JFK urged to take Cuba

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BOSTON — Congressional leaders privately urged President John F. Kennedy to invade Cuba at the outset of the Cuban missile crisis, newly released White House tapes show.

"We've got to take a chance somewhere, sometime, if we're going to retain our position as a great world power," Sen. Richard Russell, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, advised Kennedy as the world came to the brink of nuclear war in 1962.

Kennedy deflected the Georgia Democrat by reassuring him that troops were being massed for an invasion but would not be ready for at least a week.

Minutes later, the President went on television to announce a different tactic: a blockade against ships bound for Cuba with offensive weapons.

The President had learned only hours earlier that a U.S. air strike would be less than 100% effective against the missiles and that a ground invasion could take months.

Four days later, on Oct. 26, after the United States had secretly pledged to remove NATO missiles in Turkey, the Soviets agreed to dismantle and remove any offensive weapons in Cuba, and the crisis was defused.

The tapes, released yesterday after being kept secret for more than 32 years, cover two meetings held Oct. 22, 1962, about a week after aerial reconnaissance photographs first revealed a Soviet medium-range missile site under construction in Cuba.

Three hours of Cuban missile crisis tapes were declassified in July. Of the two more hours released yesterday, 48 seconds were deleted by the NSC on grounds of national security.

Ten more hours of secret tape recordings from the crisis still are under review.