Reference:
REM 1/ 3689

COPYRIGHT - NOT TO BE REPRODUCED PHOTOGRAPHICALLY WITHOUT PERMISSION

ubject

# TOP SECRET

# FROM WASHINGTON TO FOREIGN OFFICE

Cypher/OTP

PRISEC

Sir D. Ormsby Gore No. 2636 October 22, 1962

n: 70,712 p. m. 0etober 22; 1962

TIMEDIATE DEDIP TOP SECRET PERSONAL TELEGRAP

Cuba,

Following personal for Frime Minister from Ambassador.

I know that David Bruce had instructions to put us in the picture at midday today in London, but it may be useful if I give an account of my talk with the President yesterday. He asked me to come unseen to the White House just before lunch. We were quite alone and he told me that no one else outside the United States Government was being informed of what was going on.

- He then said that the situation with regard to Cuba had completely changed during the course of the last week. A major photo reconnaissance effort by U.2 aircraft had now shown that Cuba was obtaining two types of medium range offensive missiles. One type on fixed sites had an estimated range of two thousand miles. The other type was mobile with an estimated range of fifteen hundred miles. He was not very specific with regard to figures but he thought that there were perhaps thirty to forty missiles already on the island and they now knew that more were on their way by ship. They had to assume that these missiles would be armed with They would be more or less useless without nuclear warheads. them but the Americans had no firm information at this time as to whether nuclear warheads had arrived. They did, however, know of the construction of underground storage facilities. He said that this new information posed a very serious problem He had made his position very clear for the United States. on September 13 when he had said, among other things, that if Cuba became an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union, then the United States would do whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its Allies. This straightforward differentiation between defensive and offensive capacity constituted a clear warning of where the United States would draw the line. In these circumstances and in the light of this latest information, the Administration had had to decide what action they could appropriately take.
- 3. The President said that they had come to the conclusion that there were two alternatives open to them:-

/(i) They could

Reference:
REFERENCE:
COPYRIGHT - NOT TO BE REPRODUCED PHOTOGRAPHICALLY WITHOUT PERMISSION

#### TOP SECRET

### Washington telegram No. 2636 to Foreign Office

- 2 -

- (i) They could order an all-out air strike first thing Monday morning to take out all the known missile sites and the missiles themselves insofar as they had been able to pinpoint their present whereabouts. The military authorities estimated that such a strike would eliminate at least fifty per cent of the Cuban missile potential but it would inevitably cause a large number of casualties to Russians as well as Cubans. The strike would be followed by the imposition of a blockade of Cuba.
- (ii) They could impose almost immediately a blockade without first carrying out an air strike. They would stop and search all ships suspected of carrying goods which would help to build up the military potential of Cuba. This would mean leaving the Cubans with their present offensive capacity, such as it was, but would demonstrate America's determination not to allow the build up to proceed any further.
- The President then asked me for my views as to which of these two courses I felt was the correct one. I said that I saw very serious drawbacks in the first course of action he had outlined Very few people outside the United States would consider the provocation offered by the Cubans serious enough to merit an American air attack. I thought that in the circumstances America American air attack. would be damaged politically, and in any case I could not believe that the missiles so far landed constituted any significant military threat to the United States. Even with these weapons in existence on Cuba the United States could presumably overwhelm the island in a very short time if they decided at some future date that this had to be done. I thought we ought also to bear in mind the possible repercussions on the Berlin situation. American action of this kind might well provide a smoke-screen behind which the Russians might move against Berlin under favourable conditions. Therefore, of the two alternatives he had put to me I would certainly favour the second, although this too would have far-reaching political implications including the probability of a major Russian reaction perhaps in the Berlin context.
- 5. The President said that he and his colleagues had come to the same conclusion and that they therefore intended to carry out the second course of action. He added that he supposed that there was a third course and even a fourth course open to them. They might, for instance, use the latest developments as an excuse for a full-scale invasion of Cuba and so finish with Castro once and for all. They might never have a better opportunity for such action. Again, they might do nothing at all and go on as before, but he thought that this was not only politically impossible but was in any case too dangerous. It was now clear that their present actions in Cuba constituted a direct challenge; by the Soviets to the United States. They knew perfectly well what his own position and that of the United States Government was and if, when confronted by this provocative challenge, he did nothing, his friends and

#### TOP SECRET

Washington telegram No. 2636 to Foreign Office

- 3 -

Allies would come to the conclusion that he was afraid to move and Khrushchev would be bound to assume that the Americans, for all their tough words, would be prepared to sit supine and inactive whatever he, Khrushchev, did. This would have its effect in other areas all around the globe and especially in respect of Berlin.

- 6. In answer to this, I said that I was sure that an invasion at this time would be most unwise. I had seen no evidence that the conditions in Cuba were such that the Americans could expect any widespread popular support for their action and history indicated that an invasion without internal popular support usually led to endless trouble. The idea of a puppet regime kept in power by American marines was not a happy prospect. In any case, this could provide the Soviets with the opportunity to take over West Berlin at a moment when United States political stock would be at a very low ebb and the Americans could be blamed for triggering off this exchange of pawns in the most reckless manner. Nevertheless, I could well understand the political dangers and the internal difficulties of doing nothing but I supposed that the blockade itself would give us many headaches and we would now have to prepare for vigorous Russian reactions to it.
- I then asked the President under what authority institute a blockade of Cuba. He said that it they would institute a blockade of Cuba. would be under the terms of the Rio treaty and that a meeting of the O.A.S. would be called urgently and they would expect to get a two-thirds majority in favour of the course of action they were taking. I said that I feared that the invocation of the Rio treaty would not help us very much as I presumed that the United Kingdom had no legal obligations under its terms. Our traditional attitude with regard to the freedom of the seas would put us in an awkward position. Here the President commented that he understood that most of the British shipping taking part in the Cuban trade was not operated by the more He also made it clear that shipments respected companies. of P.O.L. would be denied to Cuba. Such shipments would be regarded as assistance to the military potential of Cuba and in any case, in view of the action they were taking, there seemed to be little point in adopting half measures. Certainly the denial of P.O.L. to Cuba would have the most disastrous effects on the Cuban economy.
- 8. The President finally said that he could not help admiring the Soviet strategy. They offered this deliberate and provocative challenge to the United States in the knowledge that if the Americans reacted violently to it, the Russians would be given an ideal opportunity to move against West Berlin. If, on the other hand, he did nothing, the Latin Americans and /the United

Reference:
PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

1 2 3 4 5 6

REFERENCE:
COPYRIGHT - NOT TO BE REPRODUCED PHOTOGRAPHICALLY WITHOUT PERMISSION

### TOP SECRET

# Mashington telegram No. 2636 to Foreign Office

- 4 -

the United States' other Allies would feel that the Americans had no real will to resist the encroachments of Communism and would hedge their bets accordingly.

9. The President impressed upon me how vital it was to keep all this information secret until they were ready to act. He wished that only you and your closest advisers should be informed of what was happening. I said that in these circumstances I thought it would be better if I did not report through the usual channels but rather that he should send you a personal message later in the afternoon by teletype machine.

[Copies sent to Prime Minister's Office]

JJJJJ