

October 26, 1962

Cable from Dutch Embassy, Washington (Van Roijen), 26 October 1962

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Summary:

Van Roijen relates the current situation in Washington and the American view on the crisis. The removal of the missiles was a non-negotiable issue for the Americans, as Secretary of State Dean Rusk declared their removal was absolutely essential. In the mind of American statesmen, the missiles in Cuba was directly connected to the 1961 Berlin crisis, as it was a new Soviet technique. The hurried construction of the bases was reported to go on, meaning time is of the utmost essence. The Americans were not above considering force to resolve the crisis, although this was relegated to a worst-case scenario.

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Although the president in his address on Monday left no doubt that the policy of the US strives not only to stop the supply of offensive weapons to Cuba but also most certainly the removal of the missile bases there, the measures taken so far have been exclusively aimed at the former goal. This does not mean that there is not a very active effort to develop plans to also realize the second desideratum. Consequently Secretary [of State Dean] Rusk yesterday in an off-the-record press conference with a limited number of journalists very emphatically stated that the dismantlement of the bases and the removal of the missiles are essential. The reason is of course that the president has through his announcement of the facts made it impossible for the Soviets to surprise the US with the announcement of the presence of bases on Cuba as part of a new approach to the Berlin issue, but that the acute threat to the US remains in existence and will weaken the negotiating position of the US at the critical moment.

[Francis E.] Meloy, [Jr.,] director [of the State Department's] Western Europe [Bureau], confirmed again that the construction of the bases is being continued at a frantic pace and that as time goes on the threat to the US increases. The element of time is therefore of great significance. In response to a request for comment on a press release that "the State Department made clear today that further action of an unspecified nature is being considered to deal with the continuing Soviet missile build-up in Cuba" Meloy could not provide an answer. He merely pointed out that the use of force to remove the bases is not excluded, although of course this will not be resorted to save in the worst case.

By way of an elucidation of the above and the explanation by Stone contained in my [cable no.] 910 I believe to be able to summarize the American point of view as follows.

As a result of various circumstances Khrushchev sees himself forced to definitively address the Berlin issue in the short term, i.e. before the end of this year, of course with the intention to make the Soviet position prevail. To this end it is necessary for him to strengthen his negotiating position through a military threat. The latter would have to include the possibility for the Soviet Union to launch a first blow that would if not neutralize the American "second strike capability" then at least weaken it severely. Since the Soviet Union, which does possess a large number of MRBMs and IRBMs, does not possess enough ICBMs to achieve the stated goal, the Soviet threat lacks the necessary credibility. This lacuna will be filled by the installation of MRBM and IRBM bases in Cuba, where the missiles are "zeroed in" on the American retaliation bases. This threat would be serious in itself but the US would have been caught in an even more impossible situation if the announcement of the addition to the Russian "first strike capability" would by surprise have coincided with a Soviet initiative to acutely address the Berlin issue. The American action has struck the trump card of surprise from Khrushchev's hands yet the much more important trump card of the Cuban bases remains in existence and gains in significance the more

those bases near their completion.

The preceding could confirm that the US indeed only very recently acquired indisputable evidence of the presence of the Soviet missiles and also explains the great speed with which the administration has acted. Furthermore more effective action in the short term would fit well into this line of reasoning.

Van Roijen 916 +