

JFK Dictabelt 30.2

Date: 1962-10-22

Participant: John F. Kennedy

Participant: Dwight D. Eisenhower

Start Time: 10:40

Place Name: Oval Office

SCROLLER TITLE: "The Damn Soviets"

SCENE SETTER: Before addressing the nation that evening, President Kennedy informed former president and five-star general Dwight D. Eisenhower of his intention to blockade Cuba. Should the blockade fail to spur the removal of Soviet ballistic missiles, Eisenhower encouraged Kennedy to pursue military action, as he doubted whether the Kremlin would respond with nuclear weapons to a U.S. invasion.

Dwight D. Eisenhower: The only thing that I said to John [A. McCone], that here is something, that even if you don't get as many people in South America, as many governments to go along, that once you've taken this first step in force, then you will have to, if necessary, to make all these things unilateral decisions and not—

President Kennedy: Right. That's right.

Eisenhower: —[unclear]. And that's the big thing. And when, if you see it becomes time to do something, why, you yourself, of course, will have to make that decision.

President Kennedy: Right, well, [that depends on the] thirds, if we get the two-thirds [support from the Organization of American States (OAS)] we'll operate under the Rio Treaty. If we don't get the two-thirds, then we'll do it under our own act of—

Eisenhower: Yeah, I see.

President Kennedy: —self-defense. Then—

Eisenhower: And your speech will be seven [clears throat]—

President Kennedy: Seven o'clock. Then we're going to go to the U.N. with a . . . And our position will be the withdrawal of these—[John J. "Jack" McCloy] up there to assist Adlai [E. Stevenson II], so that we get somebody who's had some experience.

Eisenhower: Well, Jack [McCloy] is a very good man.

President Kennedy: Yeah.

Eisenhower: Well, I thank you for telling me. And I will—I personally—I think you're really making the only move you can.

President Kennedy: Yeah. This—it's tough to . . . As I say, we will, I don't know, we may get into the invasion business before many days are out.

Eisenhower: Yeah.

President Kennedy: But—

Eisenhower: Of course, from the military standpoint that's the clean-cut thing to do, now.

President Kennedy: That's right. That's right.

Eisenhower: Because you've made up your mind you've *got* to get rid of this thing.

President Kennedy: Right.

Eisenhower: But the only real way to get rid of it, of course, is the other thing [military attack]. But, if—having to be concerned with world opinion and—

President Kennedy: And Berlin.

Eisenhower: —opinions of others, why, you've got to do it a little slower.

President Kennedy: Well, Berlin is the—I suppose that may be the—what they're going to try to trade off.

Eisenhower: Well, they might. But I, personally, I just don't quite go along, you know, with that thinking, Mr. President. My idea is this: The damn Soviets will do whatever they want, what they figure is good for them.

President Kennedy: Yeah.

Eisenhower: And I don't believe they relate one situation with another.

President Kennedy: Uh-huh. Right.

Eisenhower: Just what they find out they can do here and there and the other place.

President Kennedy: Yeah. Yeah.

Eisenhower: And we're already standing as a unit with NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], that if they go into Berlin, that's all of it.

President Kennedy: Right.

Eisenhower: That means they've got to look out that they don't get a terrific blow to themselves.

President Kennedy: Right. Right.

Eisenhower: And I don't—It might be; I could be all wrong. But my own conviction is that you will not find a great deal of relationship between the two.

President Kennedy: Let me ask—

Eisenhower: They'll try to *make* it that way.

President Kennedy: Yeah.

General, what about if the Soviet Union—[Nikita S.] Khrushchev—announces tomorrow, which I think he will, that if we attack Cuba that it's going to be nuclear war? And what's your judgment as to the chances they'll fire these things off if we invade Cuba?

Eisenhower: Oh, I don't believe it a bit.

President Kennedy: You don't think they will?

Eisenhower: No.

President Kennedy: In other words, you would take that risk if the situation seemed desirable?

Eisenhower: Well, as a matter of fact, what can you do?

President Kennedy: Yeah.

Eisenhower: You—if this thing is such a serious thing here on our flank that we're going to be uneasy—and we know what thing's happening now—all right, you've got to use something.

President Kennedy: Right.

Eisenhower: Something may make these people [the Soviets] shoot them [their nuclear missiles] off. I just don't believe this will.

President Kennedy: Yeah, right. [*Chuckles resignedly.*] Well—

Eisenhower: In an event, of course, I'll say this: I'd want to keep my own people very alert.

President Kennedy: Yeah. [*Both chuckle.*] Well, we'll hang on tight.

Eisenhower: Yes, sir.

President Kennedy: Thanks a lot, General.

Eisenhower: All right. Thank you.

President Kennedy: All right, bye.

End of excerpt.

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