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By SE NARA, DATE 3/3/92

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The President opened the meeting by asking Secretary Rusk to read the attached message from Prime Minister Macmillan which had just been received. Secretary Rusk observed that for a first reaction to information of our proposed blockade it was not bad. He added that it was comforting to learn that the British Prime Minister had not thought of anything we hadn't thought of.

The President commented that the Prime Minister's message contained the best argument for taking no action. What we now need are strong arguments to explain why we have to act as we are acting.

Secretary Rusk stated that the best legal basis for our blockade action was the Rio Treaty. The use of force would be justified on the ground of support for the principals of the United Nations Charter, not on the basis of Article 51, which might give the Russians a basis of attacking Turkey.

The Attorney General said that in his opinion our blockade action would be illegal if it were not supported by the OAS. In his view the greatest importance is attached to our obtaining the necessary fourteen favorable votes in the OAS. Secretary Rusk commented that if we do not win the support of the OAS, we are not necessarily acting illegally. He referred to the new situation created by modern weapons and he thought that rules of international law should not be taken as applying literally to a completely new situation. He said we need not abandon hope so early.

Mr. Salinger reported that Gromyko had departed from New York without making other than a usual departure statement containing nothing about Cuba.

Secretary Rusk said the Department had decided to hold off calling a Security Council meeting despite the possibility that the Russians might ask one first. The basis of this decision was that we would have to name Cuba in the documents requesting the Security Council meeting and this we did not wish to do.

Director McCone summarized the latest intelligence information and read from the attached document. He added that we have a report of a fleet of Soviet submarines which are in a position to reach Cuba in about a week. He also mentioned that the London Evening Standard had printed a great deal of information about the existence of Soviet strategic missiles in Cuba.

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In response to a suggestion by Mr. Bundy, the President outlined the manner in which he expected Council Members to deal with the domestic aspects of the current situation. He said everyone should sing one song in order to make clear that there was now no difference among his advisers as to the proper course to follow. He pointed out the importance of fully supporting the course of action chosen which, in his view, represented a reasonable consensus. Any course is extremely troublesome and, as in the case of the Berlin wall, we are once again confronted with a difficult choice. If we undertake a tricky and unsatisfactory course, we do not even have the satisfaction of knowing what would have happened if we had acted differently. He mentioned that former Presidents, Eisenhower, Truman and Hoover had supported his decision during telephone conversations with each of them earlier in the day.

The President then summarized the arguments as to why we must act. We must reply to those whose reaction to the blockade would be to ask what had changed in view of the fact that we had been living in the past years under a threat of a missile nuclear attack by the USSR.

a. In September we had said we would react if certain actions were taken in Cuba. We have to carry out commitments which we had made publicly at that time.

b. The secret deployment by the Russians of strategic missiles to Cuba was such a complete change in their previous policy of not deploying such missiles outside the USSR that if we took no action in this case, we would convey to the Russians an impression that we would never act, no matter what they did anywhere.

c. Gromyko had left the impression that the Soviets were going to act in Berlin in the next few months. Therefore, if they acted now in response to our blockade action, we would only have brought on their Berlin squeeze earlier than expected.

d. The effect in Latin America would be very harmful to our interests if, by our failure to act, we gave the Latinos the impression that the Soviets were increasing their world position while ours was decreasing.

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Two questions were raised which the President hoped would be discussed and settled the following day:

- a. What is our response if one of our U-2 planes is shot down by a SAM missile?
- b. If the missile development in Cuba continues, what is our next course of action?

The President concluded by acknowledging the difficulties which he was asking the military to accept because of the necessity of our taking action which warned Cuba of the possibility of an invasion.

Secretary Rusk commented that if anyone thought our response was weak, they were wrong because he believed that a "flaming crisis" was immediately ahead of us.

The President read from a list of questions and suggested answers which might be made public. The first question was why we had not acted earlier. The response is that we needed more evidence of the existence of Soviet strategic missiles in Cuba. This additional evidence was required in order to gain the necessary fourteen votes in the OAS. In addition, if we had acted earlier, we might have jeopardized our position in Berlin because our European Allies would have concluded that our preoccupation with Cuba was such as to reveal our lack of interest in Berlin, this tempting the Russians to act in Berlin. Earlier action would undoubtedly have forced us to declare war on Cuba and this action, without the evidence we now have, would have thrown Latin American support to Castro.

There followed a discussion of why evidence of Soviet missiles was lacking. Information about the strategic missile sites was reported by the refugees but these reports could not be substantiated from aerial photography. Aerial photographs taken on August 29th revealed no missile sites. It was not until October 14th that photographic evidence of the sites and missiles was available. The cloud cover prevented photography for a period of time and the possibility of an attack on an overflying American plane led to a restriction on the number of U-2 flights. Mr. McCone

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felt that the information given to Senator Keating about the missile sites had come from refugee sources, which he had accepted without further substantiation. The Attorney General pointed out that even if there had been U-2 flights, construction at the missile sites was not far enough along to have been detected by photography much earlier than October 14. It was pointed out that all Soviet experts agreed that Khrushchev would not send strategic missiles to Cuba. Therefore, there was a tendency to downgrade the refugee reports.

Commenting on what should be said publicly about our actions in Cuba, Secretary Rusk cautioned that we should say nothing now which might tie our hands later in the event we wanted to take additional actions.

The President referred again to the question of distinguishing between Soviet missiles in Cuba and United States missiles in Turkey and Italy. Secretary Rusk read extracts from the NATO communique of 1959. The President thought that it was most important that everyone be fully briefed as to why these situations with respect to the deployment of missiles do not match. He again called attention to the secret deployment of the weapons and the Tass statement saying that the Russians had no need to position strategic missiles in foreign countries. Soviet missiles in Cuba have a quite different psychological effect than Soviet missiles positioned in the USSR in that the Soviet action in Cuba may in fact be a probing action to find out what we would be prepared to do in Berlin.

Secretary Rusk added that the threat to the United States from Soviet missiles in Cuba was of worldwide importance because this threat was to a country which in effect provided the sole defense of some forty Free World States.

The President suggested that we should make clear the difference between our Cuban blockade and the Berlin blockade by emphasizing that we were not preventing shipments of food and medicine to Cuba, but only preventing the delivery of offensive military equipment.

General Taylor asked how we should reply to the question: Are we preparing to invade? The President responded by saying that we should ask the press not to push this line of questioning and to

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accept our statement that we are taking all precautionary moves in anticipation of any contingency. Secretary McNamara agreed that we should say that the Defense Department had been ordered to be prepared for any contingency and that we were not now ready to say anything more than was in the President's speech.

In response to a Presidential question, Secretary McNamara said that an information group was working on the problem of voluntary press censorship based on experience during the Korean War.

The President again asked what was being done about Dakar. Under Secretary Ball said a task force was working on this problem and Mr. McCone added that nuclear detection "black boxes" had already been shipped to Dakar.

Secretary McNamara reported that the Defense Department was working on how we would prevent the introduction into Cuba of nuclear weapons by airplanes. He said some planes could fly non-stop from the Soviet Union if refueled en route. Present arrangements provided that we would be informed of any plane flying to Cuba and we would then decide what action to take against it.

It was agreed that no reserves would be called today, but that a review would be made tonight as to the necessity of such action.

Acting Secretary Fowler raised several questions involving domestic controls, including gold transfers, foreign exchange controls, and control of the stock market. He said, in response to the President's question, that another look would be taken the following day before any recommendation would be made as to closing the stock market.

Secretary Rusk said that if we were asked whether our blockade was an act of war, we should say that it was not. The President asked whether friendly ships would be halted and Admiral Anderson replied in the affirmative, saying that we would challenge all ships. The President agreed that we should stop all Soviet Bloc and non-Bloc ships when the order to institute the blockade was given.

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Portion of the NSC Meeting Minutes, Monday, October 22, 1962

The President discussed the reasons why he had decided against an air strike now. First, there was no certainty that an air strike would destroy all missiles now in Cuba. We would be able to get a large percentage of these missiles, but could not get them all.

In addition we would not know if any of these missiles were operationally ready with their nuclear warheads and we were not certain that our intelligence had discovered all the missiles in Cuba. Therefore, in attacking the ones we had located, we could not be certain that others unknown to us would not be launched against the United States. The President said an air strike would involve an action comparable to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Finally, an air strike would increase the danger of a worldwide nuclear war.

The President said he had given up the thought of making an air strike only yesterday morning. In summary, he said an air strike had all the disadvantages of Pearl Harbor. It would not insure the destruction of every strategic missile in Cuba, and would end up eventually in our having to invade.

Mr. Bundy added that we should not discuss the fact that we were not able to destroy all the missiles by means of an air strike because at some later time we might wish to make such an attack.

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