

JFK Meeting Tape 38.2

Date: 1962-10-25

Participant: John F. Kennedy

Participant: Robert S. McNamara

Participant: C. Douglas Dillon

Participant: McGeorge Bundy

Start Time: 17:25

Place: Oval Office

SCROLLER TITLE: "It Might Be Sunk"

SCENE SETTER: With President Kennedy and Soviet premier Nikita S. Khrushchev exchanging accusatory letters and U.N. secretary general U Thant floating his own proposal to resolve the missile crisis, White House officials discussed their quarantine of Cuba. Committed to enforcing the blockade, the Kennedy administration weighed the costs of stopping a passenger ship.

Robert S. "Bob" McNamara: What do we gain by stopping it? Let's put it that way. I can see some possible loss. But what do we gain if we stop it?

C. Douglas "Doug" Dillon: [*speaking over others*] What you lose . . . What you lose, that you . . . 'cause I think you do lose something if you let it go through without—comes out that they . . . you've got [*unclear*]

McGeorge "Mac" Bundy: It's not only what you lose. I think the most dangerous thing you lose is the evidence to the bloc that you're not stopping. That suggests [*unclear*]. [*Unclear exchange.*]

President Kennedy: Well, I think the only argument for not stopping it, actually, is this U Thant thing, where we have an incident of a kind tomorrow morning on a ship at a time when supposedly he's asking the Russians to stay out of the area, before we've got an answer from them. Then if we get an answer from them, or not an answer, I would think then we have to pick up some ship tomorrow, after the shoe drops.

What do you think, Bob?

McNamara: I hate to start with a passenger ship, Mr. President. I think there's great problems.

President Kennedy: It might be sunk, you mean.

McNamara: Yes, or seriously disabled and loss of life, under circumstances that would indicate we'd acted irresponsibly. This, I think, would be a serious . . .

President Kennedy: [*Unclear*] tomorrow. [*Unclear*]

—the only reason for picking this ship up is we've got to prove sooner or later that the blockade [*works*].

End of excerpt.

CITATION: "Executive Committee Meeting of the National Security Council on the Cuban Missile Crisis on 25 October 1962," Tape 38.2, 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/8030016>