

JFK Meeting Tape 33.1

Date: 1962-10-22

Participant: John F. Kennedy

Participant: Dean Rusk

Start Time: 15:00

Place: Cabinet Room

SCROLLER TITLE: “I Can’t Say That Strongly Enough”

SCENE SETTER: Reviewing the logic behind the blockade of Cuba, President Kennedy instructed his advisers, including Secretary of State Dean Rusk, to remain silent—both now and in the future—on their planning to invade the island.

Dean Rusk: But the central point here is that we’re in Berlin by right as well as by the acknowledgment and agreement of the Soviet Union. They’re bringing these things into Cuba contrary to the Rio Pact. There’s all the difference in the world between these.

President Kennedy: Yes. So I think we want to make—what we’re trying to do is make a distinction between our actions and a Soviet blockade of Berlin, or the [Soviet] blockade of ’47–’48. The degree of surveillance and inspection which they have over the movement of troops and personnel [into Berlin]. The fact that no weapons, strategic weapons, have been placed in Berlin. And the fact that we’re permitting goods to move into Cuba at this point, food and all the rest. This is not a blockade in that sense. It’s merely an attempt to prevent the shipment of weapons there.

[Nikita S.] Khrushchev’s conclusion, his purpose apparently, was to force us into—add to his strategic nuclear power, force us into a choice of initiating an attack on Cuba, which would free his hand, et cetera, and/or appearing to be an irresolute ally. So at the time, we chose to begin [*unclear*].

I want to go back to saying: I think that the talk which we considered at any time an air attack—I want to restate that now, that that is a matter which I don’t think we ought to discuss under any conditions. We may simply have to do it. In any case, we don’t want to look like we were considering it. So I think we ought to just scratch that from all our statements and conversations, and not ever indicate that that was a course of action open to us. I can’t say that strongly enough. We don’t want to ever have it around that this was one of the alternatives that we considered this week. I think it will be very difficult to keep it quiet, but I think we ought to because it may inhibit us in the future. And, in addition, it will become a propaganda matter, that this was a matter seriously considered by the [U.S.] government. So let’s not consider that as one of the alternatives in any discussion.

End of excerpt.

CITATION: “National Security Council Meeting on the Cuban Missile Crisis on 22 October 1962,” Tapes 33.1 and 33.1A, John F. Kennedy Library, President’s Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition [The Great Crises]*, vol. 3, ed. Philip Zelikow and Ernest May] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014–). URL: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/8030005>