

October 24, 1962

Cable from Federal Republic of Germany Embassy, Washington (Knappstein)

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Summary:

West German Ambassador Karl-Heinrich Knappstein in Washington, D.C. sends a report to Federal Minister Schröder about the Cuban crisis situation in both military and political terms. He discusses the presence of both American and Soviet submarines and aircraft in Cuba. He also discusses several of the diplomatic meetings that have taken place regarding the Cuban crisis - between Kennedy, Khrushchev, Rusk and others.

Credits:

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Ambassador [Karl-Heinrich] Knappstein, Washington to Federal Minister Schröder

114-312/62 top secret

Sent 24 October 1962 6.35 pm

Telex nr. 3178

Arrived 25 October 1962 4.00 am with priority citissime

For Federal Minister and Foreign Secretary only:

Today, at 3.00 pm (8.00 pm local time), [US Secretary of State Dean] Rusk has asked [French Ambassador to the United States Herve] Alphand, [UK Ambassador to the United States David] Ormsby-Gore and me to attend a meeting where he passed on the following information which was to be considered top secret and to be passed on to cabinet members only:

I. Military

1. The first six Soviet ships had been withdrawn before reaching the quarantine zone. However, this should not lead to premature conclusions; the ships might come back with escorts, perhaps submarine protection. If possible this incident should be kept secret, a message would be issued that quarantine was in full force and that there had been no special incidents. (In the meantime, however, there has been a news-agency report that the ships had changed course).

2. Submarine protection was but a vague possibility. According to very precise intelligence of the American Navy there were only few Soviet submarines within range to provide cover.

3. For the first time that day, six low-flying American aircraft had flown over and explored the launching installations in Cuba. They had not come under fire from the Cubans, although the 14 anti-aircraft batteries around the island were operational.

4. The principal aim of quarantine operations, to keep further nuclear weapons out of the island, should be attained with a minimum of force. Therefore, in case of hostile conflict, there would be only one "wounding shot" after the usual "warning shot" to affect the ships' maneuverability but not to sink them if possible.

5. According to recent intelligence none of the missile sites were yet operational. However, this could be made possible within hours as they were mobile batteries.

6. So far, no nuclear warheads had been identified, but it was assumed that there were some in place in Cuba.

7. Up to now, about eight to ten missile launch sites had definitely been identified plus at least 30 missiles.

8. There used to be at least 5000 Russians in Cuba. Very likely, at the moment, there are three missile-equipped regiments counting about 8000 servicemen (Russians).

9. Cubans did not play an important role at all in the deployment of the missile system. According to Intelligence information Cubans were not even involved in deploying the emplacements but were kept at a distance by big barriers.

10. If any of the high flying reconnaissance aircraft were hit by ground-defense one of

the existing 24 anti-aircraft batteries would be destroyed without any further hostilities.

11. Up to then Soviet aircraft en route to Cuba had been refueled in Dakar and Conakry. Provisions have been made in those places to detect nuclear warheads aboard those aircraft.

II. Political

1. There were further signs that Khrushchev had been mistaken in his timetable and that the missile sites had been discovered too early. For his [planned] visit [to the United States to attend the UN General Assembly-ed.] in November he had obviously planned to surprise the President by telling him that in the meantime there were 60 operational missiles stationed in Cuba and that the President consequently had to make the desired concessions in Berlin.

2. On his last visit to the President, [on 18 October, Soviet foreign minister Andrei] Gromyko had not only made a general statement that there would be no deployment of "offensive weapons," but had definitely assured the President that there would be no emplacement of missiles capable of reaching the United States. This assertion had been an obvious lie.

3. For the near future certain changes were expected in Cuba. Castro's influence seemed already on the wane: He had been ready to release the prisoners of the recent invasion [i.e., in April 1961 at the Bay of Pigs], however, this had been prevented by the communist ([that is, to] say Russian) party apparatus.

4. As for current affairs, Rusk did not seem to attach much importance to the debate in the United Nations. For instance he had pointed out that it had been of utmost importance for the US to have the quarantine in full force before any decisions had been made by the United Nations. Returning to the status quo of October 22nd was definitely out of question, instead there should be a return to the status quo ante (no bases in Cuba, no quarantine).

In conclusion Rusk emphasized that an unavoidable clash was by no means imminent. Since the Soviets had realized the seriousness of the situation they had become very careful. He could imagine that their miscalculation [in having sent the missiles to Cuba?-ed.] might also lead them to proceed more carefully in the Berlin question. However, all this was not to be taken as final assessment.

[signed] Knapstein

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