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24 October 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILE

SUBJECT: Leadership meeting on October 22nd at 5:00 p.m.

ATTENDED BY: The Leadership, except for Senator Hayden, The President, Rusk, McNamara, McCone and Ambassador Thompson

McCone read a summary of the situation, copy of which is attached. This statement had been discussed with the President, Attorney General and Bundy and had been modified to conform to their views.

There were a few questions of a substantive nature, Hickenlooper asking when missiles would be in operational status. McCone replied with the existing figures as reported in the morning report. Hickenlooper then asked if the Cuban situation is tied in to the China/India confrontation. McCone replied that we have no information one way or the other. Thompson then indicated it was more probable that Cuba may force a showdown on Berlin.

Secretary Rusk then reviewed his current appraisal of the Soviet Union indicating there had been some radical moves within the USSR which were indicating a tougher line. It appeared the hard-liners are coming in to ascendency and the soft co-existent line seems to be disappearing. Peiping seems somewhat more satisfied with Moscow now. Rusk stated that he did not wish to underestimate the gravity of the situation; the Soviets were taking a very serious risk, but this in his opinion represents the philosophy of the "hard-liners". Russell questioned the Secretary as to whether things will get better in the future, whether we will have a more propitious time to act than now, the thrust of his questioning being, "Why wait". Rusk answered that he saw no opportunity for improvement.

The President then reviewed the chronology of the situation, starting on Tuesday, October 16th, when the first information was received from the photographic flight of October 14th. He stated

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that he immediately ordered extensive overflights; that McCone briefed President Eisenhower; that we must recognize that these missiles might be operational and therefore military action on our part might cause the firing of many of them with serious consequences to the United States; furthermore the actions taken, and further actions which might be required, might cause the Soviets to react in various areas, most particularly Berlin, which they could easily grab and if they do, our European Allies would lay the blame in our lap. The President concluded whatever we do involves a risk; however we must make careful calculations and take a chance. To do nothing would be a great mistake. The blockade of Cuba on the importation of offensive weapons was to be undertaken, all ships would be stopped and those containing offensive weapons would not be permitted to proceed. We have no idea how the Bloc will reatt but the indications are, from unconfirmed sources, they will attempt to run the blockade. Initially the blockade would not extend to petroleum. This might be a further step. We are taking all military preparations for either an air strike or an invasion. It was the President's considered judgment that if we have to resort to active military actions, then this would involve an invasion. Rusk then stated that our proposed action gave the other side a chance to pause. They may pull back or they may rapidly intensify the entire situation existing between the Soviet Union and the United States.

Senator Russell then demanded stronger steps, stated he did not think we needed time to pause. The President had warned them in September and no further warning was necessary. We must not take a gamble and must not temporize; Khrushchev has once again rattled his missiles; he can become firmer and firmer, and we must react. If we delay, if we give notification, if we telegraph our punches, the result will be more a difficult military action and more American lives will be sacrifieed. The thrust of Senator Russell's remarks were to demand military action. He did not specifically say by surprise attack; however he did not advocate warning.

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McNamara then described the blockade, indicating that this might lead to some form of military action; that there would be many alternative courses open to us. The President then reviewed in some detail time required to assemble an invasion force which
25X1 would involve [redacted] men in the actual landings and a total of
25X1 about [redacted] men. He stated this could not be done in 24 or 36 hours but would take a number of days and that many preliminary steps had been taken.

Halleck recalled a recent briefing by Secretary McNamara in which he stated it would take three months to prepare adequately to invade Cuba. McNamara then reaffirmed the [redacted] man figure, 25X1
25X1 with [redacted] of them actually involved in the landing force. He stated that he could be ready in 7 days and that the landing would be preceded by substantial air strike. Russell again questioned the delay. He also seriously criticized any policy which involved extensive airborne alerts of SAC in the interests of our state of readiness, pointing out that the consequences would be the serious attrition of our SAC forces, most particularly the B-47s, which are now quite old. McNamara stated that we could carry on an airborne alert indefinitely because preliminary plans had been made, repair parts, etc., secured and were in position.

Vinson then asked if the Joint Chiefs of Staff actually approved the plans for the invasion. McNamara answered, "Yes." The plans had been developed over a 10-month period and had been submitted to the President by the JCS on a number of occasions.

NOTE: This question did not refer to whether the JCS did or did not approve the proposed actions of blockade against Cuba.

The President then reviewed matters again, read an intelligence
25X1 note from a [redacted] source which indicated Soviet intention to grab Berlin. Russell promptly replied that Berlin will always be a hostage. He then criticized the decision, stated we should go now and not wait.

Halleck questioned whether we were absolutely sure these weapons were offensive. The President answered affirmatively. McNamara then made a most unusual statement. He said, "One might question whether the missiles are or are not offensive. However there is no question about the IL 28s." NOTE: This was the first time anyone has raised doubt as to whether the MRBMs and the IRBMs are offensive missiles.

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Questions were then raised concerning the attitude of our Allies. The President advised steps taken to inform our major Allies. He then read the message received from the Prime Minister which in effect agreed to support us in the United Nations and then raised many warnings including the dangers to Berlin, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, etc., etc.

Senator Saltonstall brought up the question of the legality of the blockade. A great many Senators expressed concern over the proposed action with the OAS, indicating that they felt the OAS would delay rather than act. Saltonstall then asked whether a blockade would be legal if the OAS did not support it. The President answered that it probably would not; however we would proceed anyway.

Fulbright then stated that in his opinion the blockade was the worst of the alternatives open to us and it was a definite affront to Russia and that the moment that we had to damage or sink a Soviet ship because of their failure to recognize or respect the blockade we would be at war with Russia and the war would be caused because of our own initiative. The President disagreed with this thinking. Fulbright then repeated his position and stated in his opinion it would be far better to launch an attack and to take out the bases from Cuba. McNamara stated that this would involve the spilling of Russian blood since there were so many thousand Russians manning these bases. Fulbright responded that this made no difference because they were there in Cuba to help on Cuban bases. These were not Soviet bases. There was no mutual defense pact between the USSR and Cuba. Cuba was not a member of the Warsaw Pact. Therefore he felt the Soviets would not react if some Russians got killed in Cuba. The Russians in the final analysis placed little value on human life. The time has come for an invasion under the President's statement of February 13th. Fulbright repeated that an act on Russian ships is an act of war against Russia and on the other hand, an attack or an invasion of Cuba was an act against Cuba, not Russia. Fulbright also expressed reservations concerning the possible OAS action.

The President took issue with Fulbright, stating that he felt that an attack on these bases, which we knew were manned by Soviet personnel, would involve large numbers of Soviet casualities and this would be more provocative than a confrontation with a Soviet ship.

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Vinson urged that if we strike, we strike with maximum force and wind the matter up quickly as this would involve the minimum of American losses and insure the maximum support by the Cuban people at large who, he reasoned, would very quickly go over to the side of the winner.

The meeting was concluded at 6:35 to permit the President to prepare for his 7:00 o'clock talk to the nation.

It was decided to hold a meeting on Wednesday, October 24th. During this meeting Senator Hickenlooper expressed himself as opposed to the action and in favor of direct military action. He stated that in his opinion ships which were accosted on the high sea and turned back would be a more humiliating blow to the Soviets and a more serious involvement to their pride than the losing of as many as 5,000 Soviet military personnel illegally and secretly stationed in Cuba.

JOHN A. McCONE
Director

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