

JFK Meeting Tape 37.1

Date: 1962-10-24

Participant: John F. Kennedy

Participant: John A. McCone

Participant: Robert S. McNamara

Participant: McGeorge Bundy

Participant: Robert A. Lovett

Start Time: 17:05

Place: Oval Office

SCROLLER TITLE: "Put the Screws On"

SCENE SETTER: Reflecting on the blockade they had imposed that morning, White House officials recognized that it might give Moscow time to operationalize the missiles it had already sent to Cuba. Linking the fates of Berlin and Cuba, President Kennedy speculated on how Soviet moves might lead to hostilities in both locales.

John A. McCone: What concerns me is . . . is the blockade as a whole, if they don't try to penetrate it. They go ahead and complete this—these missile sites, with more and more missiles now under cover of warehouses, and so forth, and [*unclear*]. Then we have no way of telling how the war—what the status of warheads is, what we're going to do, in view of the threat, in view of the situation, in view of the symbol of strength that this gives . . . the effect it's going to have on Latin America and all the rest.

And this might happen. The pictures that we saw here today, which were taken [by overflights] yesterday, the evidence of work going on on the sites.

Robert S. "Bob" McNamara: Mr. President—

McCone: [*Unclear*] take some more tomorrow or the next day.

McNamara: I saw Cuba as our hostage. I think it's just as much our hostage as Berlin is a Soviet hostage. I think if we can remain cool and calm here, we've really got the screws on. They're being restricted from what the [*unclear*] think is their right—

Unclear exchange with McGeorge Bundy.

President Kennedy: Well, I—it seems to me—but anyway, we don't want to decide that. But I—it is a fact that if they put the screws on Berlin in the way that [Andrei] Gromyko said they were going to, then we are [*unclear*]*—*we are bound to invade Cuba under those conditions.

McNamara: Yes, exactly.

Robert A. Lovett: But we can also put the screws on Cuba.

McNamara: Yes, this is exactly—

Lovett: By increasing—

President Kennedy: They've committed their prestige much more heavily—

Lovett: Exactly, Mr. President.

McNamara: Exactly.

McGeorge “Mac” Bundy: CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] estimates, for whatever it’s worth, is that this [Soviet] commitment [*unclear*] would come out at about a billion dollars, to Cuba.

President Kennedy: Well, I think then they’ve got their neck [out] just like we’ve got it there [in Berlin].

Well, in any case, we’ve got to think, and we can see in the next 24 hours more, but [*unclear*]. What we’ve got to be thinking about is this problem, what we—of our blockade being successful and then this work going on and being faced in November with 50 or 60 missiles. Well, we’re faced with 30 of them now, so it’s . . . but anyway, we’re faced with 60 of them. Under what conditions would the Russians fire them?

They might be more reluctant to fire them if they’ve already grabbed Berlin than they would be if we suddenly go in, there. But anyway, these are the—that’s what we’ve got to make a judgment on.

End of excerpt.

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