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*Pers 2 John* STENNIS

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M E E T   T H E   P R E S S  
Produced by Lawrence E. Spivak

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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1963

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MODERATOR: Ned Brooks

GUEST: Senator John Stennis (D. Miss.)  
Chairman, Preparedness Investigating  
Subcommittee

PANEL: Herbert Kaplow, NBC News  
Marquis Childs, St. Louis Post Dispatch  
Merriman Smith, United Press International  
Peter Lisagor, Chicago Daily News

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MR. BROOKS: This is Ned Brooks, inviting you to MEET THE PRESS.

(Announcement)

MR. BROOKS: Our guest today on MEET THE PRESS is the Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee now investigating the Russian military buildup in Cuba, Senator John Stennis of Mississippi. We will start the questions now with Herbert

Kaplow of NBC News.

MR. KAPLOW: Senator, the other day Chairman Vinson of the House Armed Services Committee said that he is confident the Administration is taking all necessary steps to bring about the removal of Soviet troops from Cuba.

Are you equally confident?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, let me give a very brief preface to the attitude of our Subcommittee investigating this matter. We are not so much concerned about the numbers of weapons now, and the offensive-defensive nature, but the great fact is that the Russian military might is there in appreciable amount and it is a basis for much more, it is a basis for possible infiltration, it is dominated, of course, directly from Russia, it is not Castro, it is a new element in the Western Hemisphere and we are trying to get the basic facts from which some sound policy can come.

Now your direct question there on being satisfied that they are now being withdrawn, no, not on the basis of what I understand the facts to be. I am not satisfied that they are now being withdrawn.

MR. KAPLOW: Well, isn't it likely that the government would be the best source, have most of the information on which to base a judgment?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well I haven't heard a strong contention by the Administration that the military force there

now is currently being withdrawn. The estimate is that 5,000 troops and the missiles and the bombers were withdrawn soon after October 22. But with the exception of that withdrawal I haven't heard it claimed that there is any, and instead there is some more military material coming in. Whether it is replacements or not it is not clear.

MR. KAPLOW: I believe you have already said -- and this is also a quote -- that there is a tendency in the Administration to ignore the basic problem which Communist domination of Cuba represents and then you went on to say it is time we take positive action to make clear that we have the national will and purpose to irradiate this.

What is this positive action?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, I think Mr. McNamara's presentation was brilliant and very fine as far as it went, but it dealt more in numbers and whether they are offensive or defensive weapons.

I think the real problem is getting those Russian troops out of there and the Soviet military might out of this hemisphere.

MR. KAPLOW: How do we do it?

SENATOR STENNIS: And that is what we come into, it is first a matter of steps that should be taken in a diplomatic way -- and I am certain that some are being taken along that line, first, economic pressure, and getting the Organization

of American States to cooperate on that as far as they will, our Western allies as far as they will. Then diplomatic pressure and trying to get other nations to go as far as they will. That takes time. And then you move into the proposition where if that doesn't get results, then we do have absolute sea supremacy there, and I think unless we get results otherwise we will be driven to a blockade and one step will have to follow another unless results are obtained. I don't put any timetable on that.

MR. BROOKS: We will be back with MEET THE PRESS and more questions for our guest, Senator John Stennis of Mississippi, but first, this message.

(Announcement)

MR. BROOKS: And now resuming our interview, our guest today is Senator John Stennis, Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee investigating the military buildup in Cuba. You have just met Herbert Kaplow of NBC News. Our other reporters today are Marquis Childs of the St. Louis Post Dispatch, Marrison Smith of United Press International and Peter Lisagor of the Chicago Daily News. Lawrence E. Spivak, our permanent member of the panel will be back with us next week.

We will continue the questions now with Mr. Childs.

MR. CHILDS: Senator Stennis, the people of your state are reported to be very hostile to the President because of

the measures of force used by the Administration in integrating the University of Mississippi. I wonder if they are also opposed to the Administration, as you seem to be, for the way the Cuban situation has been handled?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, the people of Mississippi as far as that is concerned were very much pleased with the President's action last October in connection with this Cuban situation, and thought he moved with decision, and it was very good indeed. The concern there now -- and I haven't had any more letters particularly from Mississippi about this than I have from other points. This is nationwide. There is a very deep concern about the continuation of this formidable military strength there that can be expanded, it can be a base of infiltration in Latin America and eventually it can grow into a power that would be a direct menace to us militarily. So that is the concern. I don't think it is confined to any area or state. It is nationwide.

MR. CHILDS: What interests me is whether this is going to become a political issue. I know you are up for reelection next year. Do you think Cuba is likely to come into your political campaign, Senator Stennis?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, I think it is in everyone's political campaign as far as that is concerned. I don't think there ought to be any implication for me or anyone else on this committee in connection with this investigation

that we are trying to make politics out of it. I don't think you can write this question off.

I think the President is deeply concerned about this matter. . . . was reflected in the expressions on his face when he appeared and talked about it the last time on television.

I know throughout the Senate there is the deepest kind of concern.

MR. CHILDS: Senator Fulbright said today, I think it was, that he felt that Governor Rockefeller and others were making this an issue of partisan politics. Would you agree with that diagnosis.

SENATOR STENNIS: I don't want to pass on Senator Fulbright's statement, or Governor Rockefeller's either. This is a fact of life, gentlemen, that this is a serious challenge and threat to us, it affects our prestige in the Western Hemisphere, it affects our world leadership. I think we ought to give it number one priority. I believe there is strong sentiment among the membership of the Senate to that effect. Senators come and talk to me in a most earnest way about this, wanting to know the facts and hoping that we will move forward and try to help get a legislative opinion that can help in a policy that will be hard and firm and effective.

MR. SMITH: Senator, isn't it true, though, that you do differ, as some of your fellow Senators do, with the

appraisal of the Administration as to the gravity of the situation in Cuba? Do you feel that you are at odds say with the White House picture, or Secretary McNamara's picture of the situation?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, we don't have the picture yet in our committee any more than has been told to the public, and plus what Mr. McCone told us, as to what the actual facts are. I can't say now that there are any missiles down there. I have never suggested there were, or that the bombers are not gone, but the various strong fortifications are there, the most modern tanks and the most effective armored regiments of these Russian troops, the very best -- there is no training program going on apparently to train Cubans to take this over. The Russians are there to stay as long as they are permitted, and this is a reality.

MR. SMITH: Well, Senator, if this is such a dangerous situation what then can the United States do about it short of going in there and rooting those installations and those men out of there?

SENATOR STENNIS: I don't make any exception to the fact that I think if it is necessary to get them out we will finally have to come to that. But there are other steps as I enumerated pointedly a while ago that ought to be taken first and will be effective. The missiles and the bombers were there naked in appearance last October, and a very stirring, firm policy enunciation got them out. I think

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it is a problem to continue and I assume and believe the President will continue with it. But it is not something you just start in today to go to invading.

MR. SMITH: Senator, referring back to Mr. Kaplow's question, you mentioned the need for this government taking a position which will show a national will and purpose to irradiate Communist governments from the Western Hemisphere. How are we going to do that, sir? How does this fit with the standard American principle of self-determination? Do we say let other countries decide what form of government they are going to have -- how can we influence these other people in the Western Hemisphere without going too far?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, I will illustrate it this way: When the Communist regime was set up in Cuba we did let it live and let it stay there. We didn't try then to exterminate it, but within a brief period of two or three years the next step came when this Russian military might came in. Even with missiles and bombers. That shows what happens.

Now we demanded that they get out and they haven't gotten out fully and I don't think they are going to.

MR. SMITH: In another case of Cuba, do you think we should stop it before it starts?

SENATOR STENNIS: Yes. Now I think with infiltration it is entirely possible that they will infiltrate into Latin America some place and then they will have the second



base. First they will get just a Communist government and then will come the military force and from that it can spread to another and that is why I say we have to irradiate it from the hemisphere.

MR. LISAGOR: Senator Stennis, President Kennedy and a great many other Americans feel that the problem in Latin America is one of poverty, lack of development, lack of economic development, and that that really is the only way you are going to save that area from communism. Now I think you voted consistently against foreign aid in the Senate, have you not?

SENATOR STENNIS: For several years. I voted for it some in the beginning, and after getting on the Appropriations Committee I found out more about how it was used and frankly I changed my mind and I have been voting against it. I have said repeatedly that I wouldn't just abolish all of it. I think there are certain spots where we have to have it but it is too much. It is far too much.

MR. LISAGOR: Well, if you don't go into Latin America to help them develop their economy, Senator, how are you going to prevent these Communist incursions in Latin America?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, you can't develop their economy overnight. In fact those that the President, as I understand -- but I know many of the Senators are greatly disappointed that this is not doing any more down there, this program, than it is. It takes more time. I think if you fool around with so

much time with just foreign aid and fail to give protection with the military we have lost the battle.

MR. LISAGOR: Senator, in short do you believe we should throw a military cordon around the whole of Latin America and prevent communism from coming in that way, or are we to help those people help themselves develop their countries?

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SENATOR STENNIS: It is not as simple a choice as you make. Now I say it is already here, we can see what will develop in Cuba, it will develop in other countries the same way. The thing to do is to put the pressure on and irradiate one way or another the rotten core that is already here.

Now the other things can be done, too. I know we can improve if we approach it right the economies of these countries and that will help a great deal.

We are fighting in Vietnam now trying to stop the spread of communism there, we are fighting with our soldiers, some are getting killed, we are fighting it with Foreign Aid, and that is on the other side of the world. We have certainly got to do that much, here.

MR. LISAGOR: Well you foresee the time then when we might be using American soldiers in Latin America fighting against Communists in certain countries?

SENATOR STENNIS: If we let it go far enough without stopping it now we certainly will meet that situation.

MR. LISAGOR: Senator, before Castro came to power in Cuba and certainly before the Soviets came into Cuba there was a Communist problem in the rest of Latin America as I am sure you are aware. And each of those countries have that problem quite irrespective of Cuba. What would you suggest we do in dealing with that home grown indigenous Communist problem in Latin America?

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SENATOR STENNIS: Well, as it is connected with our inquiry that is one of the very things that our committee is going to try to develop, in part. I realize more than I have before the necessity of getting to that problem. I am not an expert in it myself but I know that we've got to put up the military shield, here, to keep them from being bodily taken over and then do the other things that are practical, and that includes improving their economy. I think you can't beat trying to improve their agriculture some to start with. I don't think you can start out with tractors, though, and mass farming to do it. You've got to teach them to do it in their way.

MR. KAPLOW: Senator, what would you do right now about this military threat in Cuba?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, I would give it the highest priority of all of our international problems. We have Korea, NATO, Western Europe, Vietnam. I don't want to abandon any of those, but I would give this the highest priority and I would put the pressure on that I mentioned awhile ago, in an economic way, in a diplomatic way. I would try to ostracize Cuba, I would direct everything economically that way that I could, get others to, and I don't know how long it would take but I would follow through on that and if necessary make the demands for them to get out with this military force there and if they didn't then we would put the blockade on

similar to what we did before.

MR. KAPLOW: Well, isn't much of that being done?

SENATOR STENNIS: I think some of it is being done, yes, but frankly I think this talk about Cuba and I think the calling of our investigation has brought this matter to the front and given it prominence. The people are concerned and I think that will back the President up. I am not talking about criticising the administration all the time, but I think it will give strength to the President and Khrushchev will realize it.

MR. KAPLOW: I believe you have implied in some of your statements that the administration is not acting in this situation as it should, as positively as it should.

Why do you think the administration would understate the seriousness of this threat?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, I have never suggested that this was deliberate. Just as a matter of judgment, I am assuming now that they are correct about the number of weapons but the emphasis has been on the defensive nature of the weapons and downgrading everything and not emphasizing that there was a determined drive on with a top priority to get those Russian arms and men out of there. I think it has to be pressed harder and faster. It is one of the many trouble spots but I believe it can quickly become the most urgent and in fact already is.

MR. CHILDS: Senator, you spoke about the testimony of John McCone, the head of the Central Intelligence Agency, before your committee. Did he give you any reason for the so-called intelligence gap whereby prior to October 22 apparently this government did not know of the existence of these missiles?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, Mr. McCone was very frank in his testimony. He was very helpful to us. We have not gone into that in detail yet. He gave us an overall picture of this situation, more as to the immediate picture there. That is one of the matters that frankly I am concerned about and I think that we will get more on those facts.

MR. CHILDS: Well do you think there was a failure of intelligence, Senator? There certainly was a failure of intelligence at the time of the Bay of Pigs disaster. Was there a later failure, and where does the blame for this lie? I think the American people are very concerned about this.

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, Mr. Childs, those matters are very difficult to discuss on a program of this kind, and particularly at this stage of our hearings. If we develop any new facts that can be told then to the public with proper safeguard for our security, why of course we will do it. I hope that we have better coverage than we had then. It is part of the picture though, if they should cut off our main

intelligence sources there and eliminate this picture, and it has already been told that we were doing that, why there would be a blackout there and missiles and bombers and other military could be sneaked in there very rapidly as we already know.

MR. SMITH: Senator, you speak of economic and diplomatic pressure possibly contributing to or helping get this Russian force out of Cuba.

SENATOR STENNIS: Yes.

MR. SMITH: It strikes me that economic and diplomatic pressure could be applied against the Cubans but not against those Russian troops there. How do you see these "short of war" pressures as getting those Russians out?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, it would certainly give a very strong notice that we are proceeding step by step.

MR. SMITH: If we start stopping the Russians ships going into Cuba again, don't you think there will be real trouble between this country and the Soviet Union?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, there is risk in anything. There is risk in anything. But we can't afford just to sit back and let this continue, this buildup. It is a question of how much growth and how much resistance we are going to put. I have thought about those matters. It is quite serious. If it continues on, though, the crisis will come at some point.

MR. SMITH: Well, do you think we could let this rock along until the end of the summer, or do you think we will have to do something positive by then?

SENATOR STENNIS: I don't want to try to put any timetable on it. It would be misleading. That is very difficult, but positive, continuous, persistent pressure is bound to get results.

MR. SMITH: A new order of pressure?

SENATOR STENNIS: Yes, and a continuation of it is bound to get some results, and we've just got to go through it. It will be an ordeal, but we can do it and we must do it.

MR. LISAGOR: Senator Stennis, a political question, if I may: You supported President Kennedy in 1960. I think you were one of the few leading Democrats in Mississippi to do so. Will you support him again next year?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, that question is quite premature. It would depend upon circumstances and conditions then, of course. I am a conservative Democrat. I have my main connections here with the legislative branch of the government, of course. Frankly that is where my power is, what I have. And a great many of the policies, though, are vigorously opposed to what he has done and I am not committed. I am under no obligation to the President or to the party or anything else. I will decide on what I think is best for our people, for my people.



MR. LISAGOR: Do you expect Governor Ross Barnett to be your opponent in the primaries in Mississippi next year?

SENATOR STENNIS: I have no idea about that. I know he is a busy man and I am a busy man. I know that I am going to be a candidate.

MR. LISAGOR: Senator, in your speech in the Senate last Thursday you spoke of petty and partisan voices being stilled once we develop a firm, hard policy toward Cuba and toward the Soviet troops there. I wonder if you could identify for us who these petty and partisan voices are?

SENATOR STENNIS: I worked on that speech, I rewrote it -- really, I struck that reference out. I wasn't referring to any individual when I wrote it, when I said "petty voices." I mean petty points and making small points about things that really don't matter. I think the big factor is this problem that we have and we've got to get a remedy.

MR. LISAGOR: Senator, do you think some of the Republican criticism of the Kennedy Administration in this Cuban affair is unjustified and unwarranted, or do you think they are criticizing the Administration justifiably?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well I haven't reviewed all they said. I think it is all right to criticize vigorously. I said with reference to the Bay of Pigs that I thought that invasion was spilled milk and there were many people to blame there.

The country is not interested so much in that. What we want is a remedy to the problem, a remedy and a policy that will get results.

MR. KAPLOW: Senator, a switch: It is about five months since the trouble at Oxford. What is the feeling of the people down there now with respect to the problem involved?

SENATOR STENNIS: Well, I think that under the guidance of Chancellor Williams of the University of Mississippi -- and he has done an excellent job -- I think they are having -- they are not so much in the limelight, there are not so many cameras and newsmen there and I responded to an appeal from my grandnephew who is in the Law School, who said that he believed things would have a chance to study better, so what I think they need for most now is to be just left out of the news.

MR. BROOKS: Senator, on that note I think I will have to interrupt. I see that our time is up.

Thank you very much, Senator Stennis, for being with us.

I will tell you about next week's guest on MEET THE PRESS after this message.

(Announcement)

THE ANNOUNCER: For a printed copy of today's interview sent ten cents in coin and a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Merkle Press, 809 Channing Street,

**Northeast, Washington 18, D. C.**

**MR. BROOKS:** Next week our guest on **MEET THE PRESS** will be the Chairman of the Council of the Organization of American States, Ambassador Gonzalo Facio of Costa Rica.

And now this is Ned Brooks saying goodbye for Senator John Stennis and **MEET THE PRESS**.

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