

“Meeting on the Defense Budget,” 5 December 1962, excerpts, David Coleman, editor, *The Presidential Recordings John F. Kennedy The Winds of Change Volume Six December I, 1962-February 7, 1963* (New York: W.W. Norton, 201.), pages 28 and 47.

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President Kennedy: the purpose of our strategic buildup is to deter the Russians, number one; number two, to attack them if it looks like they are about to attack us or to be able to lessen the impact they would have on us in an attack ... I think everybody agrees if they concentrate on our cities, we can't be sure enough of their targets; they may be hard, or they may have submarines. So that we can't successfully carry out a first strike without taking--as I understood the Secretary's position--an inordinate amount of damage. If our point really, then, is to deter them, it seems to me that we're getting an awful lot of ... I mean, with the Polaris submarines, with the planes we have, the Navy's strategic force, and with the missiles we have--and which we're known to have--we have an awful lot of megatonnage to put on the Soviets sufficient to deter them from ever using nuclear weapons.

Taylor: Well, I agree--

President Kennedy: Unless we accept-- Otherwise, what good are they? You can't use them as a first [strike] weapon yourself, so they're only good for deterring. If they attack us ... if we fail to deter them and they attack us, then it's just destroy them out of--just to fulfill your part of the contract. [*chuckling*] But we just drop it on their cities and destroy them and ruin the Russians. I don't see quite why we're building as many as we're building.

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President Kennedy: I must say that I'm all for the convention of the day but I think that the chance of using these weapons is ... I don't know ... socially circumscribed, but the chance of using conventional are not. And I think that we ought to err on the side of generosity on airlift and on equipment for our military forces and on ships to transport these forces and helicopters and all the rest. Because I think that the chance of firing these off at all these SLOP targets is ... and when they do, nobody's going to care.



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