

October 26, 1962

**Memorandum of Conversation, West German
Foreign Minister Gerhard Schröder and Soviet
Ambassador Andrei Smirnov, Bonn**

Citation:

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Summary:

A discussion between Federal Minister Schröder and Soviet Ambassador Smirnow [Smirnov] in which Smirnov presents to the minister a statement of the Soviet Government concerning the aggressive acts the United States had committed against the Republic of Cuba. In this statement the Soviet Government was explaining its view on the blockade the United States had imposed on Cuba. It also commented on the other aggressive steps President Kennedy intended to take against Cuba as announced on 22 October.

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German

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Discussion between Federal Minister Schröder and Soviet Ambassador Smirnov
[Smirnov]

Notes of a conversation between Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs Schröder and Soviet Ambassador Smirnov on 26 October 1962 at 3.00 pm in the Minister's office.

Present: Dr. Reinkemeyer for the German party

26 October 1962

Ambassador Smirnov said he had come to present to the minister a statement of the Soviet Government concerning the aggressive acts the United States had committed against the Republic of Cuba. In this statement the Soviet Government was explaining its view on the blockade the United States had imposed on Cuba. It also commented on the other aggressive steps President Kennedy intended to take against Cuba as announced on 22 October. In that statement the Soviet Government called upon all governments in the world to condemn the aggressive acts of the United States against Cuba. The Soviet Government was hopeful that the German Government would also react favorably to this appeal, it being clear that approval of such actions would mean entire responsibility for all resulting consequences.

Ambassador Smirnov then presented the text of the statement the Soviet Government had made on 24 October. The declaration had already been available in the world press.

The Minister replied:

The Federal Government would examine the statement of the Soviet Government in detail and consider it carefully. On the assumption that the Ambassador's introductory remarks were meant as a sort of summary of contents, he would limit himself at the moment to a provisional comment only:

The Soviet Government had mentioned American aggressive acts. However, the Ambassador was well aware that the United States held a completely different view on this matter. The Ambassador also knew that Soviet Foreign Minister [Andrei] Gromyko in his last talk with President Kennedy [on October 18] had presented the situation in Cuba in an entirely different light, in contrast to unambiguous evidence that was now available. On account of that evidence it was obvious that Cuba was being expanded into an offensive base. Consequently the present Soviet viewpoint on this matter was completely untenable. So much for the Federal Government's opinion concerning the problems themselves. Further, it went without saying that the Federal Government wished for a peaceful solution of the present situation. Unfortunately the Federal Republic, being not even a member of the United Nations, had no influence in that matter, and very likely, attempts to settle the problem would mainly be made within the framework of the UN. According to the Federal Government peace would at any rate be preferable to an armed conflict for all those involved. However, peace meant bringing about a situation that would guarantee a peaceful life for all people. Not intending to establish a direct link with the Cuba problem, the present state of affairs also applied to the situation in Berlin where the Soviet Union was unquestionably departing from the fundamental terms of the contractual basis the Four Powers had agreed upon for Berlin. It was the German view that that agreement should be respected. The example made clear that world peace was threatened in several places of the world, not only in Cuba. With Germany being one of those places, the German interest in a peaceful settlement was particularly strong. In its memorandum of February 1962 in reply to the Soviet memorandum of December 1961 the Federal Government had clearly pointed out the important terms for such a settlement. Incidentally, the response to the German memorandum remained outstanding. For all responsible authorities in the Federal Republic maintenance of peace was paramount. The Ambassador could also learn that from recent debates in

the Bundestag [Federal Lower House of Parliament] and from the statement made there which he was surely aware of.

Ambassador Smirnov replied: It was not surprising that the US was now turning the tables accusing Cuba of aggression. However, there was no doubt possible about the actual aggressor, as the United States owned a military base in Cuba where - against all legal norms of International Law - it had accumulated gigantic quantities of troops and all kinds of weapons to expand it into an offensive base against the Republic of Cuba. This was a fact, no matter how hard the Americans were trying to talk their way out of it. On the other hand the Soviet Government was making every effort to avoid atomic and ballistic warfare. The purpose of his, the Ambassador's, present visit was to call upon the Federal Government asking it on behalf of the Soviet Government to exert its influence on its allies accordingly, in order to maintain peace.

Although the Minister had rejected the existence of a direct link between Cuba and Berlin, yet there still was a connection between the two problems as there was no peace settlement with Germany, which explained the tense situation in Berlin and further complication of world politics in general.

The Minister had pointed out that, so far, there had been no reply to the German Memorandum of last February. The explanation was that, after receipt of the German memorandum, the Soviet Government had become doubtful whether the German Government was serious in its demand for negotiations: first, the contents of the German memorandum had consisted of pure propaganda and second, there had been a propaganda campaign in Germany against the Soviet document of December, notwithstanding the serious and useful suggestions the Soviet Government had put forward to solve the problems of Germany and Berlin.

The Minister replied that the USA-Cuba conflict was about Soviet installations on the island. Although a precise definition of the aggressor in case of conflict had always been a tricky problem since International Law had come into existence, there could yet be no doubt that those installations were no defensive weapons, not even surface-to air-missiles, but medium-range ballistic missile sites with a range of 1800 to 3700 km; their deployment had definitely to be regarded as an aggressive act against the United States.

The Ambassador had put forward the American base in Cuba as an argument. However, the base had existed for a long time and been leased by contract for 99 years [sic; the February 1903 Cuban-American treaty actually granted the United States a perpetual lease on the Guantánamo Bay area while recognizing Cuba's ultimate sovereignty-ed.]. That American base had been understaffed, [and] only very recently and due to the aggressive projects in Cuba had the American garrison been reinforced to a certain degree. It was out of the question that the Americans intended to make use of this base for an aggression against Cuba. Besides, the Americans had never imposed a [total] blockade on Cuba. They were only trying to prevent delivery of special offensive weapons the emplacement of which in Cuba would seriously threaten world peace. In no way did they intend to block delivery of food items and other commodities, nor did they mean to stop delivery of purely defensive weapons. Internationally there was no disputing that the Soviet deliveries consisted of offensive weapons bound to seriously jeopardize world peace. The problem should be dealt with by the United Nations, after relevant evidence had been submitted to them.

Concerning the Ambassador's appeal he wanted to make clear that the Federal Government would always use all its strength to maintain peace. He had only mentioned Berlin to emphasize that peace was endangered in other places, too. As to Berlin the danger consisted in the Soviets' departing or rather having already departed from a settlement which the four Powers had agreed upon at that time. It was of course possible to consider departing from certain positions of the agreement. The Federal Government would certainly support any request that was intended to

put a new and better agreement in place of the old one. In no way could changes be made unilaterally without the other partners' consent, let alone against their will.

Concerning the German memorandum of last February he had already in March told the Foreign Minister Gromyko that the [Federal] German Republic meant what it said in that document. He had also told Minister Gromyko that a new German Ambassador to Moscow would be appointed soon. Like his predecessor he would consider it his first duty to work for a good relationship between the Soviet Union and the Federal Republic. He was taking the opportunity of the Ambassador's visit to emphasize that, by appointing Ambassador [Horst] Groepper, the Federal Government had sent a highly qualified diplomat to the Soviet Union. Ambassador Groepper was fully aware of his task and willing to do everything in his power to achieve it. Not only was he qualified for this mission but he would also set to work with a will and an eager interest. That might go without saying, but he, the Minister, meant to stress once again how highly the Federal Government rated Ambassador Groepper.

The Ambassador had felt it necessary to refer to the character of the German memorandum. This point had already been raised in a similar way in his, the Minister's, discussion with Mr. Gromyko. Without directly referring to the memorandum, Foreign Minister Gromyko had remarked that anti-Soviet propaganda was widespread in the Federal Republic. Replying to Mr. Gromyko he, the Minister, had suggested that independent experts over a period of three months should evaluate the frequency of negative press comments on the other in their respective countries. At the time he had been sure that such expert opinion would find favor with the Federal Republic.

He had made that remark to Mr. Gromyko half in jest and half in earnest, however, he had strictly to reject the Ambassador's dismissing the German memorandum as propaganda. On the contrary, it underlined the firm intention of the German Government to come to an arrangement with the Soviet Union. He assumed that this was also the intention of the Soviet Government. However, both their governments had a different conceptual starting point hence their difference of opinion. He was sure that the day was not far off when the Soviet Union would realize that the German solution to the pending problems was also in the interest of the Soviet Union.

Ambassador Smirnow replied: He was not disappointed [i.e., not surprised - trans.] at all at the Minister's view on the American-Cuban conflict: the Minister had stuck to his former interpretation, namely to consider all American weapons and sites of defensive purposes only and weapons and bases of non-allied powers as offensive in any case. Could missiles with a range of 5000 to even 10000 km, stationed in the United States, the Federal Republic, even in Norway on the Soviet borders, in Turkey and Greece, be qualified as purely "defensive"? On the other hand, when Cuba bought defensive weapons to be ready for fending off an American aggression it had taken "offensive" steps! The Foreign Minister might have a problem to prove that the American sites the United States had installed all over the world after the end of the [Second World] War, among others especially in Germany, the most powerful American base, were for defensive purposes only. How different the Soviet Union! It had of its own free will liquidated the base it had owned in Finland and was now living with Finland on the best of terms. In their suggestions to clarify the situation, the Cubans had never even asked for removal of the American base from the island. On the other hand the American measures were definitely aimed at doing away with the revolutionary achievements of the Cuban People. This was the very essence of the situation!

Considering German-Soviet relations, the Minister had pointed out that the Soviet Union was trying to depart from the terms of the Four Power Agreement they had decided upon with their former allies after the War. In reality it was the other way round. Since 1945 their former allies had step by step disregarded the terms of the agreement and thus eroded the foundations to which the Soviet Union had been

committed. The NATO-allies of the Federal Government were the only ones to be held responsible for the present state of affairs in Germany and Berlin.

The Minister replied: With respect to Cuba, one should realize that there was a clear difference between defensive and offensive weapons. The weapons being brought to Cuba at the moment clearly belonged in the second category, and the American steps were definitely to be considered as an attempt to stop further delivery. The Ambassador had been trying to compare the American steps with the defensive measures taken by an alliance-system like NATO. This was inadmissible. NATO was but a defensive alliance and at the time [1949-ed.] had been created as such. This was without the collaboration of the Federal Government which had joined the alliance only later [in 1955-ed.]. The motives of NATO were well-known, whereas the motives of the Soviet Union were less clear. It is to be hoped that the imminent talks might result in further information as the Soviet Government was sure to comment on this issue in the Security Council. To reproach the United States with counter-revolutionary intentions in Cuba was unfounded as President Kennedy had explicitly recognized the Cubans' and every other nation's right to determine their own social systems. This was also the position of the Federal Republic. In this respect he, the Minister, had to protest vigorously against the Ambassador's insinuation that the Federal Republic was a military base of the United States. Besides, without turning tables, it should be noted that there were far more Soviet divisions than American divisions on German soil.

Concerning the Berlin question the Ambassador's assessment of the Four Power Statute did not agree with the German view. The Ambassador said that according to the Soviet Union's viewpoint the foundations of the Four Power Agreement had been changed. But in the opinion of the Federal Government the Soviet Union had installed itself in Germany against the will of the German people. It observed with concern the continuous dismantling of the original agreement such as the recall of the Soviet City-Commandant and other measures. Finding a common denominator for future negotiations would certainly be difficult. However, according to the Federal Government, attempts should be continued to find a solution the entire German people could approve of. The Federal Government would persevere with the search for possible solutions.

Ambassador Smirnov declared himself hopeful to continue the exchange of views on this topic in the near future.

The discussion ended at 4.00 pm.