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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

EXCISE

Research Memorandum
REU- October 28, 1962

TO : The Secretary
THROUGH : S/S
FROM : INR - Roger Hilsman

Roger Hilsman

EXCISE

SUBJECT : Western European Reactions to the Cuban Situation
(Through October 27, 1962)

Western European reaction to the US blockade of Cuba has undergone some changes during the first three days since its announcement, but has resulted in a general recognition that the situation warranted or even demanded vigorous US action, and in acquiescence in or outright approval of the action taken. The degree in which this broad support by government and press was given, of course, varied from country to country; nevertheless, on the whole the response has been one of understanding and support

Certain facets of the reaction are, however, worth noting:

(1) Considerable note was taken, both in the press and in some official reactions, of the lack of "prior consultation." De Gaulle was presumably miffed by this lack, and some Italians seemed seriously annoyed, while some of the press made quite a point of it. This was also emphasized by the British Laborites. However, in general the absence of consultation was accepted as necessary and at least in the short run the negative reactions do not appear of serious consequence.

(2) A number of countries, supporting the US as a matter of principle in this showdown with the Soviet Union, nonetheless avoided specific endorsement of the kind of action taken.

(3) Adenauer and De Gaulle expressed (privately) immediate doubts as to whether the specific measures were adequate to accomplish the objectives, and this question has been raised elsewhere.

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(4) Considerable doubt was expressed initially, notably in the British and Italian and to a lesser extent in the French press, as to the facts in the situation, but there is now quite general acceptance of both the facts and their significance as set forth by the US.

(5) Although the degree of support of the US action varied predictably from one Western European country to another, the failure of Italy and Norway to give clear support to the action was conspicuous.

(6) There was naturally much speculation as to the possible upshot of the US action. There was widespread fear that the Russians might counter with action elsewhere, notably in Berlin, and/or that there might be a clash in the Caribbean, either of which might lead to war in Europe. There were contrary voices that only by such firm action could the Soviets be halted. And there were frequently expressed hopes that by negotiation, or UN action, or a Summit meeting the matter might somehow be peacefully resolved. But thus far there was no concerted push in any direction. As the week ended, there was a tendency in Western Europe to see tension somewhat eased as the quarantine failed to produce fireworks.

United Kingdom

Official UK reaction to the US Cuban action has been increasingly favorable. The first government statement, issued on October 23, expressed deep concern at the "provocative action" of the Soviet Union in placing offensive nuclear weapons in Cuba and accused it of deception and of opening up a new area of instability. Prime Minister Macmillan made a strong statement to Commons on October 25 condemning the Soviet action as a deliberate provocation designed to test the determination of the US and supported the US decision not to accept this Soviet move. He accepted the US characterization of the missiles as undoubtedly offensive in type. He emphasized the moderate nature of the limited US blockade. He stressed the need to avoid appeasement, which would lead the West into greater danger, and for allied unity. He expressed the hope that if there were some alleviation of the present state of tension it might be possible to move into

"a wider field of negotiation," but stated that recent events show that in these matters the West cannot rely on mere words and promises. The British Ambassador in Washington, however, let it be known that the UK would oppose the inclusion of oil among those strategic items we will not let pass to Cuba. And there are reportedly some British officials who do not understand why we should be less ready to live in the shadow of Soviet missiles in Cuba than they have been to accept the presence of Soviet missiles pointed toward them from the USSR.

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Labor Party leader Gaitskell expressed in Commons sympathy for the US but also considerable anxiety and apprehensions as to consequences of the steps already taken by the US. He criticized the US for acting without consultation with directly affected allies (in rebuttal Macmillan cited prior US notification to the UK and his belief that in this matter the President was forced to act rapidly). Gaitskell's performance in Commons was, however, unusually restrained. At an earlier private briefing Gaitskell had expressed doubts about US proof of the nature of the missiles and the likelihood of Soviet hostile intentions against the US mainland. He implied that the US is playing just about the same game of power as USSR, and for not much different motives. However, he expressed the hope that Labor Party reaction would be kept within bounds. Other Labor Party leaders have also been critical of the US move, but at least one, George Brown, has expressed strong support of the US. Brown urged that no consideration be given to any bargain involving Turkish bases. This same negative view of any association between US bases in Turkey and the Cuban missile bases was conveyed by a British official source in an immediate rejection as "irrelevant" of the Khrushchev proposal on the subject.

A statement issued by the Labor Party executive on October 24 expressed grave concern about the US action, which was described as being of doubtful legality. The statement did not accept it as proved that long-range missile bases had been set up in Cuba and called for an on-the-spot examination by the UN. Despite its concern about the US action, the carefully phrased statement called on both the US and the USSR to act with the utmost restraint and urged that British diplomacy be concentrated on bringing the dispute to the conference table, and stressed the urgency of reaching agreement on disarmament.

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While official UK reaction has been favorable, the specific US action taken has not been specifically approved nor has any British readiness to participate (beyond the request by the government on October 23 of British shipowners that they be as cooperative as possible with US authorities in the Caribbean) in sanctions against the USSR or Cuba been expressed.

Before President Kennedy's speech the British press was almost unanimously opposed to the expected US economic counter-measures against Cuba. Despite the change in the situation resulting from the evidence of Soviet missiles, only one of the major papers (the right wing conservative Daily Express) at first unreservedly supported the US limited blockade announced October 22. Many other papers expressed doubts about the accuracy of the US evaluation of the missile site photographs or saw the US action in any event as dangerous and unwise. Second day editorials were somewhat more sympathetic but still displayed reserve regarding the "hazardous" US counter-action. All papers, radio, and television gave extensive coverage to the Cuba story and the US aerial photographs of the missile sites proved invaluable in convincing Britons that there was justification for US action. A swing to editorial understanding and sympathy for the US move appears to be continuing, as the implications of the Soviet gambit sink in. Embassy London believes that the majority of the British public accepts and supports the US action. It feels that the demonstrations against the US have been organized by Communists and the often active ban-the-bomb group. A strong neutralist note is beginning to be heard in the propaganda of Ban-Bombers, which emphasizes that "there are American bases in Britain, too." The same note was sounded by independent Labor MP Konni Zilliacus, who called for the removal of US bases from the UK and the withdrawal of British forces from West Germany and Berlin. A poll published on October 25 by the Daily Mail (London) indicated that 58 percent of Britons interviewed thought that the US actions were justified, while 66 percent thought that Britain should support the US and only 30 percent were opposed.

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According to a paper given to the Department by a British Embassy spokesman on October 25, the UK Government stated that it was "not satisfied as to the legality of the blockade in international law" but it was "anxious to play down the legal aspects." The UK hopes, therefore, that the US would interdict British ships with the "utmost restraint and discrimination."

West Germany

Both official and public opinion in the Federal Republic of Germany and West Berlin firmly supported the US decision to interdict further delivery of strategic weapons materials to Cuban ports and to demand dismantling of Soviet missile installations in Cuba. Chancellor Adenauer was particularly emphatic in welcoming the US decision to intervene, and defended the announced measures as both appropriate and necessary; he was especially gratified at having been informed of the decision in advance, and neither he nor any other West German official gave any evidence of pique at not having been consulted rather than simply informed. Governing Mayor Brandt of West Berlin, reflecting the general satisfaction in that city over the President's special assurances to the Berliners, called the President's statement "earnest, courageous, decisive, and temperate." All three of the parties represented in the West German Bundestag likewise expressed full understanding and sympathy for the US decision and pledged their support for any action considered necessary by the US for the satisfactory elimination of the immediate threat to US security in Cuba. This attitude was only partially tempered by concern for a possible Soviet retaliation against West Berlin; there was some tendency to speculate that US firmness applied to the Cuban threat might actually serve to deter Soviet moves against West Berlin, and there was no indication of fear that US concern to resolve the Cuban problem might undermine effective resistance to Soviet pressures elsewhere. The press, which was equally forthright in support of the US position, was beginning to discern an easing of tension as no serious trouble developed in the Caribbean.

The Netherlands

On October 23 the Dutch Government officially stated it fully recognizes the fact that the United States finds itself in a situation in which action must be taken. It expressed pleasure in the fact that the United States has clearly defined its policy so that all parties know precisely the situation they are facing. This prompt and unequivocal public support remains unchanged. In the North Atlantic Council, however, the Dutch representative expressed "personal" concern as to the effects on the image of the Alliance that would be produced by the stopping of ships of NATO countries, and suggested several possible solutions to the problem.

The Dutch opposition Labor Party also supported the US position, and the extreme left and the pacifists had not, by October 26, succeeded in generating much steam behind their protests.

In general Dutch editorial comment continues predominantly favorable with minor exceptions and has not varied much from its initial firm support for the President's stand on Cuba.

Belgium

Initial Belgian Government reaction was in support of the President's stand. Official Belgian reaction continues to publicly support the United States, but one suspects without great enthusiasm. The Belgian Government was unhappy over the lack of prior consultation and has stressed the need for consultation through NAC and bilaterally, particularly with regard to the problem of Berlin. Belgian official circles are expressing surprise at the failure of the United States to press for inclusion of Cuba on the COCOM list, which they say is a prerequisite to effective Belgian action to control exports to Cuba.

Initial Belgian press reaction was generally less sympathetic with the US decision and more given to legalistic interpretations

of the blockade and to cynical interpretations of the US decisions in terms of US partisan politics. (We lack recent press comments in order to determine any change of attitude.)

Luxembourg

On October 24 the Luxembourg Government officially endorsed the actions of the President and specifically approved the firmness of the decision. While we do not have any reports on press reaction, there is no reason to believe that the government's statement runs contrary to public opinion.

Canada

Prime Minister Diefenbaker made a statement in the House of Commons on October 22 welcoming the intention of the US to bring the Cuban matter before the UN. He accepted without demurrer the facts as cited by the President but did not specifically approve of the course of action chosen. (Since no Canadian flag ships are engaged in the Cuban trade the blockade would have little direct effect on Canada.) On October 25 Diefenbaker said that Canada intends to support the US in the Cuban crisis, and while the dangers would not be ignored, Canada would stand by its allies. Diefenbaker dismissed arguments about the legality of the US partial blockade as largely sterile and refused to equate the defensive US overseas bases with the USSR missile bases in Cuba.

One manifestation of positive support for the US was the government decision to grant no more transit rights to Soviet aircraft and to search and refuse transit to Bloc aircraft en route to Cuba if they are carrying offensive weapons. Cuban aircraft would be subject to the same procedure.

Opposition Liberal Party leader Pearson expressed sympathy and understanding of the US position and called on Canada to give all possible support. He indicated that he might however have some reservations about the kind of action taken by the US and apprehensions about the dangers of the action. He called for removal of the bases.

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Canadian press reaction to the US Cuban action was generally favorable although some newspapers questioned whether in this dangerous matter the US had the right to act unilaterally. Most papers felt that Canada could not be neutral in this matter and had to stand with the US. The Montreal Gazette (Conservative) editorial on October 24 conceded that the US could not have ignored the Soviet buildup but suggested that the US might first have presented the USSR with the "ultimatum" in private.

Canadian public opinion, which strongly backs the US, was a major factor in forcing the government to go on record with an unequivocal expression of support for the US after its earlier fuzziness.

France

President De Gaulle signified support for the US action and France has given us its support at the UN. Couve was quoted more than once as saying that France could hardly have expected the US to consult it in detail on the matter, but it seems clear from other sources that De Gaulle's support is limited by a to-be-expected pique or resentment at not being consulted on a matter whose immediate aspects deal with an area which he concedes is mainly of interest to the US but whose later consequences may well involve areas of direct interest to France (e.g., Berlin). Opposition party leaders (Moderates, Socialists, MRP) told us of their support of our action, but also mentioned public uneasiness at speed of the decision (which perhaps reminded them of what they considered the precipitancy of the Bay of Pigs operation) and the possible consequences. They believed the USSR would back down but were glad the door to negotiations was open. The Quai d'Orsay and apparently the cabinet also apparently decided quite early (October 23 for the former) that war was unlikely because of the prudent Soviet attitude.

The Communist press of course denounces the US action. Initially, other French papers tended either to: (1) endorse the action; (2) chide the US for not consulting with France

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and the other allies; and/or (3) explain the action in terms of domestic US political considerations. Later, however, the Paris press (24th) emphasized: (1) support for the US and (2) hope and expectation that war will be avoided by negotiation. On the 25th Figaro and Aurore explained why the US could not yield in the Cuban matter--because of Berlin and the actual danger that the weapons in Cuba pose to US security. Paris-Jour looks for negotiations, but is uneasy at the prospect that Khrushchev may be able to raise the question of US bases abroad in this new context. By October 26, the French press, manifestly relieved that hostilities had not occurred, was by and large stressing that the US must remain firm in its insistence on the removal of the missile bases, and showing increased understanding of and sympathy for the American position. Some papers saw US overseas bases as a weakness in any debate in the UNGA.

Italy

Reaction by the Italian Government appears to be influenced and motivated primarily by two factors: 1) genuine Italian concern over the risk of escalation of the crisis into a thermo-nuclear war involving the whole Western Alliance; and 2) fear of the domestic political effects that the crisis might have.

Consequently, the immediate reaction of the Italian Government and of the political forces that support it in parliament was one of extreme concern over the possible escalation of the crisis into a full-fledged war, accompanied by hopes of a negotiated solution of controversy. During this first period, there was little support or understanding for the US action, as such. Nevertheless, both the government and the government's parties (with the exception of the Socialists) gave assurances of their "solidarity" and "every possible" assistance in the United Nations. The Socialists condemned the "unilateral" US action and questioned both its wisdom and necessity, since they were skeptical of US contention that there was "incontrovertible proof" of a Soviet buildup on Cuban territory of an MRBM and IRBM nuclear weapons delivery system. So strong was this Socialist skepticism, that Embassy Rome requested that "photographic" and

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other proof of Soviet military build-up in Cuba be shown to "Nenni himself" in an effort to allay his and his party's suspicion of the validity of the US intelligence information. Even such a staunch pro-US and pro-western leader as Social Democratic Secretary Giuseppe Saragat questioned the "legality" of the US action. In addition, there were a number of fairly reliable reports indicating a certain amount of "pique" on the part of Fanfani and other government leaders at not being "consulted" by the US. Christian Democratic Secretary Aldo Moro expressed both sympathy and understanding of the US action, accompanied by "regrets" that Italy had not been consulted in advance, thus depriving Italian leaders of the chance of preparing the "psychological grounds" for an explanation or justification of the US action before Italian public opinion.

As the crisis abated, somewhat, following the various diplomatic initiatives and the changed course of Soviet ships steaming toward Cuba, there was an increasing Italian "understanding" and sympathy at least over the inevitability of the US action, accompanied by the general hope that a sense of responsibility would prevail on both sides. Typical of this new mood and appreciation of the US position and action, was an editorial on October 25, of the PRI daily Voce Repubblicana, which defends the "grave but understandable" US decision on the grounds that by their military build-up in Cuba, "the Soviets have upset the balance of power on which peace rests." Luigi Salvatorelli, noted Italian historian and respected and influential editorialist, writes in Turin's La Stampa (center-left, Fiat-controlled daily) "What would Russia say if during a moment of tension between itself and Finland, any western power were to even send conventional arms reinforcements to that country?"

The Italian leadership can be expected to steer a cautious course in its support of the military phase of the US action in the Caribbean. There is little doubt, however, that in a showdown, the present government will give whatever assistance may be required either in a diplomatic or military field. Even the Socialists have reassured Embassy Rome that there would be no "question" as to where the PSI would stand in "case of conflict."

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Noteworthy so far has been the inability of the Italian Communist Party to organize impressive demonstrations anywhere in Italy, and the lack of any demonstration whatsoever before the US Embassy.

Scandinavia

Scandinavian reaction, excepting the Icelandic (not yet available) and the Finnish (noncommittal according to accepted public policy), has so far chiefly reflected alarm over the danger of general war and a desire for negotiations between the US and the USSR to ease the tension. Statements of the governments and top officials so far reported have been limited to expressions of concern coupled with assurances that the situation does not call for panic and to hopes that the matter will be settled through the UN. Danish Foreign Minister Haekkerup has expressed conviction that President Kennedy based his decisions on "definite information about threatening military installations on Cuba." Subsequently, however, the Danes introduced a quibble into the North Atlantic Council by asking us to explain the difference between a "quarantine" and a "blockade," suggesting they may still have legal reservations to express. Norwegian Foreign Minister Lange has confined himself to explaining the US position and giving support only to part of the action calling for "direct negotiations between the US and the USSR (sic) The Swedish Government on October 26 announced its official position: the US quarantine was not in accord with accepted international law and Sweden reserved all rights insofar as the US measures affected Swedish shipping. Indications were that the Swedes had their eyes primarily on the position of their shipping in the Baltic, and would in fact encourage Swedish shipping to comply with US procedures. The Government statement also supported U Thant in his search for a negotiated solution. Private conversations between US diplomatic officers and officials of the Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish Governments, however, reveal a greater understanding of the US position than the public statements indicated.

Statements of private commentators indicate that Scandinavian opinion is swinging from a critical attitude toward the US action to understanding and support of the US position. The major news-

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papers have for the most part cast themselves in the role of countering criticisms of the US, pointing out the aggressive nature of Soviet policies, and warning that failure on the part of Western Europe to support the US could lead to dangerous unilateral US action in Cuba and disunity that might jeopardize defense of West Berlin. The Swedish press has shown the greatest swing; the leading Social Democratic paper under a left-wing editor continues to question whether the US Government actually has proof of the presence of Soviet offensive weapons in Cuba, but has toned down criticisms of the US while the other major papers now defend the US position. The principal Conservative paper and Liberal Dagens Nyheter, the largest paper in Scandinavia, have taken nearly identical positions; the latter has stated "it is so easy to sit here and condemn the American blockade....but the current worries might have become something more serious if Kennedy had remained inactive." Swedish public opinion, particularly that of the business world, appeared favorable to the US stand. The Danish press has been more cautious in criticisms of the US from the beginning, but editorials indicated Danish editors also feel obliged to defend the US. Social Democratic Aktuellt, close to the government, typified press opinion when it maintained that the US action was of "a defensive character" and that "Kennedy's government has been exceptionally careful to avoid any step which could be described as premature." It especially praised the fact that the US immediately brought the matter before the UN. There are too few reports from Norway to analyze Norwegian opinion, but it is usually similar to that in Denmark.

Portugal

The reactions of Portuguese officials and of the controlled press are generally favorable to the policies set forth in the President's speech. Many official and news commentators, however, sounded two sour notes: 1) the action was belated; and 2) NATO solidarity, essential in the Cuban crisis, should also be created for Portugal's benefit with respect to Portuguese Africa. Reportedly some among the well-informed minority of Portuguese have confidentially expressed fear concerning the possibility of war.

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The single most important official reaction presently available is contained in instructions to the Portuguese delegation at the NAC to express an opinion that "NATO countries should state their solidarity with the measures taken by the US Government," because in "any attack on positions where the defense interests of the West are at stake," such "solidarity should be indivisible."

Spain

The day after the President's speech the Spanish Foreign Ministry issued a communique that contained faint praise and lofty generalities concerning the course of action proposed. Spain viewed "with preoccupation the progress of Soviet intervention in Cuba, with serious risks for a part of the world with which it feels so linked by historic and present ties," and understood that "peace, liberty, and respect for the juridical order are indivisible." Spanish officials, in individual declarations, have been more open in their praise for the President's message, several of them declaring that "earlier action" would have been desirable. One official in the Foreign Ministry estimated that the USSR might take action in the Berlin area but that hostilities in Cuba were "most unlikely." Lukewarm Spanish official support was succeeded on October 26, following an emergency session of the Spanish Cabinet, by the issuance of an official declaration of Spanish position on the matter. The Spaniards expressed "complete solidarity with the action of the American Government, in line with our attitude of always fighting against international communism...."

The most critical official reaction came from regime newspaperman Gomez Aparicio, who simply termed the President's course of action "too little and too late." This is in line with a tendency in the past, among Spanish officials, to criticize the US for not "rolling back the Iron Curtain" (e.g., Hungary in 1956) and to advocate quixotic action. On the other hand, in the present crisis, some Spaniards have privately indicated apprehension that war was imminent. According to one report, some Barcelona workers expressed sympathy for Cuba as a "weak underdog." Such a reaction, even if it did occur, is not of great significance in an authoritarian state like Spain.