inspectors coming into Cuba. So we have to make the issue, I think, at that point.
Otherwise, what will happen is that the Soviets will go down the path of talking, talking indefinitely, while the missile sites come into full operation, including the intermediate range. And then we are nowhere.

14. By Saturday, 27 October, millions of leaflets had been produced, ready to be air-dropped over Cuba. The developments in the crisis that day put planning for the leaflet drop on hold; then the issue was overtaken by events.
15. Charles Yost was a member of the U.S. mission at the United Nations.
And we are faced with an even more difficult problem on the facts than we are at the present time.

Now, this will involve a considerable effort on the part of the secretary-general, even if the Soviets and the Cubans accept it. He would have to have an observer corps in Cuba. It would have to include up to 300 personnel as a minimum, drawn from countries that have a capacity, a technical capacity, to know what they’re looking at and what measures have to be taken to insure inoperability. That would mean countries like Sweden, Switzerland, perhaps Austria, and a limited number of, perhaps Brazil, countries of that sort. That’s Canada. We can’t have Burmese or Cambodians going in there, or other countries, in the face of three regiments of Soviet missile technicians, being led down the garden path on the operational problem.

Further, on the quarantine itself, we think that the U.N. could put a quarantine into operation. But that ours must remain in position until the U.N. has an effective one in position. Now they could do this in several ways. They could establish, at the designated Havana port, inspection personnel to inspect every incoming ship (these come in about two a day at different ports). We ourselves would maintain complete Navy surveillance of the area and insure that no ships come through any other port, and that we have full information on what is on board each ship.

There are a lot of detailed arrangements on both these items that will have to be considered. But we would have to keep our forces in the immediate background, and move promptly if the U.N. arrangements are not trustworthy.

An alternative would be to have this inspection occur offshore. But the Defense Department and my colleagues have been talking about that, and that doesn’t seem to be as feasible as insisting upon a port inspection.

But this is the general nature of the instructions that we have in mind for Ambassador Stevenson. We’ll have a detailed draft prepared by State and Defense for you to see just a little later today. But I think we ought to talk about the general policy questions involved now.

First, that the arrangements must include no further arms shipments; no continued buildup; and a defanging of the sites that are already there.

**Dillon:** That latter is the key thing because if they refuse that consistently, that gives you your excuse to take further action.

**Paul Nitze:** The most immediate thing one could do, or they could do, would be to move the missiles from the missile sites. That is: they
could take the missiles and put them on the IL-28 fields, separated from 
the erectors, and then move the fuel trucks and the fueling nitric acid 
trucks to some other place distant from the field. And get them out into 
an open field where we could get a view of them, we can have an immedi-
ate defusing, prior to the time that the inspectors arrive. Because it will 
take some time for the inspectors to arrive.

McCone: I think that’s correct. I think that inoperable could be just 
having a switch turned off or something. I think if you actually disman-
tle these sites, you can do it very quickly and very easily, because they 
are—

Unidentified: We can do it from the air [unclear] . . . reassemble 
them?

McCloy: I feel very strongly, Mr. President, that that’s the thing to 
stress. I wouldn’t put it in the order that the Secretary’s put it. I’d put it 
in just the reverse order.

The critical thing—I think that all the signs for this thing was for a 
sinister purpose. The speed with which it was built up makes it look to 
me as if it was in accordance with a time schedule, and perhaps with an 
adventure in some other area.

And I think we know we can’t reintroduce the blockade once we let it 
drop. They [the diplomats] won’t get the OAS back of us again, and this is 
the one thing that the country’s behind, everybody’s behind. I mean there’s 
a growing momentum of opinion developing, perhaps a little slowly, but 
right now crystallizing. But this is the danger. This has got the—

Rusk: I think one thing that U Thant must understand is that the 
quarantine is related to the presence of the missiles, the missile sites. 
And not just to the shipment of new, additional arms.

President Kennedy: Yes, because the . . . McCloy’s [point], even if 
the quarantine’s 100 percent effective, it isn’t any good because the mis-
sile sites go on being constructed. So it’s only a first step.

McCloy: And have a pistol at your hip, tomorrow.

President Kennedy: . . . a first step. The quarantine, it isn’t going . . .

Rusk: The actual removal of these things from Cuba is something to 
be worked out in the two to three weeks [negotiating period after a veri-
ified standstill].

President Kennedy: Obviously we can’t expect them to remove them 
at this point without a long negotiation. Of course you won’t get them 
ever out unless you take them out. But at least, for the purposes of nego-
tiation . . .

Now, Governor, do you have any thoughts about what our presenta-

Rusk: I wonder, Mr. President, if I could just outline the other two [ideas] very briefly so that we can get the whole political picture.

We also would think it wise, from the State Department point of view, unless the Defense Department sees some utterly far-reaching objections to it, to encourage the Brazilians, hopefully associated with the Mexicans, who are the other Latinos at the Geneva Disarmament Conference, to push hard for an atom-free Latin America.

Now, this involves some fairly complicated problems for us. It would not, I think, involve Puerto Rico, because that is a part of the United States. It would not involve actual transit through the [Panama] canal, because that’s available to warships and everything else in time of peace. It could involve, Bob, the business of our storing nuclear weapons in the Canal Zone. I just wanted to flag that to you because that could be an important problem. And it could also involve the actual use of Latin American airfields for transit in peacetime.

Now I’m not worried about what the commitments would be in time of war. In time of war any such arrangements go by the board. But it could involve, in effect, could bar, the actual transit of weapons through Latin American bases in peacetime.

Taylor: As a matter of fact, the ASW [antisubmarine warfare] arrangements also.

President Kennedy: We need to reflect about that.

Bundy: I think we need to. We could [undec]

Rusk: I wonder if we could get Mr. Foster [undec].

President Kennedy: [undec] just tell him we need him.

Rusk: [to an aide] Would you get Mr. Foster in for a moment? He’s in the Fish Room and we need him on this item.

McNamara: We need to study and consider this possibility. The Chiefs are very cool toward it, for a variety of reasons that General Taylor can outline. I’m inclined to favor it.

Rusk: Mr. President, the political situation on this is as follows: If you can get a large number, a large part of the membership of the U.N. supporting an atom-free Latin America, then you, on the one side, may get the— [Quiet, undec aside to President Kennedy by Bundy, part of which is: “The cable surely should not be signed by you.”]—you may give the other side an occasion for pulling back, because they’ve been supporting

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16. William C. Foster, director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, was a veteran executive in the steel and chemical industries and had been deputy secretary of defense from 1951 to 1953.
nuclear-free zones for years. And they may find in this a face-saving formula by which they can do something about it.

And, secondly, if they are not going to yield, then it is just as well to have their rejection of this situation and this possibility well on the record, before any forceful action has to be taken.

McNamara: I think you might like to hear General Taylor's comments on the Chiefs' views, and then I'd like to make some comments.

Taylor: Well, we [the Chiefs] have just had a chance to talk around the table. We have not taken a formal position on it. I would say, first, skepticism that it would be effective, but we realize that we're not in a position to judge that. You're [unclear].

Secondly, it would seem to us to divert the U.N. attention to a secondary or a tertiary issue, when we should be bearing down on the removal of missiles. [Someone appears to agree]

Rusk: Yes, but these proposals would require the removal of the missiles, wouldn't they?

Taylor: Well, we visualize considerable discussion attendant on initiation of this proposal and diversion of effort. Now that's our preliminary . . .

Secondly, we see these problems of Panama and possibly antisubmarine warfare considerations in South America. How important they are would rather depend on the exact phrasing of this proposition.

Finally, this was linked with Africa, and we had thought at once of de Gaulle and the impact on him if we put in Africa as well as Latin America.

Rusk: Well, if the African states themselves brought in Africa, then I think that, as we see it, we would not . . .

Mr. President, the question has just been raised on this, on what happens if Africa is included. I think we could expect in the General Assembly the Africans to want to add Africa to the list, and this could be a temporary problem for [French] President [Charles] de Gaulle.

We don't know exactly what his [de Gaulle's nuclear weapons] testing program is. We do know that he has concluded that Algeria is not going to be his testing site. That is politically just impossible; he is shifting to the South Pacific. It may become necessary, to meet a French objection, for us to tell him that so long as we are not subject to a nuclear test ban, or we are not testing, that he could use our own sites for any particular test that he has in mind in the immediate future, pending his establishment of a South Pacific test site. We may have to give him some help on that.

But the other side possibly could accept this. And if they turn it down, I think we're in the . . . our necessities are much clearer to everybody.

The third step is—
McNamara: May I, Dean... I'm in favor of that, so long as it is clearly linked to the first point you made. I don't believe we should allow ourselves to be maneuvered into a position in which this is the approach we take in order to achieve the elimination of the missiles from Cuba. And with that single qualification, which is an extremely important qualification, I would strongly favor that.

Dillon: There's also, it could take too long, and that's what—

Rusk: Well I would think there would be ways in which you could detect [undeclear] even while the discussion is going on [undeclear]. There will be 75 or 80 countries in favor of it, a nuclear-free Latin America and Africa. In other words, that becomes the “May pole,” [undeclear] we could find that out before [undeclear]. [The audio quality deteriorates suddenly while Rusk is speaking.]

Sorensen: Can I just add to that Ed Martin’s suggestion that we avoid U.N. action on that. If the OAS could pass such a resolution, under the Rio Pact, it would make Cuba’s possession of these missiles another violation of the Rio Pact, and thereby give us stronger [undeclear] in the U.N. or greater grounds for an attack on them.

Rusk: We have had some discussion of that, and that is of course a possibility. We are a member of the OAS. And there is some advantage in this being done by the other countries, without our direct participation. The smaller countries wanted to take themselves out of the great power confrontation.

President Kennedy: This is Brazilian?

Rusk: This is a Brazilian initiative.

President Kennedy: Well, isn’t it part of the Brazilian initiative that we, the OAS, or U.N., or somebody else, would guarantee Cuba?

Rusk: They would provide... not only atom-free...

President Kennedy: But I thought the proposal was that they would remove these weapons if we guaranteed the territorial integrity of Cuba. [Undeclear exchange]

Well, I mean we’re... obviously we’re going to have to pay a price in order to get those missiles out without fighting to get them out or...

Rusk: Well, Mr. President, unless there is some violent action by Cuba, along the lines of these offensive weapons, Cuba has all sorts of existing guarantees of territorial integrity. We’ve got that problem here if we had in mind the violent overthrow of the regime. They’ve got the U.N. Charter; they’ve got the Rio Pact; they’ve got [undeclear]... 

President Kennedy: Obviously, this is a [undeclear]. The quarantine appeals to everybody and if that’s one of the prices that has to be paid to get these out of there, then we commit ourselves not to invade Cuba.
Rusk: Well, here is a way in which that [undea[r] even more urgently. I understand this is to approach Castro alone by the Brazilian ambassador, which we would put to the Cuban ambassador [corrects himself], to the Brazilian ambassador in Havana.

Rusk now reads from a draft State Department cable to the Brazilian government that would send the message Rusk hopes the Brazilians will pass to Castro.

The world now knows without any question and in great detail the nature and size of the buildup of Soviet offensive missile capability in Cuba. There can be no valid question in anyone's mind on this point.

The action of the Soviet Union in using Cuban soil as sites for offensive nuclear missiles capable of striking most of the Western Hemisphere has placed the future of the Castro regime and the well-being of the Cuban people in great jeopardy.

The countries of the inter-American system have unanimously called for their removal and approved and are participating in the measures being taken to eliminate this Soviet threat to all of them.

The Soviet Union is turning around its cargo ships in face of the U.S. blockade which the countries of the hemisphere have authorized. Not only is the Soviet Union failing to support Cuba on this matter, but numerous feelers have been put out by high Soviet officials to allied governments for exchanges of their position in Cuba for concessions by the NATO countries in other parts of the world. Thus you are not only being used for purposes of no interest to any Cuban, but deserted and threatened by betrayal.

It is also well known that work is proceeding rapidly to complete and make operational the offensive nuclear missile installations and to assemble the IL-28 bombers. The threatened countries clearly cannot sit still while the threat against them is being increased in this fashion. Further steps will have to be taken against Cuba and very soon. [Rusk adds a brief, inaudible comment on that sentence, then resumes.]

Castro might recall that President Kennedy has said publicly that only two issues were nonnegotiable between Castro and the U.S.—the military-political ties to the U.S.S.R. and the aggressive attitude toward the internal affairs of other Latin American countries. This view will be shared by other members of the inter-American system. Of course this now means giving up the offensive nuclear capability being established in Cuba and sending home Soviet military person-
nel, on which help can certainly be given if needed. From such actions many changes in the relations between Cuba and the OAS countries, including the U.S., could flow.

Time is very short for Cuba and for Castro to decide whether to devote his great leadership abilities to the service of his Cuban peoples or to serving as a Soviet pawn in their desperately risky struggle for world domination by force and threat of force.

If Castro tries to rationalize the presence of these missiles as due to Cuban fear of a U.S. invasion, Ambassador Batian should reply that he is confident that the OAS would not accept an invasion of Cuba once the missiles were removed and that the U.S. would not risk upsetting Hemispheric solidarity by invading a Cuba so clearly committed to a peaceful course. 17

In other words, this was the seduction, as far as Castro is concerned, I would say that there is a minimum of two things. First, get the Russians out, of course. [Undeär.]

Dillon: You've made the two major changes which I thought necessary. One of them was in the paragraph saying [undeär].

President Kennedy: [Undeär.] The only question is, do we employ [undeär] [quoting passage from draft cable]: “Not only is the Soviet Union failing to support Cuba on this matter, but numerous feelers have been put out by high Soviets . . . allied exchanges.” I mean that is pretty clumsy. I don’t think there's enough evidence to indicate that. So, I think probably that our stating it would be regarded as rather insulting.

Rusk: The thought would be that this will be what the Brazilian would say without our saying it. In other words, he has the job of trying to persuade Castro that he—

President Kennedy: But they’re not deserted . . . threatened by the Soviets yet. There's no sign of that yet. Well, if the Brazilians want to say it, it's all right. [Undeär exchange, possibly Bundy giving the President a phone call from his brother.] Well now what do you do? Send that down to them [the Brazilian government]?

Rusk: We thought we would get this off right away.

So, this relates to that point, which the atom-free proposal itself raises—that the Brazilians had this in their own minds. If they [the Cubans] get rid of these offensive weapons, then I assume that it is not our purpose to invade Cuba.

17. Luis Batian Pinto was Brazil's ambassador to Cuba.
Nitze: Isn't the question here when they're going to get rid of them? This suggests that there will be long, drawn-out negotiations, both with respect to the Latin American thing and with respect to this. So, it seems to me that we've got to make clear in some way or other. . . . [Mixed voices]

President Kennedy: We're just at the start of all these discussions.

Bundy: They've got to stop, and the inspectors have to be there . . .

Dillon: We originally had a 24-hour time limit, not as a thing but as a "perhaps not more than 24 hours remains," which is an indication of speed. We dropped that out.

Rusk: I don't like to put a 24-hour thing, because you pass the 24th hour without having taken the action, then you've undermined the whole message, then you've . . .

Dillon: Well, you might say, "perhaps not more than a few days."

Rusk: We'll have to get in there some element of urgency. [President Kennedy says: "Immediacy." Several people repeat the word urgency.]

Bundy: Very urgent is the word you've used.

McCone: One thing I don't like about this, and that is that it would sort of insulate Castro from further actions. Long before these missiles were there, his link with the Soviet Union and the use of Cuba as a base of operations to communize all of Latin America was a matter of great concern to us. Now what this does is more or less leave him in that position. The missiles aren't there, but still this situation that has worried us so much for the last two or three years goes on.

I bring that up because I think there's two things we have to consider here. One is to get rid of these missiles. And the other is to have the Cuban people take over Cuba, and take it away from Castro. This does not involve a break between Castro and the Soviet Union.

Rusk: Well, this message itself would repeat the President's statement that the military-political connection with Moscow is not negotiable, as well as the actions aimed at all Latin American countries.

Now, if Castro were, through some miracle, to get his militia together and turn on the Soviets, on these missiles, then this problem is solved, John, as far as the Soviets are concerned.

McCone: That's a big "if," though.

Rusk: Yeah, it's a very big "if," but that's . . . It's on that off chance. That's the purpose of this operation, if possible, you see.

Robert Kennedy: What happens in the future, in either one of these things, what we discussed earlier. . . . And now, that they get rid of the nuclear weapons and have a major operation, and have them get large . . .
kinds of other weapons to send in there and they export to Venezuela or Colombia . . .

**Rusk:** This, in fact, is one of the nonnegotiable points, and that is one of the things that the OAS action authorizes action against.

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, I mean . . . Under the other plan, the nuclear-free zone, would we be free to . . . if we felt . . . for instance, there is an uprising in Cuba? Will we support that? Number two [ the direct deal with Castro], if they export these other kinds of weapons and their other operators to Central and South America on a large scale . . .

**Rusk:** It’s possible. The draft [ message to Castro] that we have does not give assurances against any kind of rascality.

**Ball:** Nuclear weapons. It just refers to nuclear weapons and nuclear-capable weapons.

**Robert Kennedy:** Do you think we should add something?

**Rusk:** Add inspection. Add inspection.

**Ball:** Continuous verification.

**Bundy:** Mr. President, I believe myself that all of these things need to be measured in terms of the very simple, basic structural purpose of this whole enterprise, which is to get these missiles out. Castro is a problem. If we can bring Castro down in the process, dandy. If we can turn him in on other people, dandy. But if we can get the missiles out . . .

**President Kennedy:** I wouldn’t worry yet. If we can get the missiles out, we can take care of Castro. My God, if they do something in Berlin, we can always say “Well, this changes our commitments.” So I think we ought to concentrate on the missiles right now.


**Thompson:** One part, I think, has a bearing on this whole strategy. That is that, in my opinion, the Soviets will find it far easier to remove these weapons, or to move them to port for a removal, than they would to accept inspections, I think. Putting Soviet technicians under U.N. people would . . . I think they would resist.

**Bundy:** If we could verify their disappearance . . .

**Rusk:** Well, you go on with the alternatives. Mr. Stevenson . . .

**Dillon:** You offer both.

**Rusk:** . . . [ unclear] point to have in mind in these talks.

**President Kennedy:** All right, let’s do . . . We’ve got to get moving. So let’s get this message out to [ U.S. ambassador to Brazil] Lincoln Gordon . . . one more look at it, Mr. Secretary. Let’s send this off. It won’t matter. It won’t get any place. But let’s send it. But I think for now we’ve got to put in “the greatest urgency,” because the time’s running
out for us, and I would emphasize that about work ceasing while these conversations go on.\textsuperscript{18}

We've got to keep saying that work has to cease which we're verifying every day, during these negotiations. We have to keep saying that to U Thant, [to] the Brazilians. We can't screw around for two weeks and wait for them [the Soviets] to finish these [the missile bases].

Governor, do you want to talk a little and give us your thoughts?

\textbf{Stevenson:} Well, sir; I've just seen this proposed track on the political procedures since I came here. I think it's well for you all to bear in mind that the concept of this proposal [from U Thant] is a standstill. That is to say, no one was to take further action for—we could work out the modalities—for two or three weeks while we negotiated a final settlement.

This includes in the immediate modalities as one of the objectives of the final negotiations, which is to make the weapons inoperable. I would be very much troubled by trying to get that included in the original 24-, 48-, 36-hour negotiation, because it includes something that is not a standstill. It includes a reverse, a reversal of something that has already taken place.

I think it would be quite proper to include in our original demands that the weapons be kept inoperable.

\textbf{President Kennedy:} Would the work on the sites be ceased?

\textbf{Stevenson:} Work on the sites, of course. Now, the three points that we've talked about are suspending the quarantine—

\textbf{Bundy:} Excuse me, Governor, to be clear. Are we talking now about the first two days or about two or three weeks?

\textbf{Stevenson:} We're talking about the first two days. I'll outline to you the first two days and the subsequent days, if you wish.

The first two days the objectives were, on our side, that no ships go to Cuba carrying arms. This included all arms, not just offensive arms. This is what U Thant said. That's the one place that we have to determine whether we're willing to apply this only to offensive weapons or whether we want to insist, as he put it, in his [undec] all arms.

The second point is how that's to be done. The second point is that

\textsuperscript{18} The message to Brazil was sent at 2:00 that afternoon. After further discussion between the U.S. Embassy in Rio de Janeiro and Washington, the message was discussed with Brazil's foreign minister on the night of October 27. The Brazilian agreed to help, but the plan was overtaken by the events of October 28 [see Deptel 1055, 26 October 1962; and Rio 902, 28 October 1962, in FRUS, 11: 228–29, 278].
there should be no further construction on the bases, and how that is to be policed.

The third point is that we would then suspend our quarantine, pending the two or three weeks’ negotiation.

**Rusk:** The work on the bases [undecipherable] includes the inoperability of the missiles.

**McCone:** That cannot go on indefinitely.

**Nitze:** No.

**Stevenson:** I think it would be quite proper to attempt to include that, to keep them inoperable rather than to say that they should be rendered inoperable, because that requires the possible—

**Rusk:** “Keep them inoperable,” then.

**McNamara:** Well, when did they become inoperable? They’re operable now.

**Bundy:** Ensure that they are inoperable.

**Stevenson:** Well, that . . . You see, I’m trying to make clear to you that this is a standstill. This is what I meant. There would be no more construction, no more quarantine, no more arms shipments.

Now, when you say “make them inoperable,” that’s not a standstill.

**Ball:** You can insure that they are inoperable, and that leaves open whether it’s a standstill.

**Rusk:** If they turn out to be operable, then that is really something rather different.

**Stevenson:** I’m suggesting that we might include in the initial modalities of the negotiation that all the weapons be kept inoperable, and find out what that elicits in response from the other side. But I don’t think that there should be any misunderstanding about what was intended here, which was a standstill and only a standstill.

**Rusk:** Well they should remain inoperable. [Mixed voices. Someone says “The two days.”]

**Stevenson:** The next point is for the . . .

**Rusk:** We’re talking about the two days now.

**Stevenson:** Well then comes the long-term negotiation. What we wanted to obtain in the long-term negotiation, I assume—this is the two-week negotiation—is the withdrawal from the hemisphere of these weapons, and the dismantling of the existing sites for these weapons.

And what they will want in return is, I anticipate, a new guarantee of the territorial integrity of Cuba. Indeed, that’s what they’ve said these weapons were for. The territorial integrity of Cuba.

It is possible that the price that might be asked of us in the long-term
negotiation, two-week negotiation, might include dismantling bases of ours, such as Italy and Turkey, that we have talked about.

We might also include, in the long-term negotiation, Cuba's agreement to a Latin American free nuclear zone.

We might include, you might attempt to include, something like defanging Cuba for subversion and penetration. I'm not sure how we could do that, or whether we could do that, or should do that. That certainly is open for discussion.

But I want to conclude by making it very clear that the intention here was a standstill, not positive acts. And the standstill was to include the discontinuance of construction, discontinuance of shipping, discontinuance of the quarantine which we, we'd have to agree how to do that in 48 hours.

After that, we'd negotiate a final settlement which would relate to the withdrawal of the weapons, or the inoperability of weapons already operable. I would think inoperable becomes meaningless, because during the long-term negotiations we're concerned with the withdrawal of the weapons from the hemisphere.

McCone: I don't believe, I don't agree with that, Mr. President. I feel very strongly about it. And I think that the real crux of this matter is the fact that he's got these pointed, for all you know, right now at our hearts. And this is going to produce I think, it may produce, a situation when we get to [the promised confrontation on] Berlin after the [congressional] elections, which changes the entire balance of world power.

It puts us under a very great handicap in carrying out our obligations, not only to our western European allies, but to the hemisphere. And I think that we've got the momentum now. We've got the feeling that these things are serious and that they must be . . .

That threat must be removed before we can drop the quarantine. If we drop that quarantine once, we're never going to be able to put it in effect again. And I feel that we must say that the quarantine goes on until we are satisfied that these are inoperable. [He hits the table]

President Kennedy: Well, now the quarantine itself won't remove the weapons. So we've only got two ways of removing the weapons. One is to negotiate them out—in other words, trade them out. Or the other is to go in and take them out. I don't see any other way you're going to get the weapons out.

McCone: I say that we have to send inspections down there to see at what stage they are. I feel that if we lose that. . . But this is the security of the United States! I believe the strategic situation has greatly changed with the presence of these weapons in Cuba.
President Kennedy: That's right. The only thing that I am saying is, that we're not going to get them out with the quarantine. I'm not saying we should lift the quarantine or what we should do about the quarantine. But we have to all now realize that we're not going to get them out. We're either going to trade them out, or we're going to have to go in and get them out ourselves. I don't know of any other way to do it.

Unidentified: We ask for inspections...

Bundy: [Undeär] the first two days is, as I understand Governor Stevenson's sense of the current, or his proposal, or the proposal which is before us from the U.N., it does involve a dropping of the quarantine, without what I would call adequate momentum. Very far from it.

Rusk: Mr. President, I do think that if you had U.N. people [inspectors] at these sites [undeär]. And they were required to report in to their center every hour. That the negative, the failure to receive an hourly report on the condition of the site, would immediately cause us to send planes over to take a look. So that we would be in a position, if we needed to, if they were actually raising one of these things on its launcher or it seemed to have a [nose] cone on it, then we'll go right ahead.

President Kennedy: If we lift the quarantine, and the quarantine is substituted for by a U.N. group . . . The point is you're never going to get the quarantine back in again, or there isn't any . . . Why should the Soviets take these things out? I don't see why they should. . . . The Soviets aren't going to take them out.

McCone: They're not going to take them out. That's why we're going to have to—

McNamara: I wasn't even aware that the first two days, after which the quarantine would be lifted, would be accompanied by U.N. inspectors. That wasn't part of the two day plan.

Rusk: Not in the first two days. Not in the first two days.

McNamara: That's my point.

Stevenson: During the first two days we'd just discuss how to do it.

[Unclear exchange]

Rusk: The quarantine continues.

McNamara: But you would say, if he did these things you'd take the quarantine off. But was it your thought you'd take it off before the U.N. inspectors are in Cuba?

Stevenson (?): Oh, no. Not until [undeär] inspect all shipments and be satisfied that there are no ships moving, and that we'd be satisfied that there's no construction on the bases.

McNamara: And we'd have U.N. inspectors down there to do that?

Stevenson: Yeah. Of course, that's going to be a problem how we . . .
Dean mentioned a moment ago: how we're going to mobilize these fellows and recruit them, and that's one of the things we have to start talking about quickly.

McCloy: Well, on that point I think it seems to me pretty clear, though, as the Secretary says, that we can't expect a bunch of Burmese to go down there and take the security of the United States in its hands. I think we've got to insist upon having our own people down there. Indeed, the Soviets are already there. Their technicians—

President Kennedy: We can always tell every day by overflights whether they're—

Bundy: Not really, Mr. President. If we're talking about inoperability, we have to be there.

McCloy: You have to have technicians. You have to have somebody that knows what these things mean.

President Kennedy: The only thing is, as I say, it isn't as if what we're now doing is going to get them out of there.

Bundy: No, sir, but we are on a course in which we intend to get them out of there, and if we adopt a course at the U.N. which presumes that they might stay there, we've had it.

Unidentified: Right.

President Kennedy: But I mean... As I understand the Governor's proposal, what he's suggesting is that we give this thing the time to try to negotiate them out of there. Now maybe we're not going to be able to negotiate them out of there. But otherwise I don't see how we're going to get them out of there unless we go in and get them out.

Unidentified: That's right.

Stevenson: Simply [unreader] take two weeks to determine that.

Rusk: Mr. President, I'm not too optimistic that we will get these necessary preconditions in these first two days of talks. I think we will... If the Soviets were to come that far, I think, this would be a major backdown.

Dillon: Well, they can't back down that much.

McCone: The difficulty, it seems to me, is even during these two days, within any eight-hour period, that they could put these things on their stands, and you'd be looking at them. And they're mobile.

Stevenson: The quarantine isn't going to prevent that.

McCone: No. But I think we ought to have freedom of action that, if we detect any such move during the two-day period or any time during the two-week period, we can take such action as necessary.

Stevenson: If there is any violation of the standstill during the two-week period that we negotiate before a settlement, then of course we would have to... it serves them right... all bets are off. We're back to status quo.
Rusk: We are taking some risks on that for the next day or two. No question on that.
Nitze: Disassembly would really give you some security during the period while these negotiations go on.
President Kennedy: What did you say, Paul?
Nitze: Disassembly—separating the missiles from the erectors.
Alexis Johnson: I think we’re entitled to that.
Nitze: [Unclear] take the wings off the IL-28s to insure that they [unclear]. This doesn’t require inspectors.
McCone: Ensure that there are none [unclear] in this period.
Nitze: This is not an affront to the Soviet Union. This could be inspected.
McCloy: This isn’t a standstill until you’ve got that through. The Soviets [unclear]. These things are not operable now.
Nitze: I know that. But let’s face up to the fact that they’ve got to go back.
Bundy: Let’s be guaranteed on it now.
Nitze: Be guaranteed on it.
Stevenson: You’re trying to work out, in the modalities, the long-term negotiation.
Nitze: No, I’m just saying, during the negotiations they disassemble them. So we’re not negotiating under the threat. In our speech, you said we wouldn’t negotiate under . . . [Unclear.]
Rusk: Have we seen a missile on a launcher? [Several voices: “Right next to it.”]
McCone: All you got to do is back your trailer up.
Nitze: In an hour they could put it up. If you could put it on a basis where it would take them a day to get them up, by having these missiles on the same base with the IL-28s . . .
Bundy: It seems to me our position for pressing to look at these things, and to be satisfied ourselves, is enormously strengthened by the fact that the Soviet government hasn’t even admitted they’re there. Now I don’t see any reason why we can’t take an extremely forward position on this on the diplomatic track.
We all know that if we don’t get satisfaction on the diplomatic track it’s going to get worse. And therefore negotiating for the status quo, or for a calm down, is not in our interest.
McCone: In connection with this denial that they are there, I think it would be very appropriate for you [Stevenson] to invite the Cuban ambassador and Mr. Zorin to get in an airplane with you and fly down and look at them.
Stevenson: You see, yesterday we asked him if he would agree to send a U.N. inspection force down there to determine the existence of the missiles if there was any question about it. Of course, he didn't pick up that offer.

Dillon: I just don't see how you can negotiate for two weeks with these things sitting on, right next to the launchers.

McCone: And the IRBMs becoming operational.

Dillon: They've got to be made inoperable or you're going back on our statement that we wouldn't negotiate under threat.

McCloy: And all work is stopped.

Rusk: Well, I do think if you have U.N. personnel at the sites, with regular reporting, so that if there is any change into an actual operating condition, you would know about it.

President Kennedy: Ambassador, does Mr. Yost know what he's supposed to say at 11:30 [in his meeting with U Thant]?

Stevenson: He's going to say I'll be back at 4:30.

President Kennedy: That's all he's going to say?

Stevenson: Yeah.

Unclear exchange. By some remarkable coincidence, Yost was phoning in from New York.

President Kennedy: Excuse me, Mr. Secretary.

Stevenson: Could I be excused, sir? I did want to say one other thing to him for a moment.

President Kennedy: OK, sure. Why don't you go in my office?

Stevenson leaves and talks on the phone to Yost. Stevenson does not know it, but Kennedy has also gotten up, just for a moment, possibly to make sure that his secretary turns on the tape machine in order to record Stevenson's call from his office. The Stevenson-Yost conversation was taped. Stevenson complained to Yost that "there's a lot of flap down here" about adding a new condition for lifting the quarantine, which was that the missiles already in Cuba be rendered inoperable. He told Yost that this went beyond a standstill, but they would now have to insist on that condition. Stevenson speculated though that if the United States could not get that as part of the immediate negotiation to suspend arms shipments and the quarantine, "we'll have to settle for something less." Yost says he'll try, not really understanding, and they agree that Stevenson will go into this matter more carefully with U Thant when he returns to New York that afternoon.¹⁹

¹⁹ Dictabelt 38.1, Cassette K, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection. We do not include a full transcript of this tape in the volume because the President was not a participant in the conversation. Yost's lack of understanding is evi-
McCone: Don't you think we ought to have sophisticated people in this mission? We ought to be able to nominate the people that go.

Dillon: Right. Well, the British would be all right.

McCone: British, French.

President Kennedy: Canadians.

McCone: I don't consider why . . . It should be Swedes or Austrians, I want somebody that knows something about this business.

Robert Kennedy: I can't believe that they are going to allow a lot of foreigners running around these missiles.

Bundy: No, but what they are going to try to do is to sustain various forms of discussion while the thing goes—

Robert Kennedy: No question about that, but they can as a practical matter—

Dillon: They can as a practical matter remove the missiles from the erectors, and let people, as Paul said, let people see that by putting them in a different place, and then you don't have to have—

Robert Kennedy: But how do you know that that's . . . You know, they could put 12 missiles out on the lawn, and 16 back in the woods.

Ball: You don't know where the others are.

Robert Kennedy: How are you ever going to know—

Taylor: We could make them account for the ones we've actually seen, but those we've never seen — we have no choice.

President Kennedy: We really haven't gotten into this thing, what we haven't gotten to is . . . At least Governor Stevenson has this proposal for dealing with . . . which nobody is very much interested in.

But the point is that the blockade is not going to accomplish the job either. So we've got to have some other alternatives to accomplish what Governor Stevenson suggests may or may not be accomplished by negotiations. We don't have any proposal on the other side except to continue the blockade, which isn't going to accomplish it, except it's going to bring the conflagration closer, which may or may not be desirable, but—

Dillon: It may bring it [the conflagration] in the wrong place.

President Kennedy: Well, I think we have to be thinking, what are we going to do on the other track, if we're not going to do the negotiating track. What other devices are we going to use to get them out of there?

McNamara: Mr. President, can't we negotiate and keep the blockade? As I understood Secretary Rusk's proposal—
Rusk: Well we don't relax the blockade until . . . Our thought is that we don't relax the blockade in any way, until we get the modalities that [undər] is talking about, which include: no more arms delivered to Cuba; no further buildup of missile sites or long-range bomber facilities; any existing Cuban nuclear strike capabilities must be rendered inoperable.

McNamara: Now, and you could define that as separating the missiles from the sites, and having inspectors there.

Rusk: That's right.

President Kennedy: They won't agree to that, but the only thing is—

McNamara: Just to start with.

Bundy: But it's the inoperable that's very important, that the Governor must [McNamara agrees] get these things clearly in his head.

McCone: Separate the launchers from the sites too.

McNamara: Separate the missiles from the launchers.

In any case, if we could link together, in the initial proposal, U.N. inspection and separation of the . . .

President Kennedy: Then it seems to me we go through 48 hours and a lot of people agree with that, and then he won't agree to that.

Bundy: Then we have a double choice, Mr. President, unless we propose to go up and do nothing. One is to expand the blockade, and the other is to remove the missiles by force.

President Kennedy: Right. OK. Well let's . . . It seems to me this provides some direction to the Governor this afternoon. And then he can come back, and tell us that they won't agree to this, and then we continue with the blockade.

Bundy: You wanted to mention the importance of bipartisan representation in this.20

President Kennedy: Oh, yeah [undər]. I think that would be just fine [undər reference to McCloy].

Taylor: During any negotiation, Mr. President, shouldn't we be raising the noise level of our indignation over this?

President Kennedy: That comes to the next . . . Let's move on then to the next question, which is whether we ought to sometime today say that photographic evidence taken yesterday indicates that work is going on. And that therefore this is unsatisfactory, some [undər] [statement] like that. Do you have the photographs of this thing?

20. As he promised Ball before the meeting, Bundy is reminding the President to let Stevenson know he must be sure to include McCloy (whom they consider more reliable) in all talks with U Thant, using the argument that the U.S. team should be bipartisan.
McNamara: They do indeed. I have the evidence here.

President Kennedy: In the last four days, work has been going on, and we can't accept that.

Then I would think that tomorrow, we would then be in the position of deciding if we're going to go with [expanding the blockade to include] POL, or if we're going to decide to go the other route, the force route.

Taylor: We can do a lot of things in the air also, Mr. President, to increase our activity. We could have fighters. We could have night photography of Havana, for example. A great many things that would show mounting activity—

Bundy: Like the problems of last week, Mr. President. The more we even begin to look under these things, the less absolutely clear it is that they're sharply separated.

But we need to work on that today. And with your permission we would constitute a working group, working in the State Department, of this committee on this problem.

Rusk: Mr. President, I do think it would be important to explore the political thing, to be sure that the Soviets have turned down these three conditions before we put on the night photography.

President Kennedy: That's fair enough. I wouldn't be making any concessions now. Now, the Governor will go with this. Now, do we today put out for the world opinion, which is getting an idea this thing is—

Bundy: The work continues. Yes, indeed, we do.

President Kennedy: [Unclear] [the statement] about the work continuing? And that comes out of, I would think, the White House, rather than the Defense Department, because otherwise it looks sort of ridiculous. It's like we look to the Defense Department [unclear] to State [to speak for the President].

Bundy: That's right. There is stuff on the wires that the Soviets are saying the U.S. military have taken over at this point. It may be even advantageous for the State Department to put that out.

President Kennedy: No, let's give that to Pierre. Let's this afternoon have a statement which Ros and Sylvester and Mac can work on, saying about the work going on, and indicating—we'll have to draw this with care, and clear it with the State Department and Tommy—what severity with which we judge this.

Because this way we start the... We perfected the blockade but that's only half the job. This will lead us then to the [expanded blockade on] POL or to the...

Bundy: My suggestion would be, Mr. President, that we have a White House spokesman simply say that there are problems—
President Kennedy: OK, why don’t you get that out.
Bundy: — that the work is going on, and we call attention to the
President’s speech [undär].
President Kennedy: Something like that.
Wilson: Mr. President, did you make a decision on the leaflets? I’m
just interested in whether you want to drop the leaflets.
President Kennedy: They’re going to arrange the leaflets and we will
then tell them to drop [undär].
Wilson: But you don’t . . . But there’s been no decision to drop them?
President Kennedy: I’ve said that we’d go ahead and drop them. Do
you have some reservation about that?
Wilson: No. I have a feeling that this may be the time to stir up
things.
President Kennedy: All right, well we’re going to drop them. We
plan to drop them.
Now, let me just say the only other question here is a matter which,
Doug, you brought up yesterday. I thought that we ought to get some-
boby . . . I don’t know whether we ought to get maybe a presentation
tomorrow by the Defense Department on the air action again, whether
that is, Bobby is getting . . .
Bundy: Let us work some more on that, Mr. President, and have
something ready for you tomorrow.
President Kennedy: In some ways that [air strike option] is more
advantageous than it was even a week ago. I’d like to have us to take a
look now at whether that can even be [undär].
Unidentified: Who are you going to meet at noon?
The meeting then broke up. Many overlapping conversations continued,
with the recorder picking up little that is intelligible; the chief audible
fragments follow.
Bundy: If George was available, it would be a great help if he could
chair this planning operation in the State Department, [undär] have
the job to identify a Department officer, and someone who [undär] just
take you all in a room in the same way we did it this week.
President Kennedy: Will you just take your . . . ?
Robert Kennedy: Are we going to go right now, Mac?
Bundy: People should assemble over there as fast as they can [undär].
McNamara: Mr. President, you might like these time factors [undär]
on our military [undär].
Taylor: We’ve approved the operation in theory.
President Kennedy: Get Bobby and Mac. I know that you have to get
[undär], after a strike you have to start [undär].
Bundy: They don't have three other things to do [undiary]. [Undedar exchange, which includes McCone speaking of “the Cubans.”] [Undedar] tomorrow. On the other hand, tomorrow it gets pretty tight [undiary]. You can delegate to anyone you want up there, but [undiary]. Any others besides [undiary]. Well, I'll be there. Doug will be there. Doug is [undiary].

Unidentified: What do you want to do about Paul? [undiary]
[Undedar exchanges]

Unidentified: The man who will take this original negative and fly it to [undiary].

The tape recorder then was turned off.

After the members of the Executive Committee departed, President Kennedy returned a phone call from David Ormsby-Gore.21 The British ambassador asked how long President Kennedy felt he could wait for U Thant to try for an adequate, verified standstill. President Kennedy told him that the Soviets were pushing ahead to finish the missile sites. The United States could not, therefore, wait much longer.

As planned, a number of the advisers moved to the State Department to brainstorm about alternative plans, the way they had the week before. They discussed the instructions that would go to New York on U.S. conditions for ending the quarantine. They also worked on a possible air strike against Cuba. Taylor reported back to the Chiefs that a consensus seemed to be emerging in favor of starting with a limited strike just against the missile sites and the IL-28s. The air defenses in Florida were now so strong that fears of a retaliatory air strike by the MiGs had apparently diminished. Taylor and the Chiefs continued to favor a larger air strike, at least extending to the SAM sites as well.

At some point at midday President Kennedy took the following phone call from Dean Rusk; the specific time is just our conjecture.

21. This may have been the call he was told about during the meeting, which he asked his secretary to say he would return in an hour.
11:55–11:58 A.M.

Actually, of course, there are no ships [in the area of the quarantine line]. So the only ships he had, have already gone in.

Conversation with Dean Rusk

During the night of October 25–26, both the United States and the Soviet Union also replied to U Thant’s appeal that both countries avoid a confrontation at the quarantine line. Kennedy’s reply was that “If the Soviet government accepts and abides by your request” to stay away from the interception area during preliminary talks, then the United States would accept his request to do everything possible to avoid a direct confrontation. “I must inform you, however, that this is a matter of great urgency in view of the fact that certain Soviet ships are still proceeding toward Cuba and the interception area.”

The morning of October 26, news arrived in New York that Khrushchev had accepted U Thant’s appeal too. Having just returned to the State Department after the morning meeting, Dean Rusk got the news and called Kennedy to tell him.

Dean Rusk: [reading from Khrushchev’s letter to U Thant] “I’ve ordered the masters of Soviet vessels bound for Cuba but not yet within the area of the American warships’ piratical activities to stay out of the interception area, and we recommend [unclear].”

Then it goes on to say that this may be completely temporary, [unclear] authority [unclear].

President Kennedy: Actually, of course, there are no ships [in the area of the quarantine line]. So the only ships he had, have already gone in.

Rusk: Yeah.

President Kennedy: But we figured there was only one ship possibly [the Grozny]. Otherwise there were no ships for three days.

Rusk: Yeah.

President Kennedy: Right.

Rusk: Now, our [unclear]. U Thant [unclear].

President Kennedy: That will not become public, will it?

Rusk: [Unclear.]
President Kennedy: Yeah.
Rusk: Yeah. U Thant, now he... U Thant now released [undclear] in about an hour, so we'll talk.
President Kennedy: Yeah.
Rusk: [Undclear.] I think that it [U.N. inspection in Cuba] is a problem of controlling airfields. I think it's a problem of controlling sites—the inoperability of offensive [undclear].
President Kennedy: Right.
Rusk: In all of this, [undclear].

12:00 – 12:12 P.M.

President Kennedy: [T]here's no action that, other than diplomatic, that we can take, which does not immediately get rid of these. T here are only two ways to do this, as I said this morning. One is the diplomatic way. W hich I doubt, I don't think it will be successful. T he other way is, I would think, a combination of an air strike and probably invasion, which means that we would have to carry out both of those with the prospect that they [the missiles] might be fired.

McCone: Invading is going to be a much more serious undertaking, than most people realize...

It's very evil stuff they've got there... I f they're equipped to handle them, which I presume these technicians, at least the Russians, can handle, then they'll give an invading force a pretty bad time.

Meeting with Intelligence Officials

As President Kennedy's other advisers were thinking harder about plans for an air strike against Cuba, more ominous intelligence news was being digested, especially from the low-level photography mission flown on October 25. T he photos gave new evidence about the pace of Soviet preparations to ready the MRBM sites for firing, and the possible deployment of tactical nuclear weapons. Intelligence analysts concluded

that the MRBM’s were becoming fully operational, readied for imminent possible use. McCone, with top photo analyst Arthur Lundahl, sought and received a private meeting with President Kennedy to brief him on this information. Robert Kennedy was also present.24

We know this meeting occurred at about midday, and before President Kennedy left the office at 1:00, but the exact time is a conjecture. It is in the Oval Office.

Unidentified: [Unclear] fields with the trucks that go back there [unclear].

John McCone: Yeah, and—

President Kennedy: [looking at imagery] Well, if we hadn’t . . . ? [exclaiming] Isn’t this peculiar? If we hadn’t gotten those early pictures, we might have missed these. Wonder why they didn’t put a cover over it.25

McCone: I don’t know. I don’t know.

President Kennedy: We always think they’re so smart that . . .

McCone: Here’s another similar . . . This is the missile stand. Here’s the blocks. Here are the two missile shelter tents. Here are two missiles and a third one.

President Kennedy: Those are missiles?

McCone: Yeah.

President Kennedy: Did you see the New York or London Times where it said we’ve misread the pictures?

Unidentified: Yeah.

Nine seconds excised as classified information.

McCone: [Unclear] Strong.26 I gave him a debriefing on that yesterday [unclear].

President Kennedy: He actually said, I guess they’re missile sites. But what we said were missiles, were actually ground to air. But now, you don’t see any people, do you?

McCone: I don’t see any people here.

President Kennedy: What would be a good question, it seems to me,

24. Robert Kennedy’s memoir included an accurate quotation from McCone’s briefing, though he places it incorrectly in the morning Executive Committee meeting (Thirteen Days, pp. 85–86).
25. The missiles were now being concealed by much more aggressive camouflage efforts, which troubled the analysts. They were now able to spot the missiles only with the aid of the photographs taken of them earlier in October.
26. McCone is referring to his briefing of Kenneth Strong, the visiting chair of the British government’s Joint Intelligence Committee.
in the future is to find out what our pilots see themselves compared to what the pictures show.

McCone: Well, they don’t see very much.

President Kennedy: Don’t they? If we’re going to do an air strike—whether those fellows can pick this up themselves going at that speed.

McCone: Now that . . . Well, they . . . But I’ll have to show you here is . . . This picture unfortunately doesn’t show it very well. Let’s get one or two others.

There’s a whole complex here. See, here is the missile erector. Here’s a cable that goes over here to a power source. Then, in other parts of the pictures, there are the fueling trucks, of which there are two types. And there’s— and then there’s the missile stored over in the missiles building. I’ve concluded that it isn’t possible to really hide these things as we have sometimes thought. They’re mobile, but they’re not quite as mobile as a tractor-trailer, you see. Furthermore, they’re big.

Robert Kennedy: Is this all there is to this thing which could be fired now?

McCone: No. This is what we have. . . . I’ll have to ask him to bring in one or two other . . . [going to the doorway, calls out] Art [Lundahl], better bring all of them in, Art. You better bring them all in. [A distant voice gives an unclear response]

[back near the President’s desk] It’s quite an extensive installation, even though it’s portable. And hence it is, first, a larger target and a more sensitive target than you would think.

I’ve set up the [unclear]. I’ve had our people make a study of it quite independently. We have, as you know, a lot of military people that are seconded to the agency so that the amateurs aren’t in military billets. We conclude that—we feel that—there’s a higher probability of immobilizing these missiles, all of them in the strike, than I think we’ve . . . our thinking has tended in the last few days. Now, it won’t be final because we don’t see all the missiles for which there are launchers and SAM sites. Therefore, there are some that haven’t been moved into position. And also [unclear] could be repaired. Now I want to see that picture that shows the extent of the complex—

President Kennedy: Have we got a mobile missile that’s transportable by plane that has any range, 1,000 miles?

Arthur Lundahl (?): I don’t believe so. I take that back. Mr. McNamara said something about that the other day at the meeting which was news to me. But I think he said it affirmatively. I don’t know what it is, sir.

President Kennedy: We couldn’t fly. We could—if we ever have to fly say, 15 into Berlin— if we wanted to—
McCone: West Berlin? I think so, yes. A Pershing.27
President Kennedy: A Pershing? What's the range?
McCone: I don't know. [Scraping sounds, as of an easel being set up.]
Well, I'm anxious to see, Art, and to have the President see, if one or two of those pictures would show those, the low-level pictures, would show how extensive the complex is.
Lundahl: All right, sir. I can display some of these [unclear].
President Kennedy: Yesterday's?
Lundahl: Yes. The 23d, sir [actually the 25th].
President Kennedy: Is this one of the places that we had earlier pictures that showed the degree of accuracy?
Unidentified: Yes, sir.
President Kennedy: We hadn't released these at the time, have we?
Unidentified: No, sir. I think . . .
McCone: This is a picture—this is a picture that we released for use in the pamphlet [to be dropped over Cuba]. Now you see? Here is your launcher. Your missile's stored here. Here are the oxidizer-tank trailers. Here are the fuel tanks.
President Kennedy: [to someone else] Well, we've got it lined up, haven't we?
McCone: Yeah, yeah. [Unclear exchange]
President Kennedy: Could one bullet do that? Would it blow or is it just . . .
Lundahl: Assuming red nitric acid, sir, very heavily lined trucks, so if they're opened up, they might make some real trouble for those who are trying to contain it. That's the oxidizer that they use with their SAMs, the mediums [MRBMs] and the intermediates [IRBMs].
President Kennedy: [Unclear] they may hide these pretty quickly.
McCone: Well, we have evidence that they are . . . Let me see this picture.
President Kennedy: This photography is [unclear]. We took more pictures today, did we?

27. The Pershing I was a short-range ballistic missile with a range of less than 500 miles. Pershing I missiles were stationed in West Germany under German control, with the nuclear warheads remaining under the separate custody of the United States. The Pershing I’s range could not reach targets in the Soviet Union, a fact which annoyed the Adenauer government in West Germany (because the deterrent force on their soil was therefore less threatening) but pleased almost everyone else.
McCone: Yes, we sent planes out today. Here are the missile shelters. Here are tanks camouflaged here. You see here they’re even covered with netting. Here’s an erector covered with netting. Here’s trucks camouflaged again over here. Here’s something; we don’t know what they’re doing.

President Kennedy: Yeah, they’re really getting [unreadable].

McCone: Here’s something.

President Kennedy: It’s just a question of how much [unreadable]?

McCone: Yeah.

Unidentified: I don’t see any people. There’s a fellow.

Lundahl: The ground is so wet they have to lay their cables above ground on little stanchions. And they have to put catwalks around it because there’s all kind of water. There’s been lots of rain in there in just the last couple of days. Here’s some of their advanced equipment, sir.

Unidentified: Now this is another interesting—

Thirty-eight seconds excised as classified information. From the context this appears to be a briefing about the discovery of possible Soviet tactical nuclear weapons, in the form of a short-range nuclear missile called the FROG.28

President Kennedy: But you couldn’t shoot those up much. Could you just . . . ?

McCone: No, you couldn’t shoot these up.

President Kennedy: It shows there. Is this the only place we’ve got that’s sort of an armory?

Lundahl: So far, sir. We have others but we haven’t made—

President Kennedy: It would indicate that.

Lundahl: There’s a real concentration of effort now.

McCone: Here’s an interesting one. Now, here’s your launcher. Here’s those two pads for the wheel chocks. Here’s the missile. Here’s another erector here. Now, here’s your cable that comes through some kind of a cutout switch here and then over to a launch-control building and a generator. So there— in addition to the launchers and the missile, there are a number of trucks and trailers and interrelated equipment, 28. The FROG missile launchers were discovered by the same low-level photography of 25 October that was a main subject of this briefing. The next day’s GMAIC, JAEIC, NPIC joint report included the following: “Photography (Mission 5012 of 25 October) confirmed the presence of a FROG missile launcher in a vehicle park near Remedios (The FROG is a tactical unguided rocket of 40,000 to 50,000 yard range, and is similar to the U.S. Honest John)”; “Supplement 7 to Joint Evaluation of Soviet Missile Threat in Cuba,” 27 October 1962, in CIA Documents, McAuliffe, p. 325.
much of which is quite sensitive but would go to make this installation a workable installation.

President Kennedy: We don’t know how many people there are in each one of these, guards, do we?

McCone: No, we don’t. No we don’t. We have some information that on some sites there are as many as 500 personnel on-site with 300 additional Soviet guards, but you’ll probably find this in a very large restricted area.

President Kennedy: What conclusions does this lead you to?

McCone: Well, it leads me to... Well, I guess this is why they would need... [unreadable].

Unidentified: Your car is at the west entrance, sir.

Sounds of easels being taken down and distant, unclear exchanges between McCone and Lundahl.

McCone: Thanks very much, Art.

It appears to me that there’s a very great deal of concern about this thing. I’m getting more concerned all the time, in terms of [unreadable]. I think that they’ve got a substantial number of these, that they could start at dark and have missiles pointing at us the following morning.

For that reason, I’m growing increasingly concerned about following a political route which, unless the initial and immediate step is to ensure that these missiles are immobilized by the physical separation of the missile which is on a truck and trailer from the launcher, which is itself a truck and trailer. One of them can be hauled one way and one hauled the other. This, I think, would be—

President Kennedy: Well now, the only problem is... I agree, that that’s what we want. What other way...? The alternative, of course, is to do the air strike or an invasion. We still are going to face the fact that, if we invade, by the time we get to these sites after a very bloody fight, we will have... they will be pointing at us. So it still comes down to a question of whether they’re going to fire the missiles.

McCone: That’s correct. That’s correct.

President Kennedy: I mean, there’s no action that, other than diplomatic, that we can take, which does not immediately get rid of these. There are only two ways to do this, as I said this morning. One is the diplomatic way. Which I doubt, I don’t think it will be successful. The other way is, I would think, a combination of an air strike and probably invasion, which means that we would have to carry out both of those with the prospect that they [the missiles] might be fired.

McCone: Invading is going to be a much more serious undertaking than most people realize.
President Kennedy: Because of the equipment they are getting [unclear].

McCone: Because of the equipment; because they had a hell of a lot of equipment before they got these things that you just saw pictures of, now. It’s very evil stuff they’ve got there. Rocket launchers and self-propelled gun carriers, half-tracks, and all such things as that. If they’re equipped to handle them, which I presume these technicians, at least the Russians, can handle, then they’ll give an invading force a pretty bad time. It would be no cinch by any manner of means.

President Kennedy: Of course, if you had control of the air, could you chew those up?

McCone: Oh, you could chew them up. But you know how it is. It’s damn hard to knock out these field pieces. That was the experience we had in World War II and then Korea.

President Kennedy: We had complete air [superiority].

McCone: Well, you had complete air and bombed the hell out of these gun sites and they’re still there. But the...

President Kennedy: We’re getting in touch with the Pentagon? Who’s in charge, sort of, of the . . . with respect to the invasion? Do we have a fellow? Is [Army chief of staff General Earle] Wheeler the one who is working on that?

McCone: Yes, I think Wheeler is working on that just now. And there’s a General Trimmer who I don’t know, who I think is the man under Wheeler . . . [Admiral George] Anderson, has set up as the man who is responsible for preparing the invasion forces.

President Kennedy: What about the air strike?

McCone: I don’t know who has that.

President Kennedy: Well, but I mean, what about the—what course of action does this lead you to?

McCone: Well, this would lead me . . . This would lead me to moving quickly on an air strike if we—

At this point the recording stopped.

At 1:00 P.M. President Kennedy left the office, took a swim, and went to the Mansion for lunch. From there (where he could not tape his calls) he kept up to date as more details came in about the diplomacy in New York and the operation of the quarantine.

In the Atlantic Ocean, two Soviet submarines had finally been obliged to surface under the scrutiny of watching U.S. sailors. A Swedish dry
cargo ship, the Coalangatta, that had docked in the Soviet Union and was en route to Cuba under Soviet charter, proceeded to the quarantine line and then refused to stop when it was intercepted by a U.S. destroyer. Faced with this curiously defiant behavior by a ship that had not been on the list of suspect vessels and despite Khrushchev's pledge to U Thant that Soviet ships would avoid the quarantine area, the destroyer asked for instructions. The matter was bumped up to Washington. Ultimately the signal came back: Don't fire. Let the Swedish ship pass. The matter seemed odd, even troubling.

At 2:30 in the afternoon a number of President Kennedy's top advisers gathered again, this time in the JCS Operations Room of the Pentagon, for the planned meeting on whether to send a number of intelligence and sabotage teams of Cuban agents into Cuba under Operation Mongoose. McCone had already decided to suspend the planned operation and force the Pentagon to take responsibility for it. General Taylor complained that the JCS had not been asked to review such a broad operation and thought the idea was unwise unless the United States decided to invade Cuba. He said the military did not want to take over such sabotage operations. That left McNamara and Robert Kennedy as the sole sponsors of the idea. Though McNamara still thought Mongoose should be considered as a way to get rid of the Soviet missiles in Cuba, Robert Kennedy did not back him. So the group decided to put off any sabotage plans against Cuba for at least a week and stressed that any further plans should go through regular channels, including Operation Mongoose's formal director, Edward Lansdale. The other major item from the morning Executive Committee meeting, planning for a possible post-Castro government in the aftermath of a U.S. invasion, was turned over to the State Department.

At 4:15 in the afternoon President Kennedy returned to his West Wing office. The diplomacy was intensifying, as was the Soviet military activity in Cuba.
4:30 – 4:32 P.M.

I think we’d have to do that, because we weren’t going to invade them anyway.

Conversation with Dean Rusk

The diplomacy in New York had become very active. In Stevenson’s absence, his deputy, Charles Yost, met with U Thant at about 11:30. U Thant thought the Soviets might be amenable to a deal that withdrew the missiles in exchange for a U.S. pledge not to invade Cuba. Rusk phoned President Kennedy to mention this possibility.

Dean Rusk: The Cubans may want to resolve this by getting their weapons out in exchange for some sort of assurance about their territorial integrity.

President Kennedy: Yeah.

Rusk: We’ll be working on the idea here, and the various forms which such [ an] assurance might take. But—

President Kennedy: How does it [ this information] come to you? How does this come to you?

Rusk: Well, first, U Thant’s first discussion with our people this morning.

President Kennedy: Yeah.

Rusk: And it looks as though [ removing] the threat of an invasion may be a quid pro quo for getting the missiles out.

President Kennedy: Yeah.

Rusk: Now this would involve some problems. But at least we were not intending to invade, before the missiles got there.

President Kennedy: Yeah, yeah.

Rusk: So I just wanted to let [ you know] . . . And then we also have something through the Canadians, to the same effect.

President Kennedy: Yeah.

29. Dictabelt 38.2, Cassette K, John F. Kennedy Library, President’s Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

30. A call was logged from Rusk at 4:30. The content of the call makes us a bit uneasy about the accuracy of this logged time, since it sounds like a conversation that might more likely have occurred just before 1:00, when Kennedy left his office.
Rusk: So it’s just possible that this may move faster than we had expected.

President Kennedy [still reacting to the idea] No. I think we'd have to do that, because we weren’t going to invade them anyway.

Rusk: That’s right.

President Kennedy: Right.

Rusk: OK.

5:45 - 5:50 P.M.

What we would ideally like to get is their agreement within the next day or so that they'll take these things out and... the OAS and we would agree to guarantee the integrity of Cuba.

Conversation with Adlai Stevenson31

To handle the diplomacy, detailed instructions were conveyed during the afternoon to Stevenson. The United States was willing to accept U Thant's notion of a standstill while negotiations took place on the ultimate removal of the Soviet missiles from Cuba. But Washington told Stevenson to insist on the three conditions for a standstill (of the quarantine) that had been agreed on, over Stevenson’s objection, in the morning ExComm meeting: no more Soviet arms shipments, no further work on missile sites, and—above all—all Soviet missiles must be inoperable. This must happen in 48 hours and with international supervision. If it happened, then there could be two or three weeks for negotiations, though the quarantine forces would stay in place, shadowing but not stopping Soviet ships, until the missiles were removed.32


32. See State 1105, “Cuba: Talks with Acting Secretary General U Thant,” 26 October 1962, in FRUS, 11: 232–34. At the morning meeting Stevenson’s position had been that the United States should only use U.N. inspectors to see that missiles were “kept inoperable.” A standstill thus would only freeze the status quo, and those missiles which were already operable would be allowed to stay that way. That is why Stevenson preferred the wording “kept inoperable” to the “rendered inoperable” initially used by Rusk and others. McCone, Bundy, McCloy, and Nitze had vehemently objected and McNamara seemed puzzled, at the least. At the end of the ExComm meeting, Kennedy summarized an outcome that appeared to reject Stevenson’s view.

The instructions cable, however, revives Stevenson’s “kept inoperable” phrase. It does so by fudging the issue that divided the ExComm in the morning, using phrases like: “any exist-
In their meeting, U Thant and Stevenson talked through the details of possible verification arrangements, but U Thant doubted that the Soviets or Cubans would accept what the Americans wanted, especially the measures to keep the missiles inoperable.

Yet U Thant was hopeful that a settlement could be found through a deal in which the United States would guarantee the territorial integrity of Cuba and, in return, all missile sites and other offensive weapons would be dismantled and removed. U Thant claimed to have gotten the idea from the speech of Cuban president Osvaldo Dorticos to the General Assembly. U Thant also telephoned Rusk directly to convey the same idea for a deal, this time described as trading a verified standstill that met all U.S. conditions only for U.S. agreement not to attack Cuba during the two or three weeks of negotiation on a final settlement. Rusk was receptive. U Thant thought the Russians would want to have some face-saving reciprocal right of inspection, perhaps of Cuban refugee camps in the United States. On this point, Rusk was non-committal.

As discussed in the morning, Kennedy also was planning to call the world's attention to the quickening pace of Soviet military activity in Cuba. After Stevenson and McCloy, now back in New York, met with U Thant, Kennedy got Stevenson on the phone. He turned on the tape recorder after the conversation had already begun, perhaps after Stevenson had already summarized his just-concluded meeting with U Thant. Kennedy is turning to the press statement the White House plans to issue about the continuing Soviet military buildup in Cuba. Stevenson apparently objects to the idea.

Adlai Stevenson: [Unsure] look bad if the United States [unsure].
President Kennedy: Well, we can put out a statement in the morning.

This implies that all existing missiles were then inoperable, though McCone, Bundy, and McNamara had pointed out that this might not be true. The cable was drafted by Stevenson's counterpart in the State Department (assistant secretary of state Harlan Cleveland), who had not attended the ExComm meeting. Stevenson had cleared the language before it was sent to him. (The only officials outside State that are noted as clearing the message are McCloy and Paul Nitze—not Bundy. McCone would not ordinarily be in the channel for clearing State cables.) We presume that Stevenson knew well that the U.N. inspectors were expected to verify the inoperability of all the missiles. He secured the "kept inoperable" language, upholding the fiction of the supposed unreadiness of any of the missiles, so that he could pretend the United States still just sought a standstill.

33. The White House telephone log indicates the call took place at about 5:45 P.M. Stevenson and McCloy met with U Thant that afternoon at 4:30.
All this was, was a factual statement, nothing else, of what the [reconnaissance] pictures show. I think we have to do that because too many people know it and it will look like we're talking and not . . . then [Senator Kenneth] Keating will come out and we'll lose our credibility. So I . . . all we said was, the buildup is continuing and I don't see anything wrong with that.

Stevenson: All right.

President Kennedy: We didn't add anything that this must stop. We just . . .

Stevenson: Tomorrow you might give thought . . . We'll call you again about it.

President Kennedy: Right.

Stevenson: I'd say that once they have the approval of [undear], the rest of the hemisphere is accomplished, [undear] it should be possible to normalize [undear] to take care [undear] satisfy all the fears on [Cuba's] territorial integrity.

President Kennedy: Right, well, we ought to— we can. You'll be in touch with the State Department?

Stevenson: I've already called Rusk and I want to talk to him some more about the details.

President Kennedy: Now will somebody find out a little about these [Cuban refugee] camps that he [Khrushchev] might want to be visited?34

Stevenson: We don't have any of this information and it took me . . . It was difficult therefore to respond. So I just said they will have to hold that one.

President Kennedy: I don’t think there's anything to these camps, but . . . in fact I'm sure there isn’t. But I thought: “You'd better get somebody at the [State] department looking into it so they can give you an answer tomorrow morning.” I don’t think we—

Stevenson: [Undear] CIA?

President Kennedy: CIA would know. But . . .

Stevenson: I'll get on that.

President Kennedy: All right.

Stevenson: I think this looks rather hopeful on the whole.

President Kennedy: Yeah. As I say, our statement this afternoon just

34. U Thant had mentioned earlier in the day that, if the Americans wanted U.N. inspection of Soviet missile sites in Cuba to be sure the missiles were inoperable, he thought the Soviets might want a reciprocal right to U.N. inspection of Cuban refugee camps to be sure they were not preparing an invasion of Cuba.
talks about the [Soviet] buildup continuing and their camouflaging it and all the rest. So that’s what’s of concern to us. That we don’t look like we were talking while they were working.

Stevenson: Yes.

President Kennedy: So I think it was all right to put it [out].

Stevenson: [Undeard] to review the whole problem and have a talk with the secretary-general [U Thant] tomorrow.

President Kennedy: Yeah. Yeah. In other words, what we would ideally like to get is their agreement within the next day or so that they’ll take these things out and we would agree to guarantee the . . . the OAS and we would agree to guarantee the integrity of Cuba.

Stevenson: That’s right.

President Kennedy: Yeah.

Stevenson: I think there is one other feature that is somewhat difficult [undeard] for U Thant to satisfy them [undeard] ports of embarkation [undeard].

President Kennedy: Yeah, Governor, the other thing is—[Voices can be heard in the background. President Kennedy says, “Ask Bundy?”]—Governor, the other thing is that a good deal . . . We’ve . . . some of our pictures show a good deal of conventional [military] buildup. They’ve got a lot of the latest equipment of mobile self-propelled guns and so on, so that this is, uh, they’re making quite a serious effort there. But I just wanted you to know that for background.

Stevenson: The real trick is the offensive weapons [ballistic missiles] there.

President Kennedy: That’s correct. That’s correct.

Stevenson: All right then, I’ll be in touch with you tomorrow.

President Kennedy: OK, OK.

During the afternoon Rusk (and then Kennedy) had heard more evidence about Soviet interest in trading the removal of the missiles for a noninvasion pledge from an informal source. The ABC News journalist John Scali had been approached by a Soviet KGB officer based in Washington under cover as a journalist, Alexander Fomin. Fomin told Scali that he thought his government would be interested in a deal in which Soviet bases would be dismantled under U.N. supervision, Castro would promise not to accept offensive weapons of any kind, and the United States would pledge not to invade Cuba. Scali promptly reported this to the State Department and to Rusk. Thinking that the Soviet government might be using Fomin as an informal channel to feel out U.S. interest in
this bargain, Rusk encouraged Scali to pursue the matter further with Fomin and indicate U.S. interest in such a settlement.\footnote{Fomin's real name was Feklisov. The text presents the story as it was then understood by Rusk and others in the U.S. government. The real story is murkier, but it seems that Feklisov was improvising a position of his own and not acting as an agent of his government in this matter. See Alexander Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, “Using KGB Documents: The Scali-Feklisov Channel in the Cuban Missile Crisis,” Cold War International History Project Bulletin, Issue 5 (Spring 1995), p. 58; and Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958–1964 (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 263–65.}

The new intelligence information prompted President Kennedy and Bundy to rework the White House announcement that had been planned at the morning Executive Committee meeting. The final statement, the one Kennedy was mentioning to Stevenson, was read out by White House press secretary Pierre Salinger at 6:15 P.M. It said:

The development of ballistic missile sites in Cuba continues at a rapid pace. Through the process of continued surveillance, directed by the President, additional evidence has been acquired which clearly reflects that as of Thursday, October 25, defense buildups in these offensive missile sites continued to be made. The activity at these sites apparently is directed at achieving a full operational capability as soon as possible.

There is evidence that, as of yesterday, October 25, considerable construction activity was being engaged in at the intermediate range ballistic missile sites. Bulldozers and cranes were observed as late as Thursday actively clearing new areas within the sites and improving the approach roads to the launch pads.

Since Tuesday, October 23, missile-related activities have continued at the medium range ballistic missile sites resulting in progressive refinements at these facilities. For example, missiles were observed parked in the open on October 23. Surveillance on October 25 revealed that some of these missiles have now moved from their original parked positions. Cabling can be seen running from missile-ready tents to powered generators nearby.

In summary, there is no evidence to date indicating that there is any intention to dismantle or discontinue work on these missile sites. On the contrary the Soviets are rapidly continuing their construction of missile support and launch facilities and serious attempts are underway to camouflage their efforts.
While Salinger was reading this statement to the press corps, President Kennedy was in another meeting, in the Oval Office, with India's ambassador to the United States, B. K. Nehru.

6:03 – 6:19 P.M.

[B]ut what I’m afraid of is that he [Khrushchev] won’t give you any equipment, he won’t be very helpful to you politically. I’ve seen this crap he gives Bertrand Russell. And these people, you know, always think the Russians... If you’re a son of a bitch often enough, every time you even look at all agreeable everybody falls down dead with pleasure.

Meeting with Indian Ambassador Nehru about the Fighting between China and India

Kennedy was joined by McNamara, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs Phillips Talbot, and Bundy’s deputy, Carl Kaysen. The briefing paper prepared for Kennedy reminded him that Chinese forces were now deep in Indian territory both on the northeast frontier and in Kashmir. The Indians had rejected a Chinese proposal of a cease-fire in place. Pravda’s endorsement of this proposal suggested that the Soviets were tacitly taking China’s side. The briefing paper suggested that the President be prepared to offer arms and equipment without asking payment and also to assert U.S. recognition of the India-China border as it had been defined in 1914 (when India was part of the British Empire and adjoining Tibet was independent from China’s control).

Though the crisis in the Caribbean was not the topic of discussion, the recorded words show some of Kennedy’s continued musing about the Soviet enigma. The tape also serves as a reminder that Kennedy and his aides often had to have on their minds matters other than missiles in Cuba.

The meeting began at 5:53. President Kennedy apparently turned on the machine after the meeting had been going on for about ten minutes, as the participants got down to business.

36. Tape 40, John F. Kennedy Library, President’s Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.
37. Kaysen to President Kennedy, 26 October 1962, FRUS, 19: document 181.
President Kennedy: The Chinese forces as I understand now are beyond what they originally even claimed territorially, aren’t they?

Braj Kumar Nehru: In the northwestern sector, yes.

President Kennedy: How many miles across the frontier would they be?

Nehru: Not very far, I don’t think, in the northwestern sector. I don’t think they’ve crossed their claims in the northeastern sector.38

President Kennedy: How many miles did they claim to go?

Phillips Talbot (?): We’ve got a military briefing this afternoon. In the northeastern frontier area their . . . the penetration has gone 20 miles or so into [unhear].

Nehru: Thirty to 50 miles according to . . . Thirty to 50 miles.

President Kennedy: Are they down or are they still up high? Are they still fighting?

Nehru: They are still up high in the mountains, yes.

Unidentified: But they’re down to about 10,000 feet in that area now.

President Kennedy: But they’re over the pass?

Carl Kaysen: They’re over there on the southern slope.

President Kennedy: How many Indian troops are involved up there actually fighting, or Chinese troops? Do you know about that?

Nehru: Chinese troops, we say 30,000. Indian troops, I have no way of [unhear].

President Kennedy: How many . . . Have the casualties been many?

Nehru: Casualties on this last week of fighting: the figure I have is 2,000 Indian casualties. Many more Chinese.

President Kennedy: Does anybody know the mystery of the Communist system? What is their reason for doing this? This is the question. What is it they’re getting out of this? They take on you. Why don’t they take on us in Vietnam or something? Why are they taking you on? What’s your judgment?

Nehru: I just don’t know, Mr. President, why they should have chosen this particular time to start this. Maybe they thought you’d get involved here and make a Hungary of us or your Cuba. [Laughter.]

38. The Chinese attacks were on two fronts, one at the extreme north of India on a plateau adjoining the province of Jammu and Kashmir. This area is historically associated with the “Northwest Frontier” of British India and is what they meant by the northwestern sector. The other front, hundreds of miles to the east adjoining the Indian province of Assam, is what they meant by the northeastern sector.
President Kennedy: Kind of our Suez? Or maybe the reverse? [Laughter.] Well now, I will respond to this letter [from the Indian prime minister] and we are anxious to be helpful. What is it that the Indians would like us to do? They would like us to...?

Nehru: I don’t know whether I rightly interpret the American government, Mr. President. I get confused at certain times. But it seems to me the operative paragraph of this letter is the last one.

President Kennedy: That’s what I was just rereading.

Nehru: “I am asking for your sympathy and support.”

President Kennedy: That’s correct.

Nehru: From the sort of atmosphere that I can imbibe of what is going on in India is that we are waiting, as it were, for somebody to give...to offer concrete support rather than ask for it. There is obviously a great deal of rethinking going on—a reappraisal going on. You must have seen the prime minister’s statement about the world of our own creation. [Undefar.] It would seem to me that, to help it along, a direct offer of assistance, material assistance if we need it, without spelling it out to what would be helpful. The two words to be avoided in our context always are military alliance and military aid.

President Kennedy: Well, why don’t I write a letter to him in which I say that, of course, we offer you our sympathy and support? And then let you or [U.S. ambassador to India John Kenneth] Galbraith be discussing, or somebody else, what—how you implement sympathy and how you implement support. What about Krishna [Menon]? Is he going to continue to be the grand mogul of this?

Nehru: Well, I think he will continue to be the defense minister, but apparently the prime minister has taken over in a sense that responsibility. He’s got a group of three officers...Have you heard about this? [He recites the names.] [Undear] an advisory group.

Talbot (?): Well, that’s the commanders in chief, too.

Nehru: Two of them classify as chiefs, and all three of them are very unusual.

Kaysen: [Undear] very peculiar.

Nehru: So it’s a curious arrangement.

President Kennedy: Well now, as I understand, some Indian mission is coming here today, this afternoon.

Nehru: That is a very minor matter [Unclear].

President Kennedy: Did they send some group to London to talk about what they can provide?

Nehru: No, not the...It was the same group which went to London. There was, as far as I am aware, no talk of any major subject.
President Kennedy: Now you’ve talked to the British about some assistance?

Nehru: Not in any major way, as far as I’m aware. As far as I am aware, there have been three diplomatic moves. I am expecting a letter from Mr. Macmillan to the prime minister who said he was unclear. There has been a letter from Mr. Khrushchev urging us to make peace, containing these snide remarks about the Western powers unclear as capitalist powers unclear about creating trouble between India and China and the Soviet Union, et cetera, which has to be replied to. And we have been promised by Nasser a suggestion that a group of Asian and African powers should mediate. To both these we have said that we cannot accept any mediation or accept any negotiation unclear unless the Chinese at least go back to these lines of mid-September unclear. The Chinese offer unclear forces withdraw unclear. The 50 kilometers remain the same, wherever they happen to be. [Unclear.] This is the diplomatic activity that has happened so far as I know.

The major decision, whether we are or are not to ask for arms aid, obviously has not yet been taken. But this seems to me a sort of first step.

President Kennedy: Well, why don’t I get up an answer to it. I say it would seem to me that if I support—is the government suggesting—is the Indian government suggesting a desire to open up conversations as to the kind of support we would render, or . . . ?

Nehru: What would you say, Mr. President, if I were to suggest . . . May I smoke?

President Kennedy: Yes, sir.

Nehru: That yes, we have your sympathy and you are prepared to support us in any way that may be mutually acceptable.

President Kennedy: Useful, militarily useful.

Nehru: Mutually acceptable. And if there is anything concrete you can do, you’d be willing to . . . for discussions to be opened.

President Kennedy: It seems to me the political problem here is that the prime minister probably doesn’t want to ask us directly for assistance? Is that his idea?

Nehru: You see, all these years one’s got to sort of change one’s attitude all of a sudden and it’s difficult. So I don’t think he’s going specifically to ask you for military aid or . . .

The last statement I saw was, he wants to purchase arms wherever he can get them, and if we can befog the terms of purchase sufficiently to be within our means of payment, then that is all right. But he’s still talking of the purchase of arms.
President Kennedy: I see.

Nehru: So that to go from there to concrete suggestions of military aid would be something to be worked out.

President Kennedy: In addition to that, politically, what's good for him, the United States is involved with Cuba and with the Russians. I don't want to look like the United States is coming in and attempting to take a—because we're fighting the Communists every place—that we're attempting to take advantage in a sense—though that's not the proper term, in view of India's difficulties—by attempting to associate India with the common anti-Communist bloc, the Western or the free world bloc. But—so I think there's a question on both sides. So I think we can work that out. I'll write him a letter.

Then it seems to me that I will ask Ken Galbraith to have a conversation with him, and we'll move this to the next step. Then, after Galbraith is in touch, then I would assume that he will report to us exactly what it is that he's thinking about, the prime minister, in more precise terms. And then we will be in touch with you and we'll try to work out what we can. I would think that what they probably need is transport and light equipment, but that is for them to say.

Now the problem is, of course. This is now. We remove ourselves from this conversation. We talk just privately about governmental leaders. We don't want to, in any way, put, have Krishna enter into this. This is a matter for India, not the United States, particularly at this time when everybody's hard pressed. Of course he is a disaster and makes all the thing much more complicated. Your judgment is that he will continue, however, as defense minister.

Nehru: Yes. I don't think we can—apart from the prime minister's personal feeling that he is politically . . .

President Kennedy: Exactly now, when he would be looking as if he's picking a scapegoat?

Well, why don't I get up an answer and send one to the prime minister, then have Galbraith continue the conversation there. Why don't you report that I've read his letter; that we're very concerned about the situation there, and I'll be in touch with him right away. We're anxious to provide—to be of assistance and we'll be in contact with him through Ambassador Galbraith.

The mysterious Communist system. To take on the Indians, as I say, who after all have a good deal of influence beyond their own country as well as being this enormous country, unless they . . . when we obviously . . . they would like to make us the enemy—the Communists. They concentrate on us. They've been wooing the Indians. They've been wooing the Africans.
They've been wooing everybody else. This double game... The trouble being obviously this difficulty of you and China, and we with the Soviet Union, is going to bring China and Russia back very close together.

**Nehru:** Yes, one of the things, that was... of course, in addition, is that if we do get arms from you, China may not only stop what ever it... the Soviet Union may stop what it has promised us, which is MiGs and transports. I think we have placed an order... we have contacted [unclear] small transports. But they may start them arming the Chinese.

**Kaysen:** I must say we don't think that's very likely, Mr. Ambassador. No, they've got enough trouble and concerns of their own.

**President Kennedy:** They've got troubles with the Chinese and so I don't think that... I think that, what I think you ought to do is get them, the Russians, to put up pretty quickly. I don't think we ought to let Khrushchev—and I say this as an anti-Communist now to an anti-Communist—I don't think we ought to let Khrushchev sit this one out urging peace and holding up your arms and pacifying that way the Chinese... and at the same time maintaining his influence as a real friend of India, which he isn't. I think that this is a chance— it seems to me we have a right to— everybody has a right to call the Russians now.

I mean, the Indians have hoped always that they could use the Russians as a mediator between the Chinese and themselves. So now it seems to me that Khrushchev ought to do better than urging everybody to pull back 20 miles within Indian territory. He ought to do something about his equipment. Otherwise, we go in there and we give some military assistance, such as it is, and then Khrushchev is in a benign position and he's never had to put up. I think he ought to either give you some equipment, or he ought to be of some political help, or he ought to be discredited.

**Nehru:** The last one is more likely of the two.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, but what I'm afraid of is that he [Khrushchev] won't give you any equipment, he won't be very helpful to you politically. I've seen this crap he gives Bertrand Russell. And these people, you know, always think the Russians... If you're a son of a bitch often enough, every time you even look at all agreeable everybody falls down dead with pleasure. So I think that we ought to be tougher on the Russians— the Indians now. They ought to make him come through with some of this military [equipment]. Because, otherwise, he'll be talking to advisers a year from now, and he'll be issuing statements about urging... you'll continue to hope that maybe he's going to get you off the hook.

Meanwhile, we'll be giving assistance and nobody will be thinking... expressing much interest in us. So I don't mind that so much as I don't
want Khrushchev to do nothing for you and emerge here in a rather beneficent light. I say that not between India and America, but as somebody who doesn’t want the communist influence. I don’t want him to come in the back door when the Chinese are coming, stopped, at the front door.

Nehru: I don’t think the possibility of that is strong.

President Kennedy: Well, do you think in India there’s a feeling that the Russians have been very helpful?

Nehru: I think it’s starting [undæär] their support for the Chinese [undæär]. That, certainly, is coming [undæär].

President Kennedy: For instance, they can’t . . . They’ve got to play it pretty cute now because they’re in some difficulty themselves and they don’t want to have to—you know, they’re back in bed again, the Russians and the Chinese. That’s one of the misfortunes of the present. As the pressures on them increase, they’re going to get together. As pressures on them relax, they’ll pull apart again. But right now they’re together because the Chinese are involved in a war and the Russians are involved nearly in a war.

Kaysen: We still haven’t had many signs, as far as we can tell, of the Russians really doing anything positive with the Chinese, Mr. President.

President Kennedy: They’re not helping the Chinese, but they don’t have to.

Kaysen: No, but you’re saying they stopped shouting about them and I think that’s certainly true, but there are still no signs of anything positive between them.

President Kennedy: Oh, I agree to that but there’s going to be more intimacy, I’m sure, in the next days. But I just want to be sure that there is an effort being made. I’d like to ensure the Indians either call the Russians with their political proposal. As I say, I think you ought to get that military equipment. Otherwise everybody—

Unidentified: The Russians are going to come to the [undæär].

President Kennedy: Hello. Yeah.

President Kennedy evidently takes a telephone call. There is silence except for Kennedy occasionally saying “Yeah” or “OK” or “Right,” then ending: “Is Scotty [Reston] going to keep it quiet?”—pause—“Right, OK.”

Unidentified: Meanwhile, Mr. President, the people here at the State [undæär] circumstances [undæär].

President Kennedy: OK, fine. Well, this is a more—this is generalized. You and I can’t settle this matter but I think it would be . . . I’d like to say some of this to Galbraith. He might express it about this Russian part. Why don’t you do that and just say that I’ll be in touch right away on this.
Kaysen: Right.
Nehru: Thank you very much.
President Kennedy walks Nehru to the door. Their voices, and Kaysen's, can be heard, but the words can only occasionally be understood.

President Kennedy: Fine, good. Ambassador, it was nice seeing you. You know, I was struck by one of your most beautiful politicians.

Nehru: She's personally she has great talent.
President Kennedy: She's a very talented lady.
Nehru: She's one of the very few women in politics who has maintained her.

President Kennedy: Personally she has great talent.
Nehru: She's a very talented lady.

President Kennedy: She's one of the very few women in politics who has maintained her.

Nehru: She's a very talented lady.

President Kennedy: Five years from now then she'll be 40.
Nehru: I would like to brief her in the next speech she makes. I hope she does.

Nehru: She said she has made only three speeches so far.
[Unclear exchanges, accompanied by much laughter.]

Nehru: He's under great fire at the moment.

The tape recorder was soon turned off.

The meeting with Nehru ended at 6:19. Immediately afterward, Kennedy put through his daily call to Prime Minster Macmillan. He debriefed Macmillan on the diplomacy during the day involving U Thant and mentioned his press statement, emphasizing that “unless in the next 48 hours we get some political suggestions as to dismantling the base, we're then going to be faced with a problem of what to do about this buildup.” As for the possible Soviet offer to remove missiles in exchange for a pledge not to invade Cuba, Kennedy described this as “a couple of hints, not enough to go on yet.”

Discussing international inspection to verify that the missiles in Cuba were inoperable, Kennedy noted the apparent Soviet wish (conveyed through U Thant) for reciprocal inspection of Cuban refugee camps “in Florida and Nicaragua, Guatemala and Swan Island.” He said that, “

39. The following relies on both the U.S. and British notes of this conversation. See “Cuba–General–Macmillan Telephone Conversations, 10/62–11/62” folder, National Security Files, Box 37, John F. Kennedy Library; and PRO, PREM 11/3690, 24020.
don’t think we have got anything going there that would be difficult to inspect, but this is all part of the political proposals which are now being looked at.” He hoped to have some clearer word in the next day about whether the Soviet government really wanted such a political settlement.

Macmillan then made an offer of his own. “If we want to help the Russians to save face, would it be worthwhile our undertaking to immobilize our T hor missiles which are here in England during the same period? During the conference?”40 Kennedy said he would “put that into the machinery” and be in touch. He worried that “I think we don’t want to have too many dismantlings. But it is possible that that proposal might help. They might also insist on Greece, on Turkey, and Italy. But I will keep in mind your suggestion here, so that if it gets into that, it may be advantageous.”

Macmillan answered that he could not see why the Russians would want more than that, “because we have got 60 [ T hor missiles]. So that missile for missile, you see there wouldn’t be as many as that in Cuba.” Kennedy moved back to the possibility of exchanging Soviet missiles in Cuba for a pledge not to invade the island. That idea, though, still seemed “so vague that I am not really in a position to say that there is any possibility of an easing up. Maybe by tomorrow evening at this time I’ll know better.”

As he had the previous day, Macmillan then urged Kennedy to avoid any U.S. military action. “At this stage any movement by you may produce a result in Berlin which would be very bad for us all. That’s the danger now.”

Kennedy replied that “if at the end of 48 hours we are getting no place, and the missile sites continue to be constructed, then we are going to be faced with some hard decisions.”

Macmillan pushed back. “Of course, in making those decisions one has to realize that they will have their effect on Berlin, as well as on Cuba.”

Kennedy answered: “Correct. And that is really why we have not done more than we have done, up till now.” The President then stressed the point he had explained to others a week earlier: “But of course, on

40. The decisions to deploy T hor missiles to England were made in 1957–58, like the decisions to deploy the analogous Jupiter missile system to Turkey. However, the T hor missiles were deployed more quickly, in 1959, and were almost as quickly deemed obsolete. By the time of this call, the United States and Britain had agreed that the T hor missiles would be withdrawn later in 1962. Macmillan’s offer was still symbolically significant, since there was no precedent for such an outside intrusion into the defensive arrangements of a NATO country.
the other hand, if the missile sites continue, and get constructed, and we
don't do anything about it, then I would suppose that it would have quite
an effect on Berlin anyway."

Macmillan conceded that was the difficulty. He said he would send
a message outlining the political options. Kennedy promised to keep
Macmillan informed about diplomatic developments and said that "we
will not take any further action until I have talked to you, in any case."
He also asked Macmillan to agree to General Lauris Norstad's retain-
ing his post as NATO's military commander through the end of the
crisis.41

Very soon after this conversation, Macmillan sent off the promised
message to Kennedy to clarify the British position and itemizing three
main diplomatic options: a pledge not to invade Cuba, a U.N. mission to
Cuba to secure the immobilization of the Soviet missiles and verify that
new work had stopped, and his offer to accept reciprocal U.N. supervi-
sion of the Thor missiles stationed in Great Britain.42

7:31–7:35 P.M.

[ Y ]ou have to be goddamn careful!

Conversation with Lincoln White43

Lincoln W hite was in trouble. Press spokesman of the State Department,
W hite had delivered the daily press briefing earlier in the day. Kennedy's
press secretary, Pierre Salinger, told Kennedy that reporters were writing
stories saying that, in his briefing W hite had hinted that the administra-
tion was ready for "further action" if a peaceful solution to the crisis could
not be found. T his may have been what Kennedy was called about during
his meeting with Indian ambassador Nehru, the call in which he referred

41. General Lauris Norstad had been scheduled to turn over the job of NATO's supreme allied
commander, Europe, to General Lyman Lemnitzer. Impressed with Norstad's experience and
judgment, President Kennedy had decided on October 23 that Norstad should stay in his post
until the crisis had passed.
42. The following is from PRO, PREM 11/3690, 24020. T he message is dated 27 October but
arrived in Washington late in the evening of 26 October, Washington time.
43. Dictabelt 37.1, Cassette K, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential
Recordings Collection.
to New York Times reporter James “Scotty” Reston. Now that he had a free moment, Kennedy called White, with Salinger close by.

**Lincoln White:** Well, Mr. President, what I . . . I never said anything about further action. What I did was to cite the sentence in your Monday night speech.44

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**White:** In which, you know, you had—I don’t have the text in front of me— the essence of it being—that if this threat . . .

**President Kennedy:** [angrily] Yeah, I understand that. But that’s the sort of stuff that’s got to come from me and the White House.

Christ, we’re meeting every morning on this to control this, the escalation. I don’t want to just be . . . The fact that you refer back to my speech, that then gives them a lead headline saying “The United States Is Planning Further Action.” And we had a long talk about it this morning and it was agreed that the talk about the statement on the buildup would come from the White House and that we wouldn’t say anything about what action we’re going to take. And we don’t want to . . . When you make a reference back to my speech it then gives them a lead that further action is going to be taken.

Now we got to get this under control, Linc, cause it’s too important. I want it to be running out of the White House—

**White:** Sure.

**President Kennedy:** —under me, to Salinger, to you people and to [Defense Department spokesman Arthur] Sylvester.

**White:** Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** And nothing dealing with the Cuban crisis of any importance is to go out until it goes through Salinger and comes to me. Because I’m not—I don’t want to be critical. But the problem is when you say further action’s going to be taken, then they all say: “What action?” And it moves this escalation up a couple of days, when we’re not ready for it.

**White:** Yeah. I, I’m sorry, sir.

44. The relevant passage in President Kennedy’s 22 October address to the nation was: “Our policy has been one of patience and restraint, as befits a peaceful and powerful nation, which leads a worldwide alliance. . . . But now further action is required—and it is underway; and these actions may only be the beginning. We will not prematurely or unnecessarily risk the costs of worldwide nuclear war in which even the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth—but neither will we shrink from that risk at any time it must be faced.”
President Kennedy: So therefore you have to be goddamn careful! You just can’t make references to past speeches, because that gives them a new headline—and they’ve now got it. And every reporter in town is going to be putting together Pierre Salinger’s [6:15 P.M.] release about the missile thing with your thing that further action . . . and we’re going to find ourselves getting out of control. OK.

White: Well I’m terribly sorry, sir.

President Kennedy: OK.

White: I was under the impression that you had asked that this be done.

President Kennedy: Well, now, how did you get that impression?

White: I got it from Jim Greenfield.45

President Kennedy: Well, now, wait a second. I got Pierre right here.

President Kennedy: [to Salinger] He says he’s under the impression from Jim Greenfield that we asked that this be done.

Pierre Salinger: The fact is that [for] the last two days any question about any statement [undeclear] documents [undeclear] confirmation [undeclear].

President Kennedy: [to Salinger] Yeah, well, now, Lincoln, that’s what he did. He referred to my speech.

[to White] Wait just a second. I’ll put it on to Pierre. This is, as I say, you just got to . . . we got to get this thing coordinated. Wait a second.

Salinger: [Undeclear.]

President Kennedy: [to White] You didn’t use the words further action yourself, Linc?

White: No indeed—of course not.

President Kennedy: Well, then, I think the Washington news is way out. They can’t . . . I don’t see how they can . . . If you’re . . . if they . . . if you called attention to the speech, which I’ve been doing for two days . . .

White: Yes, sir.

President Kennedy: And then they pick out just one quote out of the speech and use it as a headline, I think that’s on the newspaper. I don’t think . . .

White: Yeah.

President Kennedy: I’ll get back to you, Linc.

45. James Greenfield was deputy assistant secretary of state for public affairs, previously a correspondent for Time magazine.
At 7:40, shortly after this call, Kennedy went back to the Mansion. Meanwhile, a cable began arriving from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, divided into four sections that were received between 6:00 and 9:00 P.M. It was a long message from Khrushchev.

This message from Khrushchev was not being made public. It was instead quite confidential and had taken more than six hours to make its way to Washington via the cable circuit running out of Moscow. The copy of the letter given to the embassy appeared to still have Khrushchev’s handwritten notations on it, and it certainly appeared to be a very personal message directly from the Soviet leader to the U.S. President.

Dear Mr. President,

I have received your letter of October 25. From your letter, I got the feeling that you have some understanding of the situation which has developed and (some) sense of responsibility. I value this.

Now we have already publicly exchanged our evaluations of the events around Cuba and each of us has set forth his explanation and his understanding of these events. Consequently, I would think that, apparently, a continuation of an exchange of opinions at such a distance, even in the form of secret letters, would hardly add anything to that which one side has already said to the other.

I think you will understand me correctly if you are really concerned about the welfare of the world. Everyone needs peace: both capitalists, if they have not lost their reason, and, still more, communists, people who know to value not only their own lives but, more than anything, the lives of the peoples. We, communists, are against all wars between states in general and have been defending the cause of peace since we came into the world. We have always regarded war as a calamity, and not as a game or as a means of attainment of definite goals, nor, all the more, as a goal in itself. Our goals are clear, and the means to attain them is labor. War is our enemy and a calamity for all of the peoples.

It is thus that, we, Soviet people, and, together with us, other peoples as well, understand the questions of war and peace. I can, in any case, firmly say this for the peoples of the Socialist countries, as well as for all progressive people who want peace, happiness, and friendship among the peoples.

I see, Mr. President, that you are not devoid of a sense of anxiety for the fate of the world, of understanding, and of what war entails. What would war give you? You are threatening us with war. But you
well know that the very least which you would receive in reply would be that you would experience the same consequences as those which you send us. And that must be clear to us, people invested with authority, trust, and responsibilities. We must not succumb to intoxication and petty passions, regardless of whether elections are impending in this or that country, or not impending. These are all transient things, but if indeed war should break out, then it would not be in our power to stop it, for such is the logic of war. I have participated in two wars and I know that war ends when it has rolled through cities and villages, everywhere sowing death and destruction.

In the name of the Soviet Government and the Soviet people, I assure you that your conclusions regarding offensive weapons in Cuba are groundless. It is apparent from what you have written me that our conceptions are different on this score, or rather, we have different estimates of these or those military means. Indeed, in reality, the same forms of weapons can have different interpretations.

You are a military man and, I hope, will understand me. Let us take, for example, a simple cannon. What kind of means is this: offensive or defensive? A cannon is a defensive means if it is set up to defend boundaries or a fortified area. But if one concentrates artillery, and adds to it the necessary number of troops, then the same cannons do become an offensive means, because they prepare and clear the way for infantry to attack. The same happens with missile-nuclear weapons as well, with any type of this weapon.

You are mistaken if you think that any of our means on Cuba are offensive. However, let us not quarrel now. It is apparent that I will not be able to convince you of this. But I say to you: You, Mr. President, are a military man and should understand: Can one attack, if one has on one’s territory even an enormous quantity of missiles of various effective radiuses and various power, but using only these means. These missiles are a means of extermination and destruction. But one cannot attack with these missiles, even nuclear missiles of a power of 100 megatons because only people, troops, can attack. Without people, any means, however powerful, cannot be offensive.

How can one, consequently, give such a completely incorrect interpretation as you are now giving, to the effect that some sort of means on Cuba are offensive. All the means located there, and I assure you of this, have a defensive character, are on Cuba solely for the purpose of defense, and we have sent them to Cuba at the request of the Cuban Government. You, however, say that these are offensive means.

But, Mr. President, do you really seriously think that Cuba can
attack the United States and that even we together with Cuba can attack you from the territory of Cuba? Can you really think that way? How is it possible? We do not understand this. Has something so new appeared in military strategy that one can think that it is possible to attack thus. I say precisely attack, and not destroy, since barbarians, people who have lost their sense, destroy.

I believe, that you have no basis to think this way. You can regard us with distrust, but, in any case, you can be calm in this regard, that we are of sound mind and understand perfectly well that if we attack you, you will respond the same way. But you too will receive the same that you hurl against us. And I think that you also understand this. My conversation with you in Vienna gives me the right to talk to you this way.46

This indicated that we are normal people, that we correctly understand and evaluate the situation. Consequently, how can we permit the incorrect actions that you ascribe to us? Only lunatics or suicides, who themselves want to perish and to destroy the whole world before they die, could do this. We, however, want to live and do not at all want to destroy your country. We want something quite different: to compete with your country on a peaceful basis. We quarrel with you; we have differences on ideological questions. But our view of the world consists in this, that ideological questions, as well as economic problems, should be solved not by military means, they must be solved on the basis of peaceful competition, i.e., as this is understood in capitalist society, on the basis of competition. We have proceeded and are proceeding from the fact that the peaceful coexistence of the two different social-political systems, now existing in the world, is necessary, that it is necessary to assure a stable peace. That is the sort of principle we hold.

You have now proclaimed piratical measures, which were employed in the Middle Ages, when ships proceeding in international waters were attacked, and you have called this 'a quarantine' around Cuba. Our vessels, apparently will soon enter the zone which your Navy is patrolling. I assure you that these vessels, now bound for Cuba, are carrying the most innocent peaceful cargoes. Do you really think that we only occupy ourselves with the carriage of so-called offensive weapons, atomic and hydrogen bombs? Although perhaps your milli-

46. Khrushchev was referring to the confrontational summit conference he had with Kennedy, the only time the two men talked in person, at Vienna in June 1961.
tary people imagine that these (cargoes) are some sort of special type of weapon, I assure you that they are the most ordinary peaceful products.

Consequently, Mr. President, let us show good sense. I assure you that on those ships, which are bound for Cuba, there are no weapons at all. The weapons which were necessary for the defense of Cuba are already there. I do not want to say that there were no shipments of any weapons at all. No, there were such shipments. But now Cuba has already received the necessary means of defense.

I don't know whether you can understand me and believe me. But I should like to have you believe in yourself and to agree that one cannot give way to passions; it is necessary to control them. And in what direction are events now developing? If you stop the vessels, then, as you yourself know, that would be piracy. If we started to do that with regard to your ships, then you would also be as indignant as we and the whole world now are. One cannot give another interpretation to such actions, because one cannot legalize lawlessness. If this were permitted then, there would be no peace, there would also be no peaceful coexistence. We should then be forced to put into effect the necessary measures of a defensive character to protect our interests in accordance with international law. Why should this be done? To what would it all this lead?

Let us normalize relations. We have received an appeal from U Thant, Acting Secretary General of the U.N., with his proposals. I have already answered him. His proposals come to this, that our side should not transport armaments of any kind to Cuba for a certain period of time, while negotiations are being conducted—and we are ready to enter such negotiations—and the other side should not undertake any sort of piratical actions against vessels engaged in navigation on the high seas. I consider these proposals reasonable. This would be a way out of the situation which has been created, which would give the peoples the possibility of breathing calmly. You have asked what happened, what evoked the delivery of weapons to Cuba? You have spoken about this to our Minister of Foreign Affairs [on October 18]. I will tell you frankly, Mr. President, what evoked it.

We were very grieved by the fact—I spoke about it in Vienna—that a landing took place, that an attack on Cuba was committed, as a result of which many Cubans perished. You yourself told me then that this had been a mistake. I respected that explanation. You repeated it to me several times, pointing out that not everybody occupying a high position would acknowledge his mistakes as you
had done. I value such frankness. For my part, I told you that we too possess no less courage; we also acknowledged those mistakes which had been committed during the history of our state, and not only acknowledged, but sharply condemned them.  

If you are really concerned about the peace and welfare of your people, and this is your responsibility as President, then I, as the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, am concerned for my people. Moreover, the preservation of world peace should be our joint concern, since if, under contemporary conditions, war should break out, it would be a war not only between the reciprocal claims, but a worldwide cruel and destructive war.

Why have we proceeded to assist Cuba with military and economic aid? The answer is: we have proceeded to do so only for reasons of humanitarianism. At one time, our people itself had a revolution, when Russia was still a backward country. We were attacked then. We were the target of attack by many countries. The USA participated in that adventure. This has been recorded by participants in the aggression against our country. A whole book has been written about this by General [William S.] Graves, who, at that time, commanded the U.S. expeditionary corps. Graves called it “The American Adventure in Siberia.”

We know how difficult it is to accomplish a revolution and how difficult it is to reconstruct a country on new foundations. We sincerely sympathize with Cuba and the Cuban people, but we are not interfering in questions of domestic structure; we are not interfering in their affairs. The Soviet Union desires to help the Cubans build their life as they themselves wish and that others should not hinder them.

You once said that the United States was not preparing an invasion. But you also declared that you sympathized with the Cuban counterrevolutionary emigrants, that you support them and would help them to realize their plans against the present government of Cuba. It is also not a secret to anyone that the threat of armed attack, aggression, has constantly hung, and continues to hang over Cuba. It is only this which impelled us to respond to the request of the Cuban  

47. Khrushchev is referring to his celebrated denunciation of Stalin’s excesses, in 1956.  
48. During the civil war following the Russian Revolution, Britain and France intervened against the Bolsheviks in 1918 in the Arctic and near the Black Sea. In 1919 and 1920, Japan, the United States, and other countries dispatched troops that briefly and ineffectually intervened in the fighting in Siberia.
government to furnish it aid for the strengthening of the defensive capacity of this country.

If assurances were given by the President and the government of the United States that the USA itself would not participate in an attack on Cuba and would restrain others from actions of this sort, if you would recall your fleet, this would immediately change everything. I am not speaking for Fidel Castro, but I think that he and the Government of Cuba, evidently, would declare demobilization and would appeal to the people to get down to peaceful labor. Then, too, the question of armaments would disappear, since, if there is no threat, then armaments are a burden for every people. Then, too, the question of the destruction, not only of the armaments which you call offensive, but of all other armaments as well, would look different.

I spoke in the name of the Soviet government in the United Nations and introduced a proposal for the disbandment of all armies and for the destruction of all armaments. How then can I now count on those armaments?

Armaments bring only disasters. When one accumulates them, this damages the economy, and if one puts them to use, then they destroy people on both sides. Consequently, only a madman can believe that armaments are the principal means in the life of society. No, they are an enforced loss of human energy, and what is more are for the destruction of man himself. If people do not show wisdom, then in the final analysis they will come to a clash, like blind moles, and then reciprocal extermination will begin.

Let us therefore show statesmanlike wisdom. I propose: we, for our part, will declare that our ships, bound for Cuba, will not carry any kind of armaments. You would declare that the United States will not invade Cuba with its forces and will not support any sort of forces which might intend to carry out an invasion of Cuba. Then the necessity for the presence of our military specialists in Cuba would disappear.

Mr. President, I appeal to you to weigh well what the aggressive, piratical actions, which you have declared the USA intends to carry out in international waters, would lead to. You yourself know that any sensible man simply cannot agree with this, cannot recognize your right to such actions.

If you did this as the first step towards the unleashing of war, well then, it is evident that nothing else is left to us but to accept this challenge of yours. If, however, you have not lost your self-control and sensibly conceive what this might lead to, then, Mr. President, we and you ought not now to pull on the ends of the rope in which you have tied
the knots of war, because the more the two of us pull, the tighter this knot will be tied. And a moment may come when that knot will be tied so tight that even he who tied will not have the strength to untie it, and then it will be necessary to cut that knot. And what that would mean is not for me to explain to you, because you yourself understand perfectly of what terrible forces our countries dispose.

Consequently, if there is no intention to tighten that knot and thereby to doom the world to the catastrophe of thermonuclear war, then let us not only relax the forces pulling on the ends of the rope, let us take measures to untie that knot. We are ready for this.

We welcome all forces which stand on positions of peace. Consequently, I expressed gratitude to Mr. Bertrand Russell, too, who manifests alarm and concern for the fate of the world, and I readily responded to the appeal of the Acting Secretary General of the U.N., U Thant.

These, Mr. President, are my thoughts, which, if you agreed with them, could put an end to that tense situation which is disturbing all peoples.

These thoughts are dictated by a sincere desire to relieve the situation, to remove the threat of war.

Respectfully yours, N. Khrushchev.49

After this message arrived, several of Kennedy’s advisers gathered informally to analyze it. Taken together with U Thant’s initiative in the day, which possibly had been prompted behind the scenes by the Soviets, and combined with the Fomin approach to Scali, Khrushchev’s letter seemed to suggest, vaguely, the same idea of a bargain that would exchange a noninvasion pledge for the Soviet withdrawal of their missiles from Cuba. To the Americans, this was a very encouraging development. With this sense of cautious optimism, they retired for the night. The Executive Committee would meet the next morning to consider how the United States should respond to the letter and explore the apparent Soviet proposal.

49. Again we use the version of the letter actually read and relied on by the decision makers at the time, in this case the unofficial translation done at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow when they transmitted the letter to Washington. It is reprinted, with some notes about later corrections, in The “Cuban Crisis” of 1962: Selected Documents, Chronology, and Bibliography, ed. David L. Larson (2d ed.; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), pp. 175–80. It differs in various small ways from the official State Department translation, which was prepared later but which appears in many of the documentary compilations.