

October 28, 1962

**Memorandum of Conversation, Federal Republic of
Germany Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and US
Ambassador Walter Dowling, Rhöndorf, West
Germany**

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Summary:

In preparation for an upcoming NATO Council meeting, the US and West German representatives discuss the current situation in Cuba - the developments of Soviet missile bases thus far, the United Nations negotiations in process, talks (letters) between Kennedy and Khrushchev, American surveillance planes coming under fire, and Soviet ships approaching the blockade line. Giving these circumstances, they feel the United States will perhaps feel compelled to resort to military action shortly.

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Highly secret

28 October 1962

On 28 October 1962 the Chancellor received Ambassador Dowling in his house in Rhöndorf together with State Secretary [in the Chancellor's Office] Dr. Hans Globke and the undersigned [notetaker Horst Osterheld].

Ambassador Dowling had asked for the meeting. First he handed to the Chancellor Kennedy's response to Khrushchev's second letter of 26 [sic; actually 27] October 1962. Furthermore, Ambassador Dowling brought President Kennedy's press statement of 27 October and an instruction by [US Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara to the State Secretary of the Air Force regarding the drafting of reservists for airborne forces.

Then Mr. Dowling informed that the American government will today ask to convene the NATO Council in order to brief it on the situation. [US Ambassador to NATO Thomas K.] Finletter will probably inform about the following issues:

I. Developments in build-up of Soviet missile bases in Cuba so far.

II. Talks held in New York [at the United Nations], as well as messages between the American and the Soviet government transmitted through the Secretary General of the United Nations [U Thant].

III. A message from Khrushchev to U Thant, indicating the Soviet Union might be willing to dismantle its missile base provided the US makes a binding commitment not to launch an invasion against Cuba.

IV. A later letter from Khrushchev to Kennedy (26 [sic; actually 27] October), where Khrushchev, contradicting his previous statements, suddenly raised conditions again, namely the dismantling of American bases in Turkey.

V. The fact that missile bases in Cuba were finished at an accelerated pace after results from surveillance flights were presented.

VI. The fact that yesterday American surveillance planes were fired at for the first time.

VII. The fact that Soviet ships are again approaching the blockade line. There might be an incident happening still during the course of today.

Giving these circumstances, the United States will perhaps feel compelled to resort to military action shortly. This might either occur in form of bombing the missile bases with conventional arms, or through an invasion where the missiles will be destroyed by American ground forces.

So far the US Government was eager to treat the Cuban affair as a purely American issue and keep it within the Western hemisphere. With Khrushchev referring to bases in Turkey, and through involvement of other Soviet troops and facilities, there is now

a chance that Europe and NATO might be dragged into the conflict. Therefore the United States wants to sound out opinions of its NATO allies. The situation becomes increasingly more serious; and the time left for discussion about the scope of military action gets shorter. Since NATO might be affected the Europeans are asked what they think about military action; probably they will still be able to stop the latter at this point.

The Chancellor stated he does not want to stop anything. He is in favor of both measures; the bases must go. However, he wishes, and here he wants to repeat what he already told [Dean] Acheson, he wishes that the Americans focus more on [Fidel] Castro as the one mainly responsible and guilty here. Certainly Khrushchev is behind the entire affair, but Castro is in the forefront. He offered his country to the missiles and thus facilitated the threat against the United States. We always must refer to Castro before the global public; it is easier to find in the United Nations a majority against Castro than a majority against the Soviet Union; in particular, it must become absolutely clear to the Cubans who is responsible for their situation and misfortune.

Ambassador Dowling did not really address the Chancellor's argumentation for quite a while; one got the impression he actually did not correctly understand the Chancellor. Dowling asserted that the United States had outlined for weeks Castro's responsibility to the world and the Cubans. Actually, Castro is just a small fry. He himself might not even have known which missiles the Russian unloaded. Cargo ports were closed to all Cubans, even to Castro.

The Chancellor rejected those and other remarks by the ambassador (for instance those about the use of unarmed surveillance planes) as in part inconsistent and missing the point. He explained the Cuban situation by giving an example: If I [Adenauer] provide my property to allow Mr. Dowling to fire a missile to the house of [Soviet Ambassador to West Germany Andrei] Smirnov on the other bank of the Rhine. However, Mr. Dowling still did not understand.

State Secretary Dr. Globke explained it will be more face-saving for Khrushchev if Castro is accused. One cannot deprive Khrushchev personally of the option to put all blame on Castro, or at least give orders to Castro to remove the missile bases (so Khrushchev does not have to do the dismantling himself).

Even then, it looked like Ambassador Dowling did not properly understand the argumentation. It was Khrushchev[, said Dowling,] who delivered and built the missiles. Until today they are under his exclusive authority. It is Khrushchev who wanted to exert pressure on the United States. The only point may be, perhaps, to make Khrushchev and Castro equally responsible.

Apparently, Dowling did not succeed in understanding the Chancellor (maybe because Mr. Dowling did not ask for a translation of the Chancellor's remarks; fully mired in his own thoughts, Dowling also did not seem to really listen). Since, on the other hand, Dowling had to get material to report back to Washington, he then began to summarize his previous statements. He asked the Chancellor whether he now is in favor of bombing the missile bases in Cuba, or in favor of an invasion, or against any kind of military action.

Here the Chancellor repeated again that he is in favor of eliminating the Soviet missile bases. Therefore he agrees to both kinds of military intervention, to the bombing as well as to the invasion. Following a remark by State Secretary Dr. Globke, the Chancellor got more precise: He is also in favor of an invasion, not the least in order to enable the Americans to offer something as a concession later, namely their withdrawal from the island. Then the Chancellor stated in addition to these military actions one should raise political pressure against Castro. Answering a question by Mr. Dowling, the Chancellor provided as an example a 24-hour ultimatum to Castro

containing demands very difficult to comply with.

The note-taker [Osterheld] got the impression that from now on Ambassador Dowling understood the Chancellor, also with regard to his position on Castro. Mr. Dowling thanked for the Chancellor's clear position. President Kennedy will certainly be very happy that the Chancellor, like during previous days, is siding so unequivocally with the United States in this difficult hour and declares its solidarity with the US. The Chancellor has been much clearer than many other allies.

Then Mr. Dowling said he is expecting military action within the next 24 hours. There already had been the incident with the surveillance plane; another one will occur with the Soviet ship; that completely suffices.

He then gave another letter to the Chancellor stating that General [Lauris] Norstad will remain SACEUR [Supreme Allied Commander Europe, NATO] until 31 December 1962. Until then General [Lyman] Lemnitzer, who will already take command over the American forces in Europe, will prepare for his assignment working under Mr. Norstad. The Chancellor welcomed this arrangement very much.

Finally, the Chancellor promised to Mr. Dowling he will take care that our [FRG] representative at NATO will be instructed according to the results of this meeting.