



November 14, 1962
West German Record of One-on-One Conversation
between FRG Chancellor Adenauer and US President
Kennedy, Washington

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Summary:

F.R.G. Chancellor Adenauer and U.S. President Kennedy discuss the Cuban crisis and the sense they both have that the situation is not yet entirely resolved. "The President indicates that one never knows what's going on in the Soviets' heads. The Americans never thought that the Soviets would dare bring missiles to Cuba and the Soviets never thought that the Americans would react so decisively. Both sides had false ideas about each other..."

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At the beginning of their talks at the White House on 14 November 1962, the Chancellor and President Kennedy had a one-on-one conversation [unter vier Augen].

The Chancellor congratulated the President on his success in the last weeks. Developments are into a new phase now. He assured the President that the FRG would always stand on the American side.

The President thanked the Chancellor for speaking with Ambassador Dowling right after the first announcement. This immediate support for American measures was valued all the higher for it still being clear what the effects of the American measures would be on Berlin and the FRG.

The Chancellor explained that he understood that the President must keep an eye on the global situation in making his decisions, not only Germany and Berlin....He suggested that later on in the talks, he would like to discuss his thoughts on Berlin in as small a circle as possible.

The President asked if the Chancellor considers that the present situation is worse or better for improving the situation in Berlin.

The Chancellor answered that one must be careful on this matter and he can't really say if the Cuba issue is definitively finished. The decision whether to try to make up with the Soviets, also in regards to Germany, depends on the [US] President. If the President believes that the Soviets have correctly carried out the American demands, then maybe we could undertake this. But if the President thinks that the demands are unfulfilled, then it is better to wait.

President Kennedy, making reference to press reports that the Chancellor believes that the missiles were not removed [from Cuba], asks why? According to the American interpretation based on the most recent airphotos, the missiles have been removed [weggeschafft]. We also don't think it would be an advantage for the Soviets to keep any missiles in Cuba. We don't think it likely that the Soviets would try the thing with the missiles again, because they know that next time, there'll be an American invasion. But even if the Americans say that the missiles are no longer there, we are still fully conscious that Khrushchev has not yet fully fulfilled his promises. The issue of the bombers and ground inspections is still open. We think in any case that air inspections are more reliable than ground inspections by UN personnel. We're also clearer now that we won't get rid of Castro so quickly [man Castro nicht so schnell loswerde]. As for Khrushchev, we know he lies and there is no reason to believe his statements. For all these reasons, the President is not interested in a new Western initiative. Far better to let the Soviets come to us and see what they propose.

The Chancellor agreed fully with these thoughts and underlined that the Soviets had lied shamefully and had planned a criminal attack on the US, as never before. If we offered negotiations now, Khrushchev must assume that the West is ready to forget and forgive the matter [Cuba]. Then maybe, he will feel tempted to try to cause trouble somewhere else.

The German experience under National Socialism shows that dictatorships change people, their thinking and morality. This is also true for Khrushchev. We cannot expect him to change suddenly.

The President says that now as before we must assume that Khrushchev has the same goals as the Red Chinese, although possibly somewhat different methods. The setback in Cuba – and this was only a setback, not a defeat – will cause Khrushchev some problems. He's also got problems with the Chinese and the fighting with India doesn't work for his plans either. The situation has changed substantially in the last weeks and one must think clearly how the various factors will affect Khrushchev.

The Chancellor thought this was absolutely correct and said the Soviet Union was going through a slow evolution, but it remains to be seen how far it goes. He is convinced that Khrushchev did not want to run the risk of a war, but will try his intrigues again, so we must pay attention. On the side of the West, we should not give the impression that nothing happened and that all is forgotten. The President succeeded in turning aside the greatest danger the US has ever experienced, a great success for himself and the American people. On the other side is this criminal – and as such he should be handled, not as [merely] misguided - we have to keep an eye on him...

The President indicates that one never knows what's going on in the Soviets' heads. The Americans never thought that the Soviets would dare bring missiles to Cuba and the Soviets never thought that the Americans would react so decisively. Both sides had false ideas about each other...

The Chancellor notes that one should not judge Khrushchev based on what he has failed to get so far, but rather on how much he has succeeded already. For example, in 1953, the Soviet Union did not even have atomic weapons [sic; the Soviets actually achieved their first atomic detonation in 1949 - ed.], and now, nine years later, they are taking missiles to Cuba. The developments of the last nine years have been good to Khrushchev. He is a smart, reckless man without conscience, who certainly doesn't want to lose all he has gained up to now. He is a convinced Soviet patriot.

Khrushchev has now learned in Cuba that the US is stronger and more decisive than he had thought. He'll think this over now and reorient himself. The Chancellor agrees with the President that the solution of the bomber issue should show us what Khrushchev has learned. Until then, one should not offer negotiations...

The conversation was then continued with a larger group present.

*Ed. note: For the U.S. record of this conversation, see U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1961-1963, Vol. XV: Berlin Crisis, 1962-1963* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1994), doc. 153; for brief additional discussion of Cuba between JFK and Adenauer, also see doc. 154.