

Letter from Hervé Alphanand to Maurice Couve de Murville (Washington, 26 October 1962)

Caption: On 26 October 1962, French Ambassador to the United States, Hervé Alphanand, informs French Foreign Minister, Maurice Couve de Murville, of an acceleration in the construction of Soviet military bases in Cuba.

Source: Ministère des Affaires étrangères ; Commission de Publication des DDF (sous la dir.). Documents diplomatiques français. Volume II: 1962, 1er juillet-31 décembre. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1999. p. 335-336.

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T. Nos 5983 to 5985
Priority. Secret. Limited circulation.

Washington, 26 October 1962.
(Received: 27 October. 2.20 a.m.)

After the 22 October meeting, the Secretary of State asked the three Ambassadors to remain in his office.

Mr Rusk stressed that aerial surveillance had shown that Cuban bases continued to be built at a faster rate. Everywhere else, the situation was calm. Anti-aircraft defences were still not responding, and fighter planes remained on the ground, leaving American spy planes total freedom to operate at will. It appeared that Soviet vessels were en route back to their home ports and were no longer in the Atlantic. No build-up of Russian forces elsewhere in the world had been detected.

It is difficult, as yet, to say what will be the outcome of the talks now taking place at UN Headquarters. In my telegram Nos 5978–5982 ⁽¹⁾, I set out the US goals in these talks. Mr Rusk said that, if they ended in failure, the US would use other means to ensure that the bases were disabled, either by bombing them or by implementing other, ‘larger-scale’ measures. The Secretary of State made no secret of the utmost seriousness of such decisions nor the global implications that they might have, but they would not be taken ‘for a few days’ and, as Mr Rusk promised, only after consultation with our three governments. The alternative, which would involve allowing a nuclear base capable of undermining the Western nuclear deterrence to be established in Cuba, would be even more serious.

(Collection of telegrams.)

(1) This telegram of the same date, that has not been reproduced here, indicated that Mr Nitze had informed Western ambassadors of how far the deployment of Russian missiles in Cuba had gone and informed them of American views on Mr U. Thant’s plan for resolving the crisis. [In identical messages sent on 24 October to the US President and the Head of the Soviet Government, the UN Secretary-General had proposed two measures: the voluntary suspension, for a period of two or three weeks, of all arms shipments to Cuba; a parallel suspension of the US embargo. In a speech the same day to the Security Council, he also asked Cuban leaders to halt all construction of military bases on the island for the duration of negotiations. Mr Kennedy agreed to talks being held but said nothing about the proposed lifting of the embargo].