

WH6411-28-6464_scroller

Date: 1964-11-23

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: McGeorge Bundy

Start Time: 21:54

Place: LBJ Ranch

SUGGESTED TITLE: "It'll Hurt Us"

SCENE SETTER: As he awaited news of the hostage rescue operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, President Johnson discussed the possible consequences of the operation. Johnson was concerned about the potential reactions of other African nations and Black Americans. National Security Adviser McGeorge "Mac" Bundy assured him that since the airdrop could be justified as a humanitarian action, the backlash would be minimal. Nonetheless, the exchange demonstrated Johnson's awareness that U.S. support of Belgium risked tying Washington to colonialism in Africa.

McGeorge "Mac" Bundy: The real trouble with this damn thing is, of course, that we don't know what's going to happen in that city [Stanleyville]. And the real choice has been whether we would feel sorrier if we tried it, and it didn't work well, or if we didn't try it, and it didn't work well. And it's that negative reason that has made me feel that the advice to you was right, and that [Paul-Henri C.] Spaak's decision was right, and that we were right to go along with it. [*President Johnson acknowledges.*] Because if there's a shambles in Stanleyville and 500 paratroopers are down at Kamina, we look damn silly.

President Johnson: Now, how many [Chester B.] Bowleses have we got around town that are not aboard on this? Any?

Bundy: Not a one, Mr. President. The people who have the most reservations about it probably are people—if I had to guess, the fellow who was most wary this morning was [Robert S.] Bob McNamara, and you know him, he's a grave. Nobody will ever know that. [*President Johnson acknowledges.*] John [A.] McCone is a little wary, and you *might* get some backlash from his people.

President Johnson: Well, did he agree to this?

Bundy: He agreed to it on the ground that Spaak recommended it, but if Spaak had not recommended it, he would have been against it.

President Johnson: Mm-hmm. What about [W. Averell] Harriman?

Bundy: Harriman is hot for it. [*President Johnson acknowledges.*] [George W.] Ball is—Ball is hot for it.

President Johnson: Now, Carl [T.] Rowan's very much against it.

Bundy: Is he?

President Johnson: Yeah. He thinks that—

Bundy: [Donald M.] Don Wilson has been in every meeting and hasn't said a word, so there's been no representation that I've heard of a USIA [United States Information Agency] opinion against it.

President Johnson: He says it'll hurt us with the other African countries.

Bundy: Well, it will. It will. Yeah.

President Johnson: It'll hurt us—

Bundy: I mean, if he's just—if he's reciting simply as to whether, from the point of view of U.S. propaganda, it's easier or harder in Africa the morning after, he's absolutely right. It is harder.

President Johnson: He thinks it'll hurt us with the Negroes in this country.

Bundy: I'm no expert on that, but I would guess that in a straight humanitarian venture and when it becomes clear, as it will be clear within a week, that these people go in and they come out, and that they are there on this mission and no other, I think it'll be a very short-lived feeling among American Negroes and even among African Negroes. [*President Johnson acknowledges.*] Not half the patch of what we'd have to deal with if a lot of people got massacred, because we couldn't quite say yes to a Belgian request.

President Johnson: When is this supposed to occur?

Bundy: They are in the air. They're on schedule. We—they should be dropping in anytime within—between now and midnight. Eleven [o'clock p.m.] Washington time, which is right now, has been the target hour, but you know how these things are. [*President Johnson acknowledges.*] First light is the theory. The first light in Stanleyville, and it should be at this hour here in Washington.

President Johnson: How long before we should know something?

Bundy: It might take a couple hours, and we might know something in an hour. We just don't know, and it might take longer, because it depends on how busy they are, and whether they have time to report out, and whether they get the radio, or whether they have to use their own single-side band, which is a slightly longer system.

President Johnson: OK, you let me know soon as you know anything.

Bundy: I'll call you as soon as I know anything, and I'll call you if I don't know anything.

President Johnson: All right. Good-bye.

Bundy: Right.

End of excerpt.

CITATION: Conversation WH6411-26-6464, 23 November 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.