

320. Notes from transcripts of JCS meeting, October 16¹

NOTES TAKEN FROM TRANSCRIPTS OF MEETINGS OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, OCTOBER–NOVEMBER 1962, DEALING WITH THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS (Handwritten notes were made in 1976 and typed in 1993.)

CJCS: Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Maxwell D. Taylor, USA.

CSA: Chief of Staff, Army. General Earle G. Wheeler.

CSAF: Chief of Staff, Air Force. General Curtis E. LeMay.

CNO: Chief of Naval Operations. Admiral George W. Anderson, Jr.

CMC: Commandant, Marine Corps. General David M. Shoup.

CONAD: Continental Air Defense

DIA: Defense Intelligence Agency

DJS: Director, Joint Staff

LANT: Atlantic

NORAD: North American Air Defense

OAS: Organization of American States

RCT: Regimental Combat Team

SAM: Surface-to-Air Missile

TAC: Tactical Air Command

Tuesday, 16 October

JCS Meeting at 1000:

CJCS says he will see the President at 1145.

Briefing by Mr. McLaughlin of DIA: 3 SS-3 sites located: MRBMs could have ranges of either 700 or 1100 miles; all-out effort could make them operational within 24 hours.

VCSAF (Gen. Seth McKee): Once the missile sites become operational, Castro can threaten retaliation for any offensive move by the US. Delaying action until the missiles are set up could touch off nuclear war.

CMC: Soviets might be attempting to pose a nuclear threat to the US without running a risk of nuclear retaliation against the Soviet Union.

JCS agree the threat is so serious as to require the US to take out the missiles by military effort.

CSA favored air attack without warning, to be followed by invasion.

CNO recommended air attack followed by invasion as the only way to eliminate the Communist regime from Cuba. Once the missiles were removed, however, he did not see a Communist Cuba as a military threat.

JCSAF foresaw a possibility of avoiding the need for invasion by efficient application of air strikes and naval blockage.

CJCS: am not convinced that air strikes need be followed by an invasion. What threat is Cuba once missiles and aircraft are knocked out?

CMC favored an ultimatum to remove the missiles or the US would destroy them.

JCS agreed that the recommended sequence would be: get additional intelligence: make surprise attacks on missiles, airfields, PT boats, SAMs and tanks; concurrently, reinforce Guantanamo; prepare to initiate an invasion.

JCS meeting at 1630 attended by Adm. Dennison (CINCLANT), Gen. Power (CINCSAC), Gen. Sweeney (CG, TAC) and LTG Hamilton Howze (SG [illegible in the original] Abn Corps);

CJCS gives a debrief of the 1145 White House meeting; President gave unlimited authority to use U-2 reconnaissance. Rusk said he was not certain that the MRBMs were in Cuba. SecDef, after being briefed on JCS recommendation, was with us except on one point: We should strike before any of the missiles show their head, before they become completely operational. CJCS then had presented the JCS view [**1½ lines not declassified**]. Conferees felt that our deterrent would keep Khrushchev from firing nuclear missiles. The President speculated why Khrushchev would put missiles in Cuba. Rusk said: To supplement his MRBM capabilities and further his [\[Facsimile Page 4\]](#) [illegible in the original] objectives. After President left the meeting, SecDef set forth his view that the known missiles would have to be taken out.

CJCS concluded his debrief by saying that the question was whether to go for the missiles or go for missiles as well as blockade, to be followed by possible invasion.

JCS and commanders discussion followed:

CJCS: in an invasion, we would be playing Khrushchev's game by getting 250,000 troops tied up ashore.

Discussion followed of what targets should be attacked: Must be not only MRBMs but also M.Gs, SAMs, patrol boats, tank parks, and all significant military targets, together with a blockade. [**1 line not declassified**] JCS discarded the 18-day buildup period. SecDef then joined the meeting: I said this morning that **after** missiles are operational. I was against attacking Cuba because they probably could launch missiles before we destroyed them. SecDef asks JCS whether they would favor attacking under those circumstances; they say yes. SecDef gives the following guidance: Heavy reconnaissance effort is authorized as well as augmentation of air defenses in the Southeastern U.S. I think that three courses of action were open: (1) political moves—useless; (2) open surveillance and weapons blockade, and if they use missiles we attack—costly but might be worth the cost; (3) a military action—might trigger a Soviet

response. JCS agreed that the following general war preparatory steps were necessary: SAC on 178th airborne alert; disperse those SAC and NORAD aircraft carrying nuclear weapons; move Polaris subs [\[Facsimile Page 5\]](#) from Holy Land; augment air defenses in the Southeast; **[less than 1 line not declassified]**.

After SecDef left, CJCS asked whether JCS favored going to low-level reconnaissance flights, which might tie our hand. All said no.

JCS agreed that if the decision was to go for MRBMs only, they would recommend that we not do anything.

1. Medium-range ballistic missiles in Cuba. Secret. 5 pp. DOD, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Office of Joint History. [↵](#)