

JFK Meeting Tape 41

Date: 1962-10-27

Participant: John F. Kennedy

Participant: U. Alexis Johnson

Participant: McGeorge Bundy

Start Time: 16:00

Place: Cabinet Room

SCROLLER TITLE: "A Quid Pro Quo"

SCENE SETTER: With Moscow having publicly proposed a trade of NATO missiles in Turkey for Soviet missiles in Cuba, President Kennedy conferred with senior advisers on how to respond—a major challenge, since the Kremlin had previously offered a private deal to remove its missiles in return only for a U.S. pledge not to invade Cuba. As Kennedy came to realize, most of his advisers opposed the missile swap.

President Kennedy: I think we got two questions [for the letter to the Soviets]. One is, do we want to have these conversations go on about Turkey and these other matters while these—there's a sort of a standstill in Cuba. Or do we want to say that we won't talk about Turkey and these other matters until they've settled the Cuban crisis. Now, there's two separate questions. And I don't think we're going to get there. They're not going to—now that they've taken a public position, obviously they're not going to settle the Cuban question until they get some compensation on Cuba.

That being true, aren't we in the best position now, with him and publicly, to say we're glad to discuss this matter [Turkey], and this whole question of verification, and all the rest, once we get a positive indication that they have ceased their work in Cuba? Otherwise, what we're really saying is: We won't discuss Turkey till they settle Cuba. And I think that he will then come back and say the United States has refused his offer. Now, I don't think that's as good a position as saying we're glad to discuss his offer, if we can get a standstill in Cuba. Because that puts us in a much stronger world position, because most people will think his offer is rather reasonable. So I think we ought to put our emphasis, right now, on the fact that we want an indication from him in the next 24 hours he's going to stand still and disarm these weapons. Then we'll say that under those conditions, we'll be glad to discuss these matters. But I think that if we don't say that, he's going to say we rejected his offer, and, therefore, he's going to have public opinion with him. So I think our only hope to escape from that is to say that we should insist that he should stand still.

Now, we don't think he'll do that, and, therefore, we're in much better shape to put our case on that than rather that Turkey's irrelevant.

End of excerpt 1.

U. Alexis "Alex" Johnson: The only question I'd like to raise about that is that it really injects Turkey as a quid pro quo for—

McGeorge "Mac" Bundy: That's my worry about it.

President Kennedy: No, but negotiations . . . The point is we . . . the point is that we're not in a position today to make a trade; that's number one. And we won't be. The trade may be made in three or four days. I don't know. We have to wait and see what the Turks say. We don't want to be . . . We don't want the Soviet Union or the United Nations to be able to say that the United States rejected it.

So I think we're better off to stick on the question of a freeze [of Soviet missiles in Cuba], and then we'll discuss it [the Cuba-Turkey trade].

Bundy: [*speaking over President Kennedy*] Well, there are two different audiences here, Mr. President. There really are. And I think if we sound as if we wanted to make this trade, to our NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] people and to all the people who are tied to us by alliance, we are in real trouble. I think that—we'll all join in doing this if it's the decision. But I think we should tell you that that's the universal assessment of everyone in the government that's been connected with these alliance problems.

End of excerpt 2.

CITATION: "Executive Committee Meeting of the National Security Council on the Cuban Missile Crisis on 27 October 1962," Tapes 41, 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/8030026>