

October 23, 1962

**Memorandum of Conversation, Federal Republic of
Germany Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and Dean
Acheson, Special Envoy of US President Kennedy,
Bonn, West Germany**

Citation:

"Memorandum of Conversation, Federal Republic of Germany Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and Dean Acheson, Special Envoy of US President Kennedy, Bonn, West Germany", October 23, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Foundation Chancellor Adenauer House, Records III/87, Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPD) 1962: Band III: 1September bis 31Dezember 1962 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2010), document 409. Translated for CWIHP by Bernd Schaefer. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/115393>

Summary:

A conversation between Federal Chancellor Adenauer with the Special Adviser of the U.S. President, Acheson. They discuss plans to destabilize the Cuban regime by domestic unrest, how the missile bases in Cuba should be destroyed, Russian soldiers stationed in Cuba and the lasting impact of the Bay of Pigs landing.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

German

Contents:

Translation - English

Memorandum of Conversation, Federal Republic of Germany Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and Dean Acheson, Special Envoy of US President Kennedy, Bonn, West Germany, 23 October 1962 1

Conversation of Federal Chancellor Adenauer with the Special Adviser of the American President, Acheson

115-105.A/62 highly secret

23 October 1962

On 23 October 1962 at 1745 hours the Chancellor received Mr. Dean Acheson accompanied by [US] Ambassador [Walter] Dowling.

At the beginning, Mr. Acheson reported how he participated in the course of recent weeks in many consultations in State Department and Pentagon. There recommendations were worked out for submission to the President.

The Chancellor asked whether it was also considered whether to shake the Cuban regime through triggering domestic unrest in Cuba.

Mr. Acheson admitted it was a big mistake not to conduct the Bay of Pigs landing operation with all the consequences it would have needed. Back then a revolution could have been launched. Since then, there exists iron communist discipline in the country. Castro has about 50,000 well trained and equipped soldiers and a militia of 150,000. Experiences so far have demonstrated that guerillas deployed from the sea cannot sustain themselves for long [on Cuba].

The Chancellor criticized the Chairman of the Belgian Senate. The latter had provided a legal expertise according to which the American blockade [of Cuba] is incompatible with international law. It would be more important instead, if world opinion will get the impression that Cuba's population does not stand behind the regime.

The Chancellor himself voiced the opinion it will not come to a conflict as long one remains firm. He reiterated again it should not cause any insurmountable problems to stir up domestic unrest within Cuba.

Mr. Acheson referred again to practical difficulties crippling such an approach. He then explained the deliberations discussed in Washington. Overall they fall into two major categories. The first one features an immediate use of military force, the second one just a blockade without any direct use of force.

According to the first scenario, the missile bases in Cuba would be destroyed by conventional air attacks. This would have resulted in 3,000 to 4,000 casualties among Russian personnel. This approach would hardly have caused casualties among the Cuban population.

As a next stage, airfields where Soviet MIG planes and IL 28 jets are deployed would have to be eliminated. At the same time, surface to air missile launching pads (of which there are 24 on the island) have to be taken out. This would have caused casualties among the Cuban population in the range of 10,000 to 15,000 people.

The third option would have been a combination of the first two actions described above, followed by a landing operation of about 75,000 to 100,000 soldiers on Cuba.

The President did not opt for any of these scenarios. Instead he preferred a blockade targeting in the first place offensive weapons and oil shipments. If the other side

would resort to the use of force, one will not hesitate to intensify its own actions. The President believes, however, the blockade has prevented an emotional and irrational immediate action from Khrushchev, such as action in Berlin or a nuclear strike. Furthermore, the President wanted to prevent the European allies of the United States from becoming exposed to unexpected danger by an irrational action from Khrushchev's side.

The Chancellor called the President's considerations noble, but he reiterated that the other side is ruthless if it comes to choosing its options. In this context he referred to the trial of Soviet KGB operative [Bohdan] Stashynsky at the [West German] Federal Court [between 8 and 19 October 1962]. He asked the [US] ambassador to provide Mr. Acheson with material about this trial for the President. During his last visit, Gromyko also had lied to the President. Thus one has to resort to different means, what the Chancellor considers morally justified in such a case.

According to Mr. Acheson's statements, the President is aware that the Soviets want to achieve three objectives with their Cuba policy. They want to build up nuclear capacities ready to be used against the United States. If an operational readiness of such weapons in Cuba will occur, this will result in a very large threat to the United States. Furthermore, the Soviets want to undermine the position of the United States in the Western hemisphere. Finally, they hope to move into better terms of negotiations in order to force concessions from the US, for instance through an exchange deal Cuba-Berlin. In light of all this, the President is completely aware that these weapons cannot remain on Cuba, and that one cannot afford a loss of prestige in the Western hemisphere. Moreover, the President does not feel the slightest inclination to make concessions on other issues for the removal of these weapons.

The Chancellor said, according to what he was told yesterday [by Ambassador Dowling] there are about 8,000 Russians in Cuba. Also one has to take into account that there are nuclear warheads on the island already. As a consequence, you have to assume that those 8,000 Russians can prepare those missiles to the extent that they are operationally ready, and that a use of those weapons cannot be excluded despite the blockade.

Mr. Acheson concurred with those thoughts. However, he added that through the blockade the President intends to give Khrushchev a certain time to think things over. If Khrushchev does not seize this opportunity, the United States will be in a better position to destroy the missiles deployed on Cuba, than they would have been in case of a first strike from the US. This deliberation [i.e., consideration or argument - ed.] was made to the President not by himself (Acheson), but by other people who he rates very highly. This deliberation as such is not dumb at all, since one thought the allies and world opinion will support the United States if it has sent a warning to Khrushchev first. Currently we are in a stage of mounting danger. Right now only maybe two, three, or four missiles are actually ready, and their target accuracy is still not very high. Yet the number of operationally ready missiles increases from week to week. Within two months all those missiles would be ready for a launch. So we run a certain risk here. The more time is passing by, the more the danger is growing. On the other hand, support is also increasing for the American position with the [US] population, the allies, and in world opinion. If it comes to an armed conflict, the US does not want to be accused of having launched a Pearl Harbor type of attack in reverse.

The Chancellor doubted anything will come about if you give Khrushchev time for thinking over. He does not believe Khrushchev will pack his missiles and planes in boxes and takes them back. The current threat is terrible for the United States. Unfortunately, the Russian action will also have a negative impact on other parts of the world. He also does not expect any positive result from steps taken at the United Nations as Khrushchev is not impressed by U.N. Resolutions. This is why he [Adenauer] sees the only hope in a blockade as tight as possible, and in domestic unrest [in Cuba].

Mr. Acheson stated the Chancellor is making it difficult for him to contradict these arguments. Those were exactly the arguments he [Acheson] himself had made during preliminary deliberations. Hasty military action by the United States could have triggered a nuclear counterstrike or Soviet actions in Berlin. Then the allies might have said those crazy Americans should have approached things more carefully. President Kennedy is ready to use force. He thinks, however, it is better not to do such right away in order not to block the option of escalating his measures. If we currently talk about a quarantine, then it means to gain enough freedom of action to escalate measures at a later stage.

The Chancellor referred to the possibility of clashes on Guantanamo base between conventional American forces and Cuban forces.

Mr. Acheson responded the American garrison there is getting reinforced. Due to the geographical location of the base, however, it is very difficult to launch an attack from there.

In conclusion, the Chancellor expressed its hope it will not come to a war on paper ["Papierkrieg"].

The meeting ended at around 1900 hours.

[1] Ed. note: The former secretary of state flew to Bonn to see Adenauer after having briefed French President Charles De Gaulle in Paris the previous afternoon.