

Robert S. McNamara Oral History Interview – 4/4/1964
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Biographical Note

McNamara, Secretary of Defense from 1961 to 1968, discusses the defense budget and military strategy during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, the recruitment of Defense Department staff, his appointment as Secretary of Defense, the Bay of Pigs, and the Cuban Missile Crisis, among other issues.

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ROBERT S. McNAMARA

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Oral History Interview

With

ROBERT S. McNAMARA

April 4, 1964

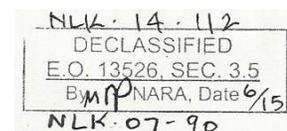
By Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.

For the John F. Kennedy Library

SCHLESINGER: This is the first interview with Secretary McNamara, April 4, 1964. Bob, do you want to begin with the Bay of Pigs or with the...

McNAMARA: I think perhaps we might start with certain comments on the formulation of military strategy, military force structures, and the defense budget – how the approach of President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] and his administration differed from that of General Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower]. It is my very strong impression – supported, I think, by an analysis of the Eisenhower budgets – that during the period of the Eisenhower administration, the Treasury Department and not the Defense Department established the size of the defense budget; therefore, to a very large degree, the Treasury Department and neither State nor Defense established the military force structure, military strategy, and, in a very real sense, the limits of our foreign policy. This policy reflected President Eisenhower's belief that fiscal security was the true foundation of military security and his belief that fiscal security was threatened by further increases in the total budget, particularly further increases in the defense budget. It is interesting to note that the Eisenhower proposal for defense expenditures in fiscal year 1962 was \$44,700,000,000, whereas the actual defense expenditures in fiscal year 1961 were \$44,676,000,000. The equality of those figures was not coincidental. It was a planned limitation on the size of the defense budget – a limitation, as I say, imposed by the Treasury.

SCHLESINGER: It was the Treasury rather than the Bureau of the Budget?



McNAMARA: I think so. There's a fascinating indication of that in Hughes' [Philip S. Hughes] recent book giving his memory of a cabinet conversation on this exact point when the Secretary of the Treasury stated to the President that he believed the defense budget should be cut by several billions of dollars. The President accepted his recommendation and Wilson [Charles E. Wilson] was simply ordered to cut it by that amount. Eisenhower appeared to believe in – and in any event his fiscal limitations on the defense budget forced – complete reliance upon nuclear weapons. As a matter of fact, the Defense Minister of Germany, Strauss [Franz Josef Strauss], reported to me on two occasions, once in 1961 and again in 1962, that Admiral Radford [Arthur W. Radford] had told him that if a single Soviet or Communist Bloc soldier stepped over the border into the West, the U.S. would respond immediately with an all-out nuclear strike against the Communist Bloc. Radford has indicated to Strauss that this was the basic military strategy and policy of the United States.

SCHLESINGER: Respond to every provocation, at whatever level...

McNAMARA: Exactly...

SCHLESINGER: ...in Europe, by a nuclear response.

McNAMARA: ...exactly. I think the important point to recognize with respect to such a policy is that it did not stop Communist political and military aggression. It did not even stop such aggression during the period when the United States had a clear or near nuclear monopoly, i.e., the ten or fifteen years following the end of World War II. Such a policy was never credible. Certainly it was never credible after the United States had failed to use nuclear weapons in the Korean War in 1952 and 1953. And certainly the Soviets did not believe that the United States would respond to minor acts of aggression – however you wish to define minor – with a nuclear response. And because they didn't believe we would respond to minor acts of aggression with a nuclear response, they continued

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to apply pressures on Berlin, on Southeast Asia, and elsewhere in the world. So a military strategy, based on or limited to an all-out nuclear response to any level of aggression, was in a true sense a bankrupt strategy. It became increasingly incredible as the strength of the Soviet nuclear forces increased. By 1961 those forces had increased to the point where it was quite clear that any strike by the United States against the Soviet Union, whether it preceded or followed a Soviet attack on this country, would lead to the loss of tens of millions of our people.

SCHLESINGER: In other words, by 1960 or 1961 we could not hope by an advance strike to knock out Soviet retaliatory power?

McNAMARA: Certainly by 1961 we could not hope to knock out so much of the Soviet nuclear power by an advance strike as to leave them with a force so small that it would cause inconsequential damage to our country. Because of the deficiencies of the Eisenhower Administration's political-military strategy, one of the first acts of the Kennedy Administration was to take the steps to permit a shift in strategy – a shift from a complete and sole reliance on massive retaliation with strategic nuclear weapons to a controlled, flexible response tailored to the level of the political or military aggression to which it was responding. It was this decision which, in my opinion, removed the fetters from our foreign policy, it was this decision which provided for our foreign policy a solid base of military power, and it was this early decision of President Kennedy which permitted such responses to Soviet aggression as that of the United States in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.

SCHLESINGER: What was required in the way of the recomposition of the mix of the armed forces to make the new strategy possible?

McNAMARA: Well, let me tell you some of the deficiencies we found immediately after taking office and relate them to the requirements for a controlled, flexible response. The most striking example of our military weakness at that time was the fact that if we had continued our forces and readiness at the 1960 to 1961 level, we would not have had enough forces to carry out a successful invasion of Cuba if that should have proved necessary in the missile crisis of October 1962. And, of course, our capability for carrying out a successful invasion was an absolute requirement for the blockade itself. We would never have been willing to undertake such a blockade had we not had the capability to follow it, if necessary, with an invasion. That capability we lacked in 1961.

SCHLESINGER: Capability in the army, or was it the transport of the army to Cuba, or both?

McNAMARA: Both, as a matter of fact. The October 1962 plan for the invasion of Cuba called for 1-1/2 Marine Divisions and four Army Divisions – these forces were exclusive of those that would be required in reserve as insurance against other contingencies which, of course, were very much in our mind at the time. In 1961 we had a total of fourteen army divisions, but only eleven of those were combat-ready. And of the eleven, only three were deployed in this country. So we had only 3/4 of the number of Army Divisions required for the invasion of Cuba and none available for reserve against other contingencies. Moreover, this obvious deficiency in combat-ready Army divisions was but one of a host of such military force deficiencies. Our strategic forces, for example, were almost entirely soft-based, concentrated, and highly vulnerable to a surprise missile attack.

The 1500 SAC bombers stood on about 60 bases, but only a third of those were on alert, and this meant that an attack by a relatively small number of nuclear missiles could have caught 2/3 of the bombers and destroyed them. Because of the inadequacies of our warning system at that time, it is possible that even more than 2/3 of the bomber force could have been destroyed on the ground. With the growing Soviet missile threat, this was an extremely dangerous situation, even though, as it turned out, the Soviet missile force was not as large as the intelligence community had predicted it would be, and even though the Russians were not turning out, were not producing intercontinental ballistic missiles at the level that the intelligence community had forecasted they would be. The key problem of our strategic force at the time was vulnerability. To reduce this danger, one of the President's first acts was to request an increase in the Defense Department budget to permit the number of Strategic Air Command aircraft on alert to be increased. It was increased, actually, by 50 percent. The percentage of the force maintained on alert was raised from 33 percent of the total force to 50 percent, that seventeen point increase being a 50 percent increase in the size of the bomber alert force. At the same time, the Polaris program was speeded up. The original fiscal 1962 budget proposed by the Eisenhower Administration had provided for only five Polaris submarines. President Kennedy doubled the number of Polaris submarines in both the 1961 and 1962 budgets from a total of ten to a total of twenty. And, furthermore, the Minuteman program was accelerated by President Kennedy's supplements to the fiscal 1962 budget and was expanded from a total of four hundred missiles to a total of six hundred missiles – this number to be in place by the summer of 1964. And, by the way, we will actually exceed that schedule.

But turning now to the weaknesses in the non-strategic nuclear forces, as I say, the army in 1961 had only fourteen divisions, and of the fourteen, only eleven were combat-ready. The President took action to increase the number of divisions to a total of sixteen, all to be combat-ready. This meant that the number of combat-ready divisions held in reserve in the United States was raised from three to eight. It was this, more than any other action, that prepared us for the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. And, of course, our deficiency would have been at least as great had we faced a Chinese Communist invasion of Southeast Asia, which was always a contingency we had to reckon with. Both in the case of the Cuban missile crisis and in the case of a Chinese movement in Southeast Asia, we would have faced serious shortages of air and amphibious lift, as well as shortages of combat personnel. As I mentioned, not only would there have been shortages of combat personnel in relation to the specific requirements of the contingency war plans for either one of those situations, but perhaps even more important, there would have been absolutely no reserve forces available to move against Soviet or Communist moves elsewhere in the world, moves which we recognized as highly probable in retaliation for any of our moves against Cuba at the time of the missile crisis. Now as to equipment, here too there were major deficiencies in 1961. The divisions that we had in January of that year were so deficient in equipment that they would not have been able to fight longer than a few weeks before running out of ammunition. Furthermore, production of new equipment would not have been able to start in time to in any contribute to the war effort. And this meant, of course, that the effectiveness of our combat-ready divisions, limited as they were in number, was seriously degraded. The list of

deficiencies was very long, but I think I can give you a few examples to illustrate the problem.

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In January of 1961 we had only two-thirds of the required number of armored personnel carriers and only 46 percent of the self-propelled howitzers required – required in the sense that they were authorized in the Tables of Equipment for the divisions that we had combat-ready. And we had only 15 percent of the authorized number – the required number – of recoilless rifles. Another indication of the deficiency was that in the fall of 1961, during the buildup of our forces in response to the Berlin crisis, we actually had to strip thousands of pieces of equipment (included were hundreds of trucks and trailers, required to carry ammunition and other vital supplies, as well as artillery pieces and radios) from active Army units in the United States in order to be able to send two division sets of equipment to Europe in preparation for the possible movement of division forces to augment the five divisions in Europe at the time of the Berlin crisis. In effect, in many critical lines of equipment, our inventories were actually bare. At the time of the Cuban missile crisis we were still short. Although orders for additional equipment were placed in large volume in 1961, the production had not been delivered by October 1962. Therefore, at the time of the Cuban missile crisis we actually didn't have equipment on hand for 18,000 of the priority Reserve personnel that we would have had to mobilize had we faced a Cuban invasion. And despite these shortages, which were very serious, we had grave imbalances in the inventory. We actually had surpluses, serious excesses, in a number of items of supply. For example, we had three times the required number of 105 mm cartridges, over twice the number of 81 mm and 4.2" mortar shells, indicating that there had been a complete lack of control of procurement in the department against any reasonable plan. I'll come later to an explanation of why I think that situation existed. It existed, I think, primarily because the budget was set to a financial limit. It was not set in relation to an analysis of contingency war plans and a translation of those war plans into military requirements.

SCHLESINGER: One can understand the shortages as a consequence of that policy of putting all the eggs in the nuclear basket, starving non-nuclear forces, but the surpluses are very peculiar since these are in conventional equipment.

McNAMARA: Surpluses existed because at that time the procurement was being made against requirements that were grossly inflated. If I recall the figures correctly, the total requirement for equipment was estimated to have a value of \$40 billion. Against that we had an inventory of something less than \$8 or \$12 billion. Certain sections of the Department of Defense were buying to the level of the total requirement. They happened to have funds to allow them to buy 100 percent or even more in certain cases. Other sections of the department were very limited in funds. They couldn't buy 5 or 10 percent of the total requirement, and it was this that led to the imbalance.

SCHLESINGER: And – I know you'll get to this later – there was no centralized control?

McNAMARA: Absolutely none. One of the first things we did when we put in a centralized control was to wring the water out of the requirements calculations. We annually reduced the requirement by \$24 billion, from \$40 billion down to \$16 billion. Then we bought to the \$16 billion requirement, and we balanced the levels of inventories of the various items to that level so that we ended up with a force that had a \$16 billion fighting potential. Previously, with a \$40 billion requirement and perhaps an \$8 or \$12 billion inventory, we had a fighting potential that wasn't worth more than \$1 or \$2 billion. In any event,

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we had serious equipment shortages, so serious that had we been forced to fight in 1961, we could not have fought for more than a few weeks, if that long.

Moreover, we had very serious shortages of tactical fighter aircraft. So much emphasis in the air force had been placed upon our strategic nuclear capability that they took what limited funds they had, spent them on those forces, and completely neglected the fighters that were required to provide the air support to the ground forces in any operations short of a strategic nuclear war. At that time the air force had sixteen wings of fighter bombers, but over 75 percent of those were F-100s. The F-100 first flew in 1955. It was barely supersonic when carrying no ordnance and had no all-weather capability. Only about 10 percent of the force was composed of Mach 2, all-weather fighters. But despite those deficiencies in tactical air power, the Eisenhower fiscal 1962 budget included only 192 F-105 fighter bombers and made no provision for modern tactical reconnaissance aircraft. Under the Kennedy administration, as you know, the number of fighter bomber wings has been increased by over one-third and almost all of them are to be equipped with modern supersonic aircraft.

Perhaps even more important, however, than the deficiencies in the aircraft themselves was the almost complete lack of supplies of modern non-nuclear ordnance. For example, the air force had only about a fourth of the required number of Sidewinder missiles. In air-to-ground weapons it had nothing but Korean War vintage general-purpose bombs and rockets, most of which were not suitable for the aircraft in the inventory. This meant, in effect, the air force would have been unable to provide any meaningful tactical air support for the army in the event of a non-nuclear limited war. As a matter of fact, during that period, in order to carry out a demonstration for me of tactical air power in support of ground forces, the air force actually had to borrow certain ordnance from the Navy because their own stock was so short. And yet, despite these ordnance shortages, the Eisenhower budget for fiscal 1961 included only \$4.1 million for air force ordnance. The Kennedy Administration increased that in fiscal 1962 to about \$240 million.

Furthermore, not only were we short of troops and short of equipment for the troops we had, but our airlift capability at the time was so inadequate it would have taken nearly two months to airlift one infantry division and its equipment to Southeast Asia – a period of time completely unacceptable in relation to the contingency war plans then on the books. The

airlift force was largely composed of obsolescent aircraft designed for civilian passenger transportation. Only about a third of the aircraft we had could be said to be modern cargo aircraft designed to perform the military airlift mission. And yet, the Eisenhower budget for fiscal 1962 for airlift aircraft provided for only forty-two airlift aircraft when we were short literally hundreds of such aircraft.

To summarize our deficiencies, the vulnerabilities and shortcomings of our forces in 1961 were so serious that it meant we had only a facade rather than the reality of military power. The U.S. deterrent forces actually invited attack because these vulnerabilities were as obvious to the Soviets as they were to President Kenney and to the members of his Administration. We had too few divisions, we had divisions without enough equipment, we had troops without adequate air support, and we had air support aircraft without adequate ordnance. We were spending about \$44 billion a year in the Eisenhower budget,

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for defense, but we weren't getting anything close to \$44 billion per year worth of defense because of the many imbalances and the critical weaknesses in our program. We could have attained the same degree of usable military power at a far lower figure.

SCHLESINGER: How soon did you become aware of these deficiencies in our military posture? What was the process by which . . .

McNAMARA: Well, I think we became aware of it in the first thirty days following the President's inauguration because not more than approximately sixty days elapsed – perhaps a little less than that – before he submitted a proposed supplement to the Eisenhower fiscal 1962 defense budget, submitted it to Congress and the hearings were held, and the Congress very shortly passed it. That was but the first of three such supplements submitted by President Kennedy to the fiscal 1962 Eisenhower budget.

SCHLESINGER: Did these issues arise in your transitional discussions with Secretary Gates [Thomas S. Gates Jr.]?

McNAMARA: No, although they were listed in a set of work projects that I set up during the first week after taking office. This was so because it had become very apparent in discussions with the chiefs of the services and with other members of the department that there was an utter lack of balance between the elements of our forces – men versus equipment, men and equipment versus mobility, ordnance supplies versus requirements, etc.

SCHLESINGER: At what point did the issue, in terms of the bankruptcy of the all-or-nothing strategy and the need for flexible control of strategy and a

capability for diversified response, become clear to you? Had you thought much about strategic matters?

McNAMARA: No, obviously not. As President of Ford Motor Company this had been outside my area of thinking and responsibility. I think that President Kennedy had thought much about this and brought into office with him a feeling that it was essential that we broaden our strategic base and that we develop a capability for what I have called a controlled, flexible response, a response tailored to the specific level of political or military aggression.

SCHLESINGER: The change-about was really quite quick. The supplemental went up the first time in March?

McNAMARA: As I remember it, in early March. It might even have been late February. It came very quickly because it didn't take me long, once we got in here, to find out the deficiency or bankruptcy in both strategic policy and in the force structure.

SCHLESINGER: How about the people you found in the Pentagon when you got here? Were they aware of the bankruptcy which you very transiently described, or were they...

McNAMARA: Most of them were not. There were some notable exceptions, not all in the Pentagon. I think perhaps General Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor] had described the bankruptcy as well as anyone in his book *The Uncertain Trumpet*. But there came with me into the Pentagon a group of extraordinarily bright, able men, many of them experienced

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in defense analysis – the Charlie Hitches [Charles J. Hitch], Ros Gilpatrics [Roswell L. Gilpatric], Paul Nitzes [Paul H. Nitze]. Men of that caliber and experience brought with them some knowledge of where to look for the deficiencies, and we joined together and, in a period of three or four weeks, made a quick audit of the situation. It was very obvious to them, as it was to me, that the deficiencies existed. The most noticeable deficiency, as I mentioned, was the imbalance that existed between the elements of our forces, and it was perfectly apparent that we should eliminate that either by cutting out the peaks or filling in the valleys. We had an unusable form of military power at the time.

SCHLESINGER: Do you want to say something about recruiting this exceptional group of people you brought in?

McNAMARA: Yes. With one exception I knew none of them before joining this administration. As I recall, I accepted the President's offer of an

appointment to this position...

SCHLESINGER: Do you want to say something about that? Was it a complete surprise to you?

McNAMARA: Oh, yes. I was elected President of Ford Motor Company the day after President Kennedy was elected President of the United States. Five weeks later I came into my office one day and my secretary reported to me that a Mr. Kennedy had called. I knew no Mr. Kennedy, but I told her I'd return the call. It turned out to be Robert Kennedy, whom I had never met. He didn't explain the purpose of his call other than to say that he would like me to see his brother-in-law. I didn't know his brother-in-law. I asked the nature of the business his brother-in-law would like to discuss with me. Mr. Kennedy stated he preferred to have his brother-in-law discuss that with me at the time of our meeting. I told him I felt I could see him the following week. He said no, he preferred to arrange an earlier meeting and I asked when his brother-in-law would be prepared to come to Detroit. He said he could be there in three hours, that he was then in Washington. I agreed, therefore, to see him that afternoon. He arrived at approximately four o'clock and stated that he had been authorized by the president-elect to offer me an appointment as Secretary of Defense. I replied that for a variety of reasons it would not be appropriate for me to accept such an appointment.

SCHLESINGER: This was out of the blue? You had heard no...

McNAMARA: Completely out of the blue.

SCHLESINGER: You had no intimations of any interest?

McNAMARA: None whatsoever. I was known as a Republican at the time although I had, as a matter of fact, contributed financially to President Kennedy's election campaign and had voted for him. He knew of neither of those actions, however. But in any event, it was a complete surprise to me. And, as I say, I told Sarge Shriver [Robert Sargent Shriver Jr.] at the time that for a variety of reasons it would be inappropriate for me to accept the President's offer. My major reason was my complete lack of experience, both in the Defense Department and, as a matter of fact, in government. Sarge Shriver responded by saying that he had been authorized to accept a favorable reply, but in the event the reply was unfavorable, he had been instructed to ask that I meet with the President to discuss the matter in person. Although I had no intention of changing my mind, as a matter of courtesy I did agree to go

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to Washington to meet with President Kennedy. This I did the following day. I expressed to President Kennedy the same views I had presented to Sargent Shriver. President Kennedy said to me he wasn't aware of any school for either Cabinet Officers or Presidents and that the

excuse of lack of experience was not an adequate excuse. I then shifted my ground somewhat to say that I recognized there were few men who had served as Secretary of Defense, and few who could be considered experienced in that sense, but I was certain there were many more experienced than I. I listed several possibilities, each one of whom he disposed of with reasons that I was forced to accept. But, nonetheless, we concluded that first meeting, which was the first time I had ever met the President, by my saying that I still felt he would make a mistake to put a person as inexperienced as I in government in such a position. He did ask, and I did agree, to reconsider and to meet again a few days later. This we did. In the interim I discussed the matter with some of my associates and with others whom I felt more qualified than I to appraise my own capabilities for carrying out the responsibilities of the Secretary of Defense. Finally, on the second meeting I accepted the position. All this is leading up to the point that immediately thereafter I moved to Washington. I have only been back to Ann Arbor once in the intervening three and a half years. I moved to Washington, into the Ford Suite at the Shoreham Hotel, where I spent the three weeks prior to Christmas and the two weeks after Christmas on the telephone twelve or fourteen hours a day calling acquaintances and friends throughout the country to ask their recommendations as to men capable of carrying out the responsibilities of political appointees inside the department.

SCHLESINGER: Let me ask one question about before you came to Washington. Treasury was not brought up?

McNAMARA: Yes. I didn't mention, Arthur, that Sarge Shriver actually said to me that he had been authorized to offer me either the position of Secretary of Treasury or the position of Secretary of Defense.

SCHLESINGER: Then Defense was the only one that interested you of those two?

McNAMARA: Yes. I told him I felt even less well qualified to be Secretary of the Treasury than I did Secretary of Defense. I had served in the air force three years during World War II and I had, during a part of that period, been stationed in the Pentagon, so I did know something about the Defense Department. I knew very little about Treasury and had had no formal experience in banking or fiscal affairs.

SCHLESINGER: The President, I think, once told me that at your first meeting you asked him one question, which was whether he had really written *Profiles in Courage*.

McNAMARA: Yes, I did ask him that. I had read the book when it was first published, in 1956, and I was tremendously impressed by it, impressed both by the substance of the book and also by the beauty of the writing. I had heard the numerous stories that it had been ghost written and I was just interested in how he would answer the question. It was a rather presumptions thing to ask. Had it been six months later, I never would have asked him because in that intervening period

I saw him write prose of equal quality on many occasions in my presence. In any event, the book impressed me as no other book that I read in the 1950's did. It

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impressed me because he dealt with one of our major national problems – the problem of principle versus expediency, and he dealt with it beautifully, I felt. There was great realism in the book.

SCHLESINGER: So you and he hit it off very well in that first meeting?

McNAMARA: Well, I felt so. I don't think I have admired any man that I have associated with more than I did him based on very close associations over that period of nearly three years.

SCHLESINGER: So it was really the meeting with him that decided you?

McNAMARA: Yes, exactly so. And, in any event, as I started to say, the day after accepting the position I moved down to Washington and spent the next three weeks prior to Christmas in recruiting personnel and the two weeks following New Year's doing the same thing. And of the men I recruited, I had known only one previously.

SCHLESINGER: Who was that?

McNAMARA: Zuckert [Eugene M. Zuckert], the Secretary of the Air Force, who had been a colleague on the Harvard faculty early in the 1940's.

SCHLESINGER: Is the story true that you and Zuckert were the two members of the Business School faculty who voted for F.D.R. [Franklin D. Roosevelt] in The Crimson straw poll?

McNAMARA: Yes although it wasn't The Crimson straw poll. It was a straw poll in the Graduate School of Business Administration when Willkie [Wendell L. Willkie] was running against Roosevelt in 1940. The vote was ninety-eight to two among the members of the Harvard Business School faculty. I recall it very well because Norman Thomas [Norman M. Thomas] debated Bart Leach [W. Barton Leach] on the other side of the river one night during the campaign, a day or two after the straw vote had been taken, and he referred to the vote. He said he felt that the Business School faculty felt they were voting for McKinley [William McKinley]. In any event, there were only two votes against Willkie – one of them was mine. And I recall sitting in the Faculty Club, as a young instructor, opposite a very senior member of the faculty with whom I worked quite closely, and hearing him say he couldn't believe that there were two members

of the faculty who would cast a vote for Roosevelt. He really felt that the vote was in the nature of an intelligence test.

SCHLESINGER: You had not known Roswell Gilpatric?

McNAMARA: No, I hadn't. I don't even recall who first suggested his name to me. But I do remember calling him from the Shoreham Hotel and being told that he was probably at their home on the Eastern Shore. I called there and couldn't find him. I went back to telephoning him in New York, and finally wakened Madelin, his wife, whom I had never met, at six-fifteen in the morning. It was a rather inauspicious beginning to my approach to him to leave his law firm and come to Washington. But we did agree to meet later that day at the Baltimore airport while he was on his way to his Eastern Shore home. We sat in a car in the snow to discuss his appointment as Deputy Secretary – this after I had made a very intensive investigation which led me to conclude he was by far the best man qualified for the post and after I had asked for President Kennedy's authority to offer him the post. On our first meeting we came into complete agreement as to the approach that should be taken in the department and as to his role in it. He agreed to serve. It was one of the most satisfying associations that

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I've had in either business or public life and it was typical, I think, of the relationships that were established between me and all of the key members of the department. An extraordinary group of men agreed to serve. Charlie Hitch, as you probably know, was a Rhodes scholar, one of the first asked to stay on at Oxford, after his graduation, to teach. He stayed there as a Don for five or seven years teaching economics. As a matter of fact, one of his students was Harold Wilson, the present head of the British Labor Party. A very bright man, and a man who has done an amazing job in reforming the requirements calculations and the financial management of the department. Harold Brown, former director of the Livermore Laboratories of the University of California, a protégé of Teller's [Edward Teller], one of the brightest and ablest scientists and engineers that I have worked with, far exceeding in ability any scientist or engineer that I know of in a private company in this country – at the age of, thirty-four or thirty-five, an acknowledged leader among American scientist-engineers. Paul Nitze, Dean Acheson's [Dean G. Acheson] former director of the Policy Planning Staff, a man who had spent two decades in studying political-military affairs. Alain Enthoven, another Rhodes scholar, a young economics professor, gave up an offer of a full professorship in economics at Stanford University to come to serve as one of Charlie Hitch's deputies. John McNaughton [John T. McNaughton], another Rhodes scholar professor of law at Harvard, gave up his professorship there to serve as a deputy to Paul Nitze. Tom Morris [Thomas D. Morris], a former principal in Cresap, McCormick and Paget, has done more, I think, to change procurement policy in the department and has thereby had more influence on the management of defense industry than any man in the last two decades in this country. These are typical of the type of men who were recruited during that five or six week period.

SCHLESINGER: To what extent did you have an absolutely free hand or to what extent were there political pressures on appointments?

McNAMARA: Well, one of the subjects that President Kennedy and I discussed before I accepted the post was his attitude toward recruitment of individuals for the political positions within the department. I asked if I would have a free hand in making such appointments. He said yes, and he never once deviated from that agreement. He left to me the recruitment of all of the political appointees. There was only one standard against which those men were recruited and that was the highest possible ability in relation to the requirements of the job. Some of my recommendations proved very embarrassing to President Kennedy. I recall, for example, that Franklin Roosevelt Jr. [Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr.] was very anxious to obtain the position of Secretary of the Navy, partly because of the association of his father with that job. President Kennedy mentioned this to me and asked me to consider him for the post. I did, but I thought there were others more competent than he. When I mentioned this to President Kennedy, he replied that he owed a political debt to Franklin Roosevelt Jr., particularly for his work in West Virginia, and he wished that I would at least meet him and learn more about him before concluding that he was not qualified for the job. This I agreed to do. I did, and my view was the same after meeting him as it had been before: that there were others more competent than he. The President then accepted my judgment without any further question.

SCHLESINGER: How did John Connally [John B. Connally] come into the picture?

McNAMARA: During the telephone conversations between me and friends and acquaintances around the country, his name was brought to my attention. It was very difficult

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for people to believe that Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] had nothing to do with it. I had never met the Vice President at that point and had no conversation with him at all in relation to the appointment prior to the time that I recommended the name to President Kennedy. I was calling President Kennedy from Aspen to ask his approval to offer the job to Connally, whom I had determined by that point was the best qualified among the men I had considered. President Kennedy, speaking from Palm Beach, said there were two men present whose views he would like to have – Lyndon Johnson and Sam Rayburn [Samuel T. Rayburn] – and asked me to talk to them, which I did. Needless to say, both were enthusiastic about the appointment, and the President therefore agreed that I could offer it to John. I never regretted it, as a matter of fact.

SCHLESINGER: Where did Stahr [Elvis J. Stahr Jr.] come from?

McNAMARA: Stahr, again, came to my attention through these telephone calls, and his record showed that he should have been qualified for the job. He

was a Rhodes scholar. He had served during the war in China in responsible positions. He had been an assistant to Frank Pace [Frank Pace Jr.] when Frank Pace was Secretary of the Army. Stahr was president of a university at the time. He was highly recommended by friends and associates, but he did not prove as competent as we had expected, and it seemed desirable and necessary, as a matter of fact, to make a change, which we did approximately two years after his appointment.

SCHLESINGER: How do you conceive the job of Service Secretary?

McNAMARA: They serve as subordinates to the Secretary of Defense in the limited areas of directing research and development, requirements calculations, and recruitment and training for their services. I say "limited areas" in the sense that their responsibilities do not include operational planning for those services, nor the application of the forces in relation to specific political and international crises, nor do their responsibilities include final recommendations on force requirements because they are no longer in a position in which they can make such final recommendations. These, coming from the chiefs, must consider more than the area of responsibility of a particular service. They must consider the broad range of capabilities and requirements of the several services before developing a final recommendation on the force level of a particular service. The Service Secretaries are not in a position to make such judgments.

SCHLESINGER: Was there any change in the function and responsibilities of the Service Secretaries in the Kennedy...

McNAMARA: I think there has been a gradual change in the responsibilities of the Service Secretaries over the past ten years. As the responsibility of the Service Chief as a Service Chief has decreased, so has the responsibility of the Service Secretary. Particularly the change in the law in 1958, which allowed the operational forces to be shifted from the command of the Service Chief and the Service Secretary to the command of the Unified Commanders who in turn reported not to the services but to the Joint Chiefs, had a major effect on the responsibilities of the Service Secretaries. As the responsibility of the Service Secretaries has decreased, so have the responsibilities of the Assistant Secretaries of Defense increased. That is particularly true of the Assistant Secretary (Comptroller), the Director of Research and Engineering, and the Assistant Secretary in charge of international security affairs. And certainly it's true of the Assistant Secretary in charge of installations and logistics.

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SCHLESINGER: One more question on this recruitment business. There have been recurrent stories about resistance in the Department of Defense to the new methods – to the Rand approach, computers, the so-called "whiz kids" and so on. Was that a problem?

McNAMARA: I think not. Any individual or organization resists change. Whether the change, with hindsight, proves wise or foolish, as individuals we resist change because we wouldn't be doing something we didn't believe right. If we believed it wrong, we would have changed it ourselves. The very fact, therefore, that we're doing it indicates we believe it right and when someone else indicates they believe it wrong, an immediate controversy develops. Such controversies developed in the Defense Department because of the huge number of changes at all levels and in all areas that we introduced. I don't believe there has been another period of such widespread change since the department was created.

SCHLESINGER: To what extent were you able to use techniques of management you developed or learned at Ford?

McNAMARA: Well, I think to a very wide extent. I say this without in any way implying that the subject matter of my responsibility here is in any way comparable to the subject matter of my responsibility at Ford. But the administrative problems are very similar. Whether one is administering a large religious body such as the Catholic Church, or a large industrial organization such as Ford Motor Company, or a large educational institution such as Harvard, or a governmental department such as the Defense Department, the administrative problems are very much the same. They are simply the problems of organizing a group of people to move toward a common objective, and to continue to move toward it and not away from it. I could go into this at great length...

SCHLESINGER: Well, I was wondering particularly with reference to things like the use of computers...

McNAMARA: Oh, I think the use of computers is of secondary importance wherever one is. As a matter of fact, I believe that we rely too much on computers. The tolerances of calculation are refined far beyond the accuracy of the assumptions. This is true in business, and I am certain it is true here. We have been tagged as computer-minded individuals. Quite the contrary, most of the judgments we make do not depend upon computers. But they do depend upon a quantification of the factors affecting the alternatives that we face.

SCHLESINGER: In other words, a computer is a means of making the alternatives precise.

McNAMARA: Exactly. And, as a matter of fact, as I say, I really think in many, many cases we use computers to obtain a greater degree of precision than is warranted by the assumptions.

SCHLESINGER: Do you want to say anything more about the general problems of

transition, coming in, taking over from...

McNAMARA: Well, probably not at the moment. Perhaps we could go on to another subject and then come back to that at another time.

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Let's turn for the moment to the Bay of Pigs. This incident occurred during the period of organization of the new administration, and, as a matter of fact, that was one of the factors that influenced the outcome, I'm sure. But the point I particularly want to emphasize here is that despite the fact that President Kennedy assumed full responsibility for the decision, the fault lay not with the President, in my opinion, but rather with his senior advisors, myself included. Particularly myself, because the Secretary of Defense along with the Secretary of State and the Director of Central Intelligence, were the primary advisors to the President on this issue. I say the primary advisors although, of course, they based their advice on recommendations from the Joint Chiefs and the operational directors of the Central Intelligence Agency. Not a single senior advisor to the President, other than Senator Fulbright [J. William Fulbright], recommended against the operation. The Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs, and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, who had the direct operational responsibility, all were in favor of the operation. Now why did the error in judgment occur? I think several factors influenced it. First, and perhaps most important, most of the senior advisors had been in office less than ninety days. Secondly, all felt the pressure for action resulting from the decision of the Guatemalan government to terminate the use of its territory for the training of the Bay of Pigs recruits. Thirdly, each of the senior advisors believed they were following a well-established plan and policy developed by the previous administration. Fourthly, the weaknesses of the operational plan were not disclosed to the policy advisors. That is to say, there had been poor staff analysis of the plan – poor staff analysis both by the CIA staff and by the Joint Staff. The Joint Staff had been handicapped, it is true, by a lack of time for preparation of their study and by incomplete exposure of the plans.

SCHLESINGER: Why had there been a lack of time if this operation had been in the works for some period?

McNAMARA: Because apparently the Joint Staff had not been participants in the development of the plans, but had been called in only at the last moment – that is to say, after the Kennedy Administration came into power, and, as a matter of fact, close to the date of the operation itself – for an evaluation of the plan.

SCHLESINGER: When did you become aware of the operation?

McNAMARA: I don't recall, Arthur, but it would have been shortly after the administration came to power. But, as I say, the operation itself took

place approximately ninety days after inauguration. Fifthly, one of the most important factors influencing our judgment was the view of the intelligence community that the Cuban people would revolt shortly after the start of the invasion and overthrow Castro [Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz].

SCHLESINGER: I noticed that Mr. Dulles [Allen W. Dulles] in his book *The Craft of Intelligence* denies that this was the view of the intelligence community.

McNAMARA: Well, I'm speaking from memory. I'd like to review the papers, but I believe they will support my statement that it was the view of the intelligence community that the people would rise up and initiate a movement to overthrow Castro, and that such a movement would be sparked by the invasion itself.

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SCHLESINGER: That is my memory. You may remember, I was participating in . . .

McNAMARA: I do. And, finally, you may recall the last factor which I think was at least as important as any of the others: we were led to believe that the cost of failure would be small. The cost of failure was seriously understated because it was believed that in the event of failure, the invading force could escape to the hills to carry on successful guerrilla operations. And the price of failure, therefore, was thought to be small. The price of failure, of course, turned out to be tremendous.

SCHLESINGER: And I think the international political implications of failure were never fully understood.

McNAMARA: I think that's correct. But the main point I want to make is that although the President said immediately after the failure that it was his decision alone, and he assumed full responsibility for it, the failure was not his but the failure of his advisors who were unanimous in their recommendations to him with the single exception of Senator Fulbright.

SCHLESINGER: Do you remember, did you participate personally in the events of the actual weekend before the invasion?

McNAMARA: I participated in all of the events, excepting only the discussion of whether that single air strike should be carried out. But while we are on that point, let me say that although I didn't participate in that decision, I think it has been greatly exaggerated in importance. They were only talking of a

few sorties – I have forgotten whether it was six or nine – and the six or nine sorties couldn't possibly have influenced the outcome in any substantial way.

SCHLESINGER: As I recall it, when those meetings began, the matter had not been made clear as to whether American military participation was excluded.

McNAMARA: Oh, on the contrary, I think the President made crystal clear before the invasion started that the U.S. would not support it.

SCHLESINGER: No, that's true. But before, by early in April, and indeed by the middle of March in the meetings he'd made that clear. But when the meetings first began, or, in other words, when the plan came to the President, do you remember whether this was excluded at that point?

McNAMARA: I don't remember whether it was excluded initially, but I know that it had been made perfectly clear that it was to be excluded before the senior advisors all recommended to the President that he carry out the operation. There was no misunderstanding in their minds at the time they made the recommendation. They all understood and, as a matter of fact, I believe all recommended that there be no application – no overt application – of U.S. power in support of the invasion.

SCHLESINGER: How would you describe the impact of this on the way the government thereafter operated?

McNAMARA: It was shattering, but, as is so often the case, a failure proved the foundation for future successes. It taught the President something about his advisors. It taught each advisor something about himself and about his department. We all learned from it. It was a horribly expensive lesson, however.

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SCHLESINGER: Where was the lesson mostly – in judgments of people or methods of organization?

McNAMARA: I think principally in judgments of people. It was a lesson that I really didn't need to learn at that point. I had learned it before: do your own work. Don't rely on advice from anybody.

SCHLESINGER: In the White House, for example, there were organizational changes. Mac Bundy [McGeorge Bundy] decided that we'd better start holding staff meetings on foreign policy problems, and so on. Were there any similar changes in the way...

McNAMARA: No, I don't think so. I don't think there were any similar changes in the Defense Department. But, as I say, I think I relearned a lesson I had learned many times before, and that was never to rely on the advice anybody gives me on anything.

Perhaps we can now turn to the second Cuban crisis, that of October 1962, following the recognition that the Soviets had introduced medium range and intermediate range ballistic missiles into Cuba. This information was received by the President Tuesday morning, October 16, following which he instructed State, Defense, CIA, and other government departments to join together immediately to develop a program of action for his review. We met on the succeeding days and considered basically five alternatives. First, political pressure on the Soviets, designed to force them to withdraw their offensive weapons from Cuba – a program of action limited to political pressure alone, including no forms of military pressure. Secondly, a declaration of a policy of open surveillance plus an offensive weapons blockade, and an indication that if the weapons blockade failed to lead to withdrawal of the offensive weapons there would be the application of further military pressure. Thirdly, a restricted air strike – an air strike directed to the destruction of the medium range and intermediate range launchers. Fourthly, a more extensive air strike directed not only against the offensive weapons themselves, but also against the air defenses, the surface-to-air missile sites, and the fighter aircraft located in Cuba. Finally, a fifth course of action, a military invasion of Cuba preceded by a comprehensive air strike.

These five alternatives were discussed intensively by the Secretary of State and his representatives, the Secretary of Defense and his, the Director of Central Intelligence, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and members of the White House staff. On the 18th of October, Thursday the 18th, the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the Director of Central Intelligence, the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, and others met with the President to discuss these alternatives. There was still considerable difference of opinion among the President's advisors, both those from inside the government and those from the outside whom the President had introduced into the discussion.

SCHLESINGER: Who was that? Acheson?

McNAMARA: Dean Acheson had been introduced into the discussion, as had been Mr. Robert Lovett [Robert A. Lovett]. And they had met with us on several occasions and were present, as I recall – at least Mr. Lovett was present – at one of the discussions on the 18th. It was on the evening of the 18th that these alternatives were presented to the President. I outlined them to him with the pros and cons of each. He heard the views of those present, including several who proposed no action against Cuba other than to include it as a target in the Single Integrated

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Operational Plan. That is to say, a target that would be struck along with the Soviet Union in the event we were ever to undertake a strategic nuclear strike against the Soviet Union. The

President, following the outline of the courses of action, and following a discussion of the pros and cons of each, indicated his preference for a course of action involving a blockade, preferably a blockade to be established without declaring a state of war. He instructed us to be prepared to undertake such a blockade on the following Monday morning. He further asked that preparations be started for a speech to be made to the nation Sunday night, and that we increase the level of reconnaissance effort directed against Cuba.

SCHLESINGER: This was on Thursday evening?

McNAMARA: This was on Thursday evening. Then on Friday morning some of those who had been present the previous evening spoke to the President expressing their disagreement with the decision of Thursday night. The President became concerned that the decision was becoming unstuck, to use his language. I mention this only to indicate that initially it was a highly controversial decision, a decision that, while first made Thursday night, was to be reviewed intensively on Friday, Saturday, and ultimately on Sunday.

SCHLESINGER: Was the criticism from which side? From those who felt it did not go far enough or those who felt it went too far?

McNAMARA: I think the criticism on Friday morning was from those who felt it went too far. One of those who felt it went too far went privately to the President expressing his great concern over how far it had gone. On the other hand, there were those who felt it hadn't gone far enough. One of those individuals stated at a meeting at the State Department on Friday that, without qualification, he was in favor of an air strike and invasion. Furthermore, in a private conversation in the hallway outside the State Department meeting room, he stated he was so disturbed by the President's decision to limit the action to a blockade that he thought he would have to disassociate himself from such an action and disassociate himself publicly from the President's policy. I mention this simply to indicate feelings and emotions were running high and controversy was rampant. On Friday, the 19th of October, the President met at the White House with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He and I were the only others present.

SCHLESINGER: This was Friday afternoon?

McNAMARA: My notes don't indicate whether it was in the morning or the afternoon. I've forgotten which, Arthur. The chiefs stated they believed we could not tolerate the existence of the missiles in Cuba, and they were united from a military point of view in believing that the missiles should be taken out by force and should be kept out by surveillance. They realized the political problem involved and the difficulty of predicting the Soviet response but, nonetheless, recommended the application of military force to destroy the missiles. The President outlined his approach to the consideration of the problem, starting with the question of why the Soviets supplied the weapons. He went on to say he recognized the danger of a U.S. failure to act. He pointed out

that such a failure to act would weaken the alliance and might mislead the Soviets in their appraisal of our strength of purpose to support freedom and independence throughout the world. He stated that if we took the missiles out by an air strike there was bound to be a reprisal by the Soviet Union. They might take Berlin by force,

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and that, of course, would leave us no alternative but to respond with nuclear weapons. The Chiefs stated they recognized all of these points but emphasized that our security depends upon the credibility of our response to Soviet action and we must act, and act promptly, to destroy the missiles in order to preserve the credibility of our response. General LeMay [Curtis E. LeMay] stated that if we limit our action to either political action or to a blockade, the missiles will move into the woods, as he put it, and therefore it is absolutely essential that we destroy them with an air strike. He stated he didn't believe that if we struck Cuba from the air the Soviets would move against Berlin, that our strike against the missiles in Cuba would not change the Berlin situation in the slightest. He further stated that a course of action limited to the political action or to a blockade would lead right into war, that such actions would be as bad as Munich. Admiral Anderson [George W. Anderson Jr.] stated that an air strike against the missiles was the only proper course of action. The Navy could carry out a blockade, but the blockade would not affect the weapons in Cuba, and it would give the Soviets full time for assembling such weapons. The blockade would escalate to higher forms of military pressure and would eventually lead to a nuclear attack on the United States. On the other hand, taking positive, prompt action in Cuba would deter the Soviets from later aggressive acts against Berlin. The President pointed out that when we had grabbed their United Nations representative, they threw out ours. The Soviets have been following an eye-for-an-eye policy. General Wheeler [Earle G. Wheeler] stated that from the point of view of protecting the people of the United States, the safest course of action would be to take out the missiles by an air strike. The Soviet Union had not yet incorporated Cuba in the Warsaw Pact, and Soviet prestige would not be placed at stake by an air strike by the United States against the Cuba missiles. The commandant of the Marine Corps stated that placing the weapons in Cuba indicated the Soviets' intention to inflict damage on the United States; however, such action by the Soviets was hard to reconcile with the fact that we had known for months that the Soviets have nuclear power directed against us, far more than is needed to inflict serious damage against us. Yet the Soviets hadn't attacked us nor had we attacked them, and the power equation did not appear to have been significantly altered by the introduction of weapons into Cuba. LeMay went on to add that the big problem was the blackmail threat that would exist if we left the missiles there. The blockade, he stated, did not support the political promises and public statements made by the President. One of the Chiefs stated that blockade would bring two problems. He didn't see how we could continue to maintain surveillance over any extended period of time, and further, Guantanamo would prove to be a serious problem for us, including the problem of short-range cruise missiles directed against Guantanamo. LeMay interrupted to state that we must do more than just take out the missiles. We must take out all of Cuba's air power as well. Admiral Anderson stated if an air strike is initiated, we must strike to protect Guantanamo. There is no acceptable

solution to the military problem in Berlin, and neither is there any acceptable solution to the Cuban problem other than a complete destruction of the Soviet power on that island. We will never be able to apply sufficient political and economic pressure through a blockade to force the Soviets to remove that military power from Cuba. The President stated he appreciated the views of the Chiefs; he will maintain contact with them.

The controversy among the President's advisors continued throughout Friday and Saturday. The President met with us on Saturday, at which time I was asked

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to express the views of the group. I stated that we could not bring to him a unanimous recommendation, that we were split. Bobby Kennedy calculated that eleven were in favor of the blockade course of action, while six were in favor of air strikes and/or invasion: General Taylor, the Joint Chiefs, Dean Acheson, Doug Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon], John McCone [John A. McCone], Mac Bundy appeared to favor a strike against Cuba, while Bobby Kennedy, Dean Rusk, Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson], Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen], Ros Gilpatric, Paul Nitze, Alex Johnson [U. Alexis Johnson], George Ball [George W. Ball], Bob Lovett, Tommy Thompson [Thomas B. Thompson] and I favored the blockade route. I outlined the objective of a blockade. It would be two-fold: first, to stop a further buildup of the Soviets' offensive capability in Cuba, and secondly, to force the removal of that offensive capability from Cuba. Initially we would blockade the further introduction of weapons and do so within the framework of the OAS resolution and the Rio Treaty. Subsequently we might expand the blockade by steps to cover all types of goods and thereby increase its power and pressure to the point where it would result in a Soviet agreement to withdraw the weapons. The blockade plan assumed that prior to the application of the blockade, the President would speak to the nation and the world calling for action by the OAS. A draft of a speech for that purpose was read at the meeting. Following the speech and the application of the blockade, negotiations would be started directed toward removal of the offensive weapons. We recognized that blockade might not either stop the movement of Soviet ships to Cuba or lead to the withdrawal of the weapons and that it might, therefore, require additional action. But we believed that it would be possible to control the escalation to meet whatever contingencies developed. At the time the blockade would be initiated, it was recognized that some weapons in Cuba would have an operational capability for a strike against the U.S. with nuclear warheads and that any military action beyond the level of the blockade would therefore carry with it great risk. We estimated that the Soviets would react as follows: Chip Bohlen [Charles E. Bohlen] stated there was a very good chance the Soviets would confine themselves to United Nations action and would not initiate military action if the U.S. program was limited to a blockade. The National Intelligence Estimate issued the day before stated: "The Soviets would concentrate on political exploitation, especially in the United Nations. They would not resort to major force in the area of Cuba or forceful retaliation elsewhere, at least initially." I pointed out there were certain disadvantages to the blockade. It would almost certainly extend over a period of several days during which world pressures would build up and impatience would develop inside the United States. It would lead to political negotiations, upon the conclusion of which our position vis-a-vis the Soviet

Union would be stronger than it was today but it might be weaker than it had been prior to the introduction of the missiles into Cuba. And finally, that the negotiations might proceed so unsatisfactorily that further military action would be required and that later military action might: entail greater risks than an immediate surprise attack. I also emphasized the advantages of the blockade as contrasted to alternative courses of action. It would be evidenced by action that the United States would not allow the Soviets to build up offensive weapons capabilities in this hemisphere, and, by this action, the United States would have moved to retain the respect of its allies, both those in Europe and Latin America. Secondly, it avoided the Pearl Harbor approach of a sneak attack and a war without warning on a small nation. It was really the only course of military action compatible with our principles and our standing as a free world leader. Thirdly, it avoided the risk of a surprise attack against potentially operational nuclear weapons prior to the time when Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyeovich Khrushchev] had been conditioned to believe that his use of those weapons against the United States would be interpreted by us exactly as though the weapons had been based

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in the Soviet Union. And fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, the application of a blockade as contrasted to an air strike and invasion, avoided a sudden military move so forceful as to force Soviet action – action without thought, a spasm type of response – which could seriously damage our own military forces and our worldwide prestige, and lead to a rapid and uncontrollable escalation of actions by both the Western world and the Communist bloc. I emphasized that in the view of those who favored the blockade, this course of action gave the United States the best chance to control the consequences of its application of pressure on the Soviet Union. After listening to an outline of the alternatives and to the pros and cons relating to the blockade, the President called on other members of the group present, heard their views, and then stated that we should make preparations for immediate application of the blockade. He issued instructions for the various departments to carry out these preparations.

On Sunday, the 21st of October, the President met in the Oval Room of the White House with the Attorney General, General Taylor, General Sweeney [Walter C. Sweeney Jr.], and me to discuss possible military action over and above a blockade. I started by stating that following the start of an air attack, the initial units of the landing force could invade Cuba within seven days. The movement of troops in preparation for such an invasion could start at the time of the President's speech. No mobilization of reserve forces would be required for such an invasion until the start of the air strike itself. General LeMay had stated that the transport aircraft from the reserve and guard units which would be required for such an invasion could be fully operational within twenty-four to forty-eight hours after the call to active duty. I then went on to say that, based on the information which had become available during the night, it appeared that there was equipment in Cuba for approximately forty medium range or intermediate range ballistic missiles. And Mr. McCone, who had joined the group fifteen or twenty minutes after we started our discussion, confirmed that report. The location of the sites for some thirty-six of these launchers was known, and thirty-two of the

thirty-six known sites appeared to have sufficient equipment on them to be included in any air strike directed against Cuba's missile capability. We believed that the forty launchers would normally be equipped with eighty missiles. John McCone had reported that a Soviet ship, believed to be the vessel which the Soviets had been sending to Cuba with missiles, had made a sufficient number of trips to the island to allow it to have off-loaded approximately forty-eight missiles. Therefore, we assumed there were approximately that number of missiles on the island at the time although we had located only about thirty of them. General Sweeney outlined the plan of air attack, the objective of which would be the destruction of the known Cuban missile capability. The five surface-to-air missile installations in the vicinity of the known missile sites would each be attacked by approximately eight aircraft. The three MIG airfields which were defending the missile sites would be covered by twelve U.S. aircraft per field. In total, the defense suppression operations, including the necessary replacement aircraft, would require about a hundred sorties. Each of the launchers at the eight or nine known sites, a total of approximately thirty-two to thirty-six launchers, would be attacked by six aircraft, and for that purpose a total of approximately two hundred and fifty sorties would be flown. The U.S. aircraft covering the three MIG airfields would attack the MIGs if they became airborne, and General Sweeney strongly recommended an attack on each of the airfields to destroy the known MIG aircraft. He went on to say that he was certain the air strike would be successful, but that even under optimum conditions it was not likely that all of the known missiles would be destroyed. And, as I mentioned before, probably no more than 60 percent of the total

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missiles on the island could fall into the known category. General Taylor went on to add that, "The best we can offer you, Mr. President, is to destroy 90 percent of the known missiles." General Taylor, General Sweeney, and I all emphasized our opinion that the initial air strike must be followed by strikes on subsequent days and that these, in turn, would lead inevitably to an invasion. A CIA representative, who had joined the discussion at this point, stated that it was probable the missiles which are operational – and it was estimated then that there were between eight and twelve operational missiles equipped with nuclear warheads on the island at the time – could hold indefinitely a capability for firing with from two and one-half to four hours notice, and included in that notice period was a countdown requiring twenty to forty minutes. In relation to the countdown period, the first wave of our attacking aircraft would give ten minutes of warning, the second wave forty minutes of warning, and the third wave, which General Sweeney believed was required to assure destruction, a proportionately greater warning. General Sweeney strongly recommended, as I mentioned, that any air strike include attacks on the MIG aircraft and, in addition, attacks on the IL-28 bombers. To accomplish the destruction of these aircraft, the total number of sorties of the air strikes should be increased to five hundred. The President directed that we be prepared to carry out the air strike Monday morning or at any time thereafter during the remainder of the week. The President recognized that the Secretary of Defense was opposed to the air strike Monday morning and that General Sweeney favored it. He asked the Attorney General and Mr. McCone for their opinions. The Attorney General stated he was opposed to such a strike because it would be thought of as a

Pearl Harbor type of attack and it might well lead to unpredictable military responses by the Soviet Union which could be so serious as to lead to general nuclear war. He thought, as did I, that we should start with the initiation of a blockade and, thereafter play for the breaks. Mr. McCone agreed with the Attorney General, but emphasized that he believed we should be prepared for an air strike and, thereafter, for an invasion. In a meeting with the Joint Chiefs on Sunday, October 28th, after the receipt of Khrushchev's message stating that he was issuing an order to his officers in Cuba to dismantle and return the offensive weapons to the Soviet Union, Admiral Anderson stated, "We have been taken;" General LeMay said, "We should probably strike tomorrow anyway. Monday morning is already late, and it's the last acceptable postponement. We can never believe the Soviets. Khrushchev is probably erecting the missiles on the launchers today." On the following day, October 29, at a meeting in the afternoon with the Chiefs, General LeMay stated, "We don't share the general enthusiasm in the believe we have won a victory. We feel we are digging ourselves into a hole. We [meaning the Chiefs and the Joint Staff] are trying to develop a paper to outline some actions that may allow us to salvage something yet."

On the 22nd of January, 1963, the President, during a meeting with his advisors, emphasized the lesson we had learned from Cuba. In his opinion it was this: we provided the Soviet Union with time for consideration of their response, and thereby we avoided a spasm response. This was the major argument in favor of the blockade instead of the air strike. This should be our objective for future confrontations with the Soviets.

SCHLESINGER: What was the demeanor of the President during this period?

McNAMARA: Calm and cool – and highly rational and unemotional during the period. I remember one indication of this calmness. I was walking along the porch of the White House to the Cabinet Room for one of the critical discussions. It was about six o'clock in the evening and Caroline [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy] was running in toward the mansion, perhaps a hundred feet away from the President. He watched her run, and called to her,

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"Caroline, have you been eating candy?" And, as is so typical of a four or five-year old, she gave no answer at all and no indication she had even heard the question. He called again, "Caroline, have you been eating candy? Answer me." Again she paid no heed to his question. And finally, with a smile on his face, he said, "Caroline, have you been eating candy? Answer me. Yes, no, or maybe." And I think that was typical of his attitude during the whole period.

SCHLESINGER: How about the first Cuba? Was he calm then too? Or did he seem more concerned?

McNAMARA: I think he seemed much more concerned then, as were all of us. As I say, I want to emphasize it was sixty to ninety days after the

administration had come to power. It hadn't been organized. We weren't familiar with each other and with our strengths and limitations, and it was a very much more difficult period to live through.

SCHLESINGER: Was there an intelligence failure?

McNAMARA: No, I don't think so. On the contrary, I think that despite what Congress indicated at the time, despite what some of the public believed, the intelligence collection agencies acted with considerable skill. The weapons were discovered long before the Soviets anticipated we would discover them. There is no question about that. We believed so at the time and all the evidence since then indicates that is a correct interpretation of the Soviets' view. The weapons were discovered before they became operational. So, recognizing we were dealing with a closed society, I think our intelligence collection and evaluation agencies operated in a manner far above criticism.

SCHLESINGER: There was a period when there were no overflights?

McNAMARA: Yes, a limited period. Had there been overflights then, I doubt that we would have discovered the weapons more than a day or two earlier than we did.

SCHLESINGER: In other words, we really got the weapons identified then . . .

McNAMARA: I think so. I don't believe our course of action, either as to time or substance, would have been changed in the slightest by additional overflights.

SCHLESINGER: As you have described it, the President reached a decision on Thursday night in favor of the blockade and against the strike. Then on Friday he was subjected to this barrage of military opinion in favor of the strike, and also some civilian opinion. Do you think at any point he was seriously shaken by this?

McNAMARA: No, I feel that at no time did he feel we should initiate any action other than a blockade. I think he recognized that, by initiating a blockade, we might subsequently be forced to other action, and of course he instructed us, as I feel he should have, to make preparations for additional actions, but I don't believe that at any time he felt we should initiate those unless we were forced to by Soviet action.

SCHLESINGER: How would you describe Robert Kennedy's role in this? He seemed to have functioned as the President's representative in meetings when the President was not there.

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McNAMARA: No, I don't believe he functioned as the President's representative. He functioned as a highly intelligent and receptive and wise member of the special group.

SCHLESINGER: Did you ever, in the aftermath, reach, in your own mind, a convincing theory to why the Russians, who never put nuclear missiles outside the Soviet Union before, should have tried this great...

McNAMARA: No. No, I never have. I think it would be interesting now to have Tommy Thompson's and Chip's views on it. I must say in passing that their appraisal of the way the Soviets would react proved to be extraordinarily accurate, and was a major factor in influencing my judgment at the time.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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