

JFK Meeting Tapes 33.2 and 33A.1

Date: 1962-10-22

Participant: John F. Kennedy

Participant: Richard B. Russell Jr.

Start Time: 17:30

Place Name: Cabinet Room

SCROLLER TITLE: "We Can't Invade Cuba"

SCENE SETTER: Briefing congressional leaders on his intention to blockade Cuba, President Kennedy faced the wrath of several senators opposed to his policy, none more so than Sen. Richard B. "Dick" Russell Jr. [D-Georgia]. Their exchange, which took place just 90 minutes prior to Kennedy's televised address outlining his decision to blockade, highlights the charged tenor of the meeting.

Richard B. "Dick" Russell Jr.: Mr. President, I don't want to make a nuisance of myself, but I would like to complete my statement.

My position is these people have been warned. They've had all the warning they could expect. And they're here. And our Secretary of State speaks about the pause. When you enforce this blockade, [Nikita S.] Khrushchev's never said up to now that he wouldn't fight over Cuba. He's going to start rattling his missiles and making firmer and firmer and firmer statements about what he's going to do about Cuba. And you will only make it sure that when that day comes, when if they do use these MiGs to attack our shipping or to drop a few bombs around Miami [Florida] or some other place, and we do go in there, that we'll lose a great many more men than we would right now and—

President Kennedy: But, Senator, we can't invade Cuba. For instance, it takes us some while to assemble our force to invade Cuba. That's one of the problems we've got. We haven't wanted to surface the movement of troops beyond what has been surfaced in the last 48 hours. But we have to bring some troops from the West Coast and to assemble the force, which would give us the 90,000-odd men who might participate in an invasion, will take some days. That's why I wanted Secretary [Robert S. "Bob"] McNamara [to be here]. We are now assembling that force, but it is not in a position to invade Cuba in the next 24 or 48 hours.

Now, I think it may very well come to that before the end of the week. But we are moving all the forces that we have, that will be necessary for an invasion, to the area around Cuba as quickly as we possibly can.

End of excerpt.

CITATION: "Meeting with the Congressional Leadership on the Cuban Missile Crisis on 22 October 1962," Tapes 33.2 and 33A.1, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition [The Great Crises]*, vol. 3, ed. Philip Zelikow and Ernest May] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014-). URL: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/8030006>