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LIBRARY RELEASES CUBAN CRISIS TAPES

Kennedy Archive Calls Timing of Its Disclosure of Secret Material a Coincidence

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BOSTON, Oct. 26 — In the first hours after discovering that the Soviet Union was installing missiles in Cuba, President Kennedy and his advisers seriously discussed air strikes against Cuba, according to secret White House tapes released today.

"I don't think we got much time on these missiles," Kennedy said at a meeting Oct. 16, 1962, shortly after being shown aerial reconnaissance photographs of the newly discovered Soviet missile sites.

"We're certainly going to do No. 1," the President told his top aides. "We're going to take out these missiles."

The tapes, along with transcripts of the White House talks, were made public by the John F. Kennedy Library here after review by national security officials in Washington. William W. Moss, chief archivist of the library, said 20 percent of the material had been deleted by the officials for security reasons.

Tapes Cover Two Meetings

The 87 pages of transcript and 33 minutes of tapes released today covered only two meetings on the Cuban missiles, both on Oct. 16, 1962, the first day of the 13-day crisis.

In June the Kennedy Library made public a first selection of materials from tapes secretly recorded by Kennedy. They involved the integration of the University of Mississippi in 1962 and discussions of Administration tax policy. The tapes' existence was first announced in 1973.

Mr. Moss said the timing of this release, on the day after the United States invasion of Grenada, was coincidental. It happened because the library only recently got the material back from Washington, he said.

Mr. Moss said the material on the Cuban missile crisis contained "no surprises." He said, "It doesn't change anything. There is nothing new of substance."

But he added that "it gives us the voices" of the participants in the crucial meetings and may provide historians with a more accurate sense of the personalities involved.

McNamara Role Dominant

In the view of Mr. Moss, the tapes show that the dominant actor in the first day of meetings was Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense. "McNamara took a leading role in the discussions and tried to get people to focus on the issues," Mr. Moss commented.

It was Mr. McNamara, the transcript shows, who first defined three possible responses. The first was political or diplomatic, to consult with America's allies and give both the Cuban leader Fidel Castro and the Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev ample warning that Washington would not accept the missiles in Cuba.

When Mr. McNamara described this as "a nonmilitary action," others in the meeting laughed, the transcript shows.

The second course, Mr. McNamara suggested, was a naval blockade to keep all further Russian offensive weapons from Cuba. It might mean "we search every ship," Mr. McNamara said. This was the option ultimately selected.

The third choice, which both the President and most of his officials seemed to favor on the first day, was a military attack to remove the missiles.

Kennedy Enumerated Them

Kennedy himself refined the military response into three options. "One would be just taking out these missiles," he said in the meeting, in the Cabinet Room. "No. 2 would be to take out all the airplanes," meaning a large number of Russian fighters that had recently also been shipped to Cuba. "No. 3 is invade," he said.

Gen. Maxwell W. Taylor, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as Mr. McNamara, favored a surprise attack to hit both the missile sites and the airplanes.

The transcripts show Kennedy closely questioning officials of the Central Intelligence Agency on how they know the small objects in the photographs, taken by a U-2 plane, were really Russian medium-range missiles. Their answers speak of a comparison with photographs of Soviet missiles displayed on parade in Moscow.

At one point in the first meeting, after he learned about the missiles, Kennedy mused on why the Russians decided to put the weapons in Cuba after publicly declaring they would not. There "must be some major reason for the Russians to set this up," he said. "Must be that they're not satisfied with their ICBM's."

Rusk Quotes McCone

Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, then recalled that a few weeks before John McCone, the Director of Central Intelligence, warned that Khrushchev might put missiles in Cuba because "he knows that we have a substantial nuclear superiority."

Minutes before the first meeting, the transcript reveals, Kennedy chatted cheerfully over the phone with his daughter Caroline. The conversation between father and daughter has been deleted, in accordance with the conditions of the Kennedy family's gift of the President's papers to the library.

But it ended in laughter, that much was not censored.

Mr. Moss said that future release of material on the Cuban missile crisis would be very slow. He noted that all the tapes had first to be transcribed, which took 100 to 150 hours of work for each hour of recording. Then the transcripts had to be sent to Washington for clearance.

With these difficulties, and the Kennedy Library's shortage of money, he estimated that only three hours of recording could be prepared for review each year.