

343. Notes from transcripts of JCS meetings, October 201

October 20, 1962

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

Saturday, 20 October

JCS meeting at 1000:

CJCS said that the President might want to hit them as early as tomorrow morning. He proposes sending a memo strongly recommending against a hasty attack on offensive weapons; it should be launched on 23 Oct and include all offensive weapons and supporting defenses. JCS agreed.

Briefing by Gen. Quinn of DIA: One regiment on 1020 n.m. missiles is near San Cristobal and is operational now. Each site has eight missiles and four launchers. There is another regiment with two sites in the Sagua la Grande area; these will be operational within one week. The 2000 mile IRBMs could be operational within six weeks; there are four launchers at two fixed sites. Operational SAM sites have risen to 16. There is no evidence of nuclear warheads in Cuba.

CNO: We are dividing the Pentagon into two teams. [Red] with McNamara, Taylor and Gilpatric will review surprise attack scenarios. Blue with Anderson, Yarmolinsky, Griffin, Shoup and McNaughton will consider blockade. In taking leadership of the Blue Team, CNO said he protested to the SecDef that this would [be] locking the barn door after the horse had been stolen. Blockade would not accomplish the objective, was not in the US interest, would be imposed after the missiles had been emplaced, and would bring a confrontation with the Soviet Union rather than Cuba. It would incur the danger of

attacks on Guantanamo and US shipping in the Florida Strait, and left the possibility of missiles being launched from Cuba.

BG Lucius Clay (Dep Director, J-3): I have just come from a meeting at State attended by Cabinet members and some others. They are considering two courses: (1) limited blockade followed by an air strike three days later; (2) limited blockade followed by negotiations. Consensus is that we will have to go through political shenanigans, followed by blockade and then air strike. UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson is strong for blockade less POL.

CJCS rejoins the meeting at 1230: President will preside at a White House meeting this afternoon. The SecDef wants an in-between plan: a five-day blockade and then strike. CJCS says he will tell the President that we have every reasonable chance of hitting all those missiles. If we wait, they'll have time to hide them.

JCS meeting at 1815:

CJCS debrief on White House meeting that afternoon: "This was not one of our better days." After a two-hour discussion, the decisive votes were cast by Rusk, McNamara and Adlai Stevenson. Decision is to draw up plans for a blockade, to take effect 24 hours after the President's TV speech on the evening of the 21st or 22nd. OAS approval should be obtained during the 24-hour interval. The blockade will concern offensive weapons: POL probably will be added during the week. We should be prepared to execute an air strike against missiles only (1) without warning on Monday or Tuesday or (2) after 24 hours' notice. The rationale is that we don't want a Pearl Harbor on the American record, and we want to protect unprepared allies against retaliation. We also talked about possible negotiations with the Soviets about giving up missiles in Italy and Turkey, and using Polaris subs in the Mediterranean as a substitute. The President said to me, "I know that you and your colleagues are unhappy with the decision, but I trust that you will support me in this decision." I assured him that we were against the decision but would back him completely.

CSA: "I never thought I'd live to see the day when I would want to go to war."

1. Various courses of action in response to Soviet missiles in Cuba. Secret. 4 pp. DOD, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Office of Joint History.