

October 24, 1962

Cable from Dutch Embassy, Washington (Van Roijen), 24 October 1962

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Summary:

This cable comes from Dutch Ambassador to the United States J. Herman van Roijen, regarding the subject of Cuba and the discovered Soviet missiles. Van Roijen reports on the current status of negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union, noting that the Soviets are willing to dismantle the missiles in Cuba if the Americans would do for "obsolescent bases near Soviet territory." The State Department fervently denied that any such tradeoff would happen or was even being considered.

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Regarding Cuba

Since the period of strict secrecy was ended by Kennedy's speech last Monday [22 October] the press has of course embarked upon extensive speculation regarding both what preceded the quarantine decision and the considerations that laid the foundations for that decision and the further course of events. The article by [Max] Frankel in today's New York Times contains a fairly complete overview of the lines of argument that one can hear at [the] State [Department]. In response to the statement therein that if the Russians would be willing to negotiate about the dismantling of the base in Cuba "it was conceivable that the US might be willing to dismantle one of the obsolescent American bases near Soviet territory," the State [Department's] Western Europe department [head?] upon being asked stated categorically that there could be no such trade-off and that this was not being considered in the least: "completely and flatly untrue."

In my opinion it is not entirely inconceivable that at a certain moment they might still proceed to meet a Russian retreat on Cuba with the removal of a single American base, for which dismantlement had already been considered as an option. If this would indeed be the intention of course the value of such a gesture would be greatly diminished in advance by labeling such a base "obsolescent."

From the circles of the ambassadorial working group concerning Berlin it was heard that yesterday among other things they discussed the argumentation used by the Americans to announce the quarantine; apparently especially [French ambassador to the United States Hervé] Alphand pointed out that the argument of the offensive nature of the Russian missile installations is not very strong since after all the question whether a missile is defensive or offensive demands a purely subjective answer, while in fact strategic intentions determine the nature of the weapons involved. In the American reasoning for example [Soviet] ICBMs are by definition offensive while those same missiles clearly play a defensive role in the Western strategy. In the same way the Cubans can posit that the Soviet MRBMs and IRBMs are of a purely retaliatory nature and therefore in fact form a deterrent and not a threat. Consequently in the group it was said that the US would have a much stronger position if they would make the disturbance of the strategic equilibrium and therefore the status quo the centrepiece, in other words if they focus the attention on the unprecedented element brought into the international strategic relations by the Soviets.

Van Roijen 907.