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TOP SECRET

2 copies sent Mr. Samuel (F.O.) 2310.

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND  
PRESIDENT KENNEDY at 12.30 a.m. on Tuesday, October 23, 1962President Kennedy

Prime Minister?

Prime Minister

Yes, I can hear you well.

President Kennedy

Prime Minister, I'm glad to talk to you and I appreciate your messages today. I've just finished giving my speech. I'm sorry to confront you with all the problems that are going to come out of it, but our strong feeling was that after my statements to them against bringing missiles in after their frequent statements that they weren't, the fact that this was done in a wholly clandestine way would have left us in November when Mr. Khrushchev was planning to come over - he kept saying that he was waiting till after the elections but obviously he was waiting to so substantially increase his military power that it would have, we think, just unhinged all of Latin America and thrown into question any of our statements about Berlin.

Prime Minister

Yes, I quite see that. What's worrying me is how do you see the way out of this? What are you going to do with the blockade? Are you going to occupy Cuba and have done with it or is it going to just drag on?

President Kennedy

We could not occupy Cuba for some days and we are preparing a potential for that kind of action if it's necessary but we didn't start off with that action for two reasons. First because there has to be a gap of some days to assemble the forces which of course will always be public information. And secondly because we want to see a little where we begin to go on

PREM 11/3689

26394

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- 2 -

this road. We don't know what's going to happen in Berlin - we don't know what's going to happen any place else. This seemed to be the action we could take which would lessen the chance of an immediate escalation into war though of course it could bring that result.

Prime Minister

Yes, that's quite true. Is your blockade going to extend beyond the military and arms into things like oil and all the rest of it in order to bring down the Castro Government?

President Kennedy

At the beginning we're going to confine ourselves to offensive weapons of war in order not to give him a complete justification for Berlin. In other words we're not shipping offensive weapons of war into Berlin so we're just confining it to that. But it may be that within the next few days we may need to move it to petroleum, oils, lubricants and other things but we don't want to do that just now because it gives him an obvious tit for tat in Berlin.

Prime Minister

What do you think Khrushchev's action will be? In the United Nations to start with or some action of a positive kind?

President Kennedy

He may do what you suggest and make us stop one of his ships by force and then take some action in Berlin. He could seize Berlin or he could put on a blockade there and there are any number of things he could do. We just have to expect that whatever it's going to be it's going to be unpleasant. But I don't think anybody is able to predict with certainty what he will do right now but I would suspect that he will do something unpleasant to us in Berlin which I think he is going to do anyway.

PREM 11/3689

26394

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- 3 -

Prime Minister

Well then what do you think the next step will have to be to have some kind of conference with him or not?

President Kennedy

What we want to do is get these weapons out of Cuba. The Castro regime is not the issue or the Communists. We have had no plans to invade Cuba, in fact, as you know, I have taken the position that we should not, but we want to get these missiles out of Cuba. Now I don't know what kind of a negotiation we could go on which would permit some exchange on that, but that of course should be the object of our policy.

Prime Minister

Yes. What worries me - I'll be quite frank with you - having a sort of dragging-on position. If you occupied Cuba that's one thing. In my long experience we've always found that our weakness has been when we've not acted with sufficient strength to start with. However we've got to wait now and see what the Russian reactions are. Then we must get into very close touch. They may react in words, by arguing at the United Nations and all the points that I made in my message to you or they may react in deeds - either in the Caribbean area or in Berlin or elsewhere. But we must be ready to decide whether we're going to meet that by demanding a Conference and settle the whole thing up or whether we're going to force the issue by warlike measures. And I hope that we can keep in very close touch as to what the next stage is the moment we see the Russian reaction.

President Kennedy

Well I'm aware, Prime Minister, that the action we're taking is not complete force and does not immediately solve the problem but the alternative which is the series of air-

- 4 -

strikes and an invasion of Cuba, which we may have to do, seems to me placing such a burden on us and invites him so directly into Berlin, that we are rather reluctant to do that unless it's necessary particularly when we can't do it for at least a week because we have to assemble our vessels. So that if we obviously had a sufficient force on hand and could take Cuba tonight that would be very nice but we don't have that force. Now we may come to this invasion by the end of the week but we are assembling our forces in preparation for it. But what we're attempting to do is to begin this escalation in a way that lessens the chance of a seizure of Berlin or World War III. Now we <sup>may</sup> not be able to prevent either but at least we have served notice on him that we cannot accept the procedure and the actions which he carried out.

Prime Minister

Yes, I very much appreciate that and I have just got a message from David who has explained to me his talk with you and this is very valuable. I think all we can do now is just to wait for the reactions and if you would get in direct touch with me or through David Gore so that we are actually working together all the time, it's very important. Meanwhile may I ask you - have you been in direct touch with Khrushchev - have you had a telephone talk with him or anything like that?

President Kennedy

No, I haven't. I sent him a letter about an hour ago telling him what we were going to do. As I said in my speech about his assurances, he played a double game. You remember that he kept saying he was coming over here after the election and would do nothing to disturb the situation until after the election. He said that the weapons were defensive, that they weren't moving any missiles

PREM 11/3689

26394

- 5 -

there and all the rest. And obviously he has been building this up in order to face us with a bad situation in November at the time he was going to squeeze us on Berlin. So I didn't feel there was much point in phoning him up so I just sent him a letter telling him what we're going to do.

Prime Minister

Yes. Well I think that's all that we can do for the moment. As soon we've seen the world's reactions - what I'm only anxious is, you know how much I feel for you and sympathise; we've been all through these sort of things ourselves. We know the difficulties and I think if we can keep in the very closest touch. I haven't yet heard from de Gaulle and Adenauer, have you?

President Kennedy

No, I haven't heard from either one of them. We didn't get in touch with them until this afternoon so they haven't had much chance to get back to me. One of the points which I think is important about this build-up here is that this build-up, if completed or when completed will double the number of missiles which the Soviet Union could bring to bear upon the United States. It would also overcome our warning systems because they come from the South and we don't have an adequate warning and it comes from so close by that there's always a temptation for them to engage in a first strike or to face us with such a dangerous situation over Berlin that we would have had to quit. That's obviously his purpose. And that's why we feel that we have to take some action. Now, our action is moderated by the realisation that we could move very quickly into a World War over this or to a nuclear war or to lose Berlin and that's why we've taken the course we've taken.

Even though as I say, it doesn't /represent

PREM 11/3689

26394

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- 6 -

represent any final answer. The invasion itself as I said requires seven days for us to mobilise our forces which we cannot do under any cloak of secrecy. We may find we have to come to that but we are preparing for that in the meanwhile but I won't do anything about that until I've discussed this with you again. But what we're attempting to do is to warn Khrushchev that this action he's taken constitutes a very hazardous threat which may lead to a great number of courses which would be unpleasant for us but awful unpleasant for him.

Prime Minister

Well, I quite understand that and as you know, we'll do all we can to help in the United Nations and all that. But the actual realities are quite serious and you quite understand them. What worries me is, again I say, that if we are forced to a conference all the cards are in this man's hand. But, however, you explained to me what are the possible developments you may have to take and if we do have to talk to him and meet him in the last resort the more cards in our hands the better, in my view. You may say that's rather tough and perhaps rather cynical but I think the more cards in our hands the better and I would be very happy to see them in your hands.

President Kennedy

Fine. Well, we're going to be in a position to execute that if it appears wise at the end of the week, but I'll talk to you about that.

Prime Minister

You must have had a very hard time. I feel very sorry for you and all the troubles. I've been through them. I only want to tell you how much we feel for you but if you'll keep in touch with David and me the best we can do now is just

References -

PREM 11/3689

2639A

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- 7 -

Prime Minister (contd.)

to see what happens next.

President Kennedy

Yes I will, Prime Minister. Many thanks for your thoughts and I'll be talking to you within the next day or so.