

## **November 21, 1961**

### **Memorandum of Conversation, Private Conversations Between the President and Chancellor Adenauer, 'Germany'**

#### **Citation:**

"Memorandum of Conversation, Private Conversations Between the President and Chancellor Adenauer, 'Germany'", November 21, 1961, Wilson Center Digital Archive, NARA, RG 59, Conference Files, 1949-1972, box 268, CF 1993 Adenauer Visit Washington, 11/20-22/1961 Briefing Book and Misc (Folder 1 of 2); edited version published in excised form in U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Volume XIV, Berlin Crisis, 1961-1962 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1993), document 219. Contributed to NPIHP by Bill Burr.  
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/177747>

#### **Summary:**

The ongoing crisis over West Berlin brought Adenauer to Washington for talks on strategy, diplomacy, and contingency planning. During this discussion, Kennedy wanted to determine where the Chancellor stood on the nuclear questions, specifically whether his government would continue to observe the 1954 declaration renouncing the production of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

#### **Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

#### **Original Language:**

English

#### **Contents:**

Original Scan

SECRET

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

18382

*Unedited version*  
**Memorandum of Conversation**

Tues., Nov. 21, 1961  
DABR: a.m. to 1:00 p.m.  
President's Office  
Same as last night's meeting

Private Conversations Between the President  
SUBJECT: and Chancellor Adenauer

PARTICIPANTS:	GERMANY	UNITED STATES
	Chancellor Adenauer	President Kennedy
	Mr. Weber (interpreter)	Mrs. Lajins (interpreter)

COPIES TO:

The Chancellor opened the conversation indicating that he felt the most important thing about the agreements to be reached at the present time was that they should be as flexible as possible.

The President agreed. He felt that the question of access to Berlin is the key issue and this matter should be worked out in as much detail as possible. He felt that the experience of the Federal Republic and the people of Berlin should be helpful in working out all the necessary details on this question prior to the meeting of the Foreign Ministers in Paris.

The Chancellor made the statement that the people of Berlin had grown overly sensitive, owing to the tense situation under which they had been living for so long. If the final results of negotiations with the Soviets made for improved living conditions for the people of Berlin, along with maintenance of their freedom, then the U.S. need not fear any difficulties from the German side.

The President then indicated that there was one matter which he would like to discuss with the Chancellor. He made reference to an article by Walter Lippmann in this morning's paper and asked whether the Chancellor had, per chance, read it. The article stated that the German people have come to realize by now that it has become impossible for the West to gain the reunification of Germany in the face of Soviet opposition. The Soviet Union would always attempt to maintain East Germany as a separate entity. This

would

SECRET

SECRET

- 2 -

would increase the Soviet power position and, so Lippman stated, would cause the Soviet Union to exercise and maintain great pressure on the Federal German Government to disassociate itself from the NATO Alliance and to harmonize its policies with those of the Soviet Union for the purpose of regaining reunification thereby. For instance, by following a policy of neutrality for the ultimate purpose of reunification, Germany would help the Soviet Union in the coming decade to alienate her further and further from the West and to draw her closer to the East. This was Lippman's view and the President wanted the Chancellor's opinion on it.

The Chancellor stated that he had not read the article but that he is familiar with Lippman. He could recall the days when he used to read Mr. Lippman's articles and get excited about them. One day he had spoken to Mr. McCloy about this, who was then in Bonn, and the latter had told him not to worry about Lippman's prophecies because they always proved false. The Chancellor wanted to assure the President that he shared Mr. McCloy's evaluation and felt, moreover, that the article in today's paper was utter nonsense.

The President replied that he had had the occasion to discuss Lippman with Mr. McCloy earlier today, and Mr. McCloy had referred to a Lippman quotation of 1936, in which he had stated that Roosevelt would not be re-elected, or something of that sort. Of course, he had been proved wrong and since that time Mr. McCloy no longer believed in Lippman's prophecies. The President added that Mr. Lippman might at some time perhaps have written something about Mr. McCloy which the latter had not liked.

The Chancellor replied that he would wager his head that Lippman's prophecy was false.

The President then tried to get the Chancellor's reaction, quite aside from the Lippman article, to the possibility of German rapprochement with the Soviet Union for the purpose of reunification and the degree of pull the Soviet Union might be able to exert on Western Germany in this respect.

The Chancellor stated that he was convinced the President need have no fears of any such eventuality or possibility. The 53 million Western Germans did not want to become enslaved nor did they want to join the 16 million East Germans in slavery. They desired freedom. Of this, the Chancellor was absolutely sure.

The President then asked the Chancellor whether this meant that conditions were different now than they had been at the time of the Rapallo Treaty.

The Chancellor

SECRET

SECRET

- 3 -

The Chancellor stated emphatically that they were completely different. He continued that perhaps shortly after the 1945 collapse there might have been some such thoughts in the minds of some. But the establishment of the Chancellor's party, the biggest party in Germany, had been precisely for the purpose of avoiding Soviet slavery. The Chancellor felt absolutely sure that there was no danger of any pro-Eastern movement in Germany in the years to come. The big decision of whether to join the East or the West had been taken in the Bundestag in November 1949. At that time, the only dissenting element had been Schumacher and his Social Democrats. All others had seen eye to eye with the Chancellor. Even the trade unions had agreed with him. Schumacher was a nationalist, who had wanted a bigger Germany and who had other aspirations along those lines, and he had forced his Party to voice dissent with the decision taken at that time. However, there was now no further chance of such adverse developments. Since 1945, the Chancellor stated, more than 3 million refugees had fled to Western Germany from the Soviet Zone. These refugees were in the best position to spread the word about what conditions in the East Zone were really like.

The President mentioned that he and the Chancellor had wished to discuss nuclear matters further and that he thought this might best be done after this afternoon's discussions which were designed to set forth the comparative strategic positions of US and the Soviet Union. There were several other matters, however, which he wished to discuss with the Chancellor. One of these was the problem of nuclear testing. The US was now engaged in analyzing the results of the Soviet tests, which had turned out to have much greater military significance for the Soviets than the West had originally anticipated. This would be particularly true if the Soviets had actually achieved progress in increasing yield compared to weight. In any event, the US is continuing to analyze the results and this may well mean that the US will have to resume nuclear testing also. The President had been talking to the British about the possible location of the tests, if resumed. Our previous testing had been done in the Pacific Ocean at Eniwetok which is a Trust Territory of ours, and we could probably hold further tests there. We realize, of course, that this will expose us to a great deal of criticism within the UN for utilizing Trust Territory for this purpose. The President had therefore approached Prime Minister Macmillan and asked for permission to hold the tests at Christmas Island, which was a British possession. Since public opinion in Britain was very much opposed to the resumption of nuclear testing, the Prime Minister was very reluctant to grant such permission unless it were absolutely necessary to resume testing. The President stated that the need for resuming testing was, of course, a matter of opinion and Britain and the US might well view this matter differently. The President hoped that within a matter of weeks we would know whether we could use Christmas Island or not. If not, we would have to return to Eniwetok. If we resume

testing

SECRET

SECRET

- 4 -

testing, the tests would most likely begin in March and would run for several months. All in all we would not contemplate exploding more than 10 megatons altogether as opposed to the more than 100 megatons the Soviets had exploded.

The Chancellor stated that he was convinced that the Soviets had continued their nuclear tests all during the period of supposed cessation. He felt it indispensable that the US resume and continue to test also or else lag behind the Soviets in nuclear achievements.

The President agreed that it was quite certain that the Soviets had continued large-scale laboratory tests all the while, since those were easy for the Soviet Union to conduct. Then he stated, however, that there was a point beyond which one did not need to go. There was no point in blowing up a country twice if you can blow it up once. The US at this stage was interested in smaller scale testing, for instance, in order to test the effect of nuclear explosions on radar and the like.

The Chancellor agreed that this was absolutely necessary and an actual must for the US. He had no doubt about that.

The President reiterated his hope to be able to use Christmas Island.

The Chancellor was a bit doubtful, since he realized that Mr. Macmillan would like to stay out of trouble at home.

The President understood Macmillan's position, especially in view of the Labor Party's stand. He then inquired about the Chancellor's opinion on the desirability of Western Germany continuing to adhere to the declaration that the Federal Republic renounce experimenting with nuclear, biological and chemical weapons--how did the Chancellor feel about this?

The Chancellor pointed out that he was the one who had made this declaration. He had done so at a conference in London, at which time he had said that Germany renounced the production of ABC weapons. The occasion had been the establishment of the Western European Union. After he had made this statement, Mr. Dulles had come up to him and said that this declaration was of course valid only as long as circumstances remain unchanged. Nevertheless, the Chancellor, said, Germany had not undertaken anything in this respect as yet.

The President expressed the opinion that as long as the NATO organization existed as presently constituted, and as long as the US had its weapons stationed in Western Germany with agreement on how and when these were to be used in the defense of Europe and West Germany, he felt that it was highly

desirable

SECRET

SECRET

- 5 -

desirable for conditions to continue as stated in the Chancellor's declaration. He feared that if Western Germany were to begin nuclear experimentation, the danger of war would sharply increase without providing additional security compared to what we have at present.

The Chancellor stated that Germany was not considering any nuclear experimentation.

The President then made reference to a recent speech of his in Ottawa, in which he had spoken about the US turning over Polaris submarines to NATO. The purpose of this had been to lessen the feeling which he felt existed in Europe that each individual NATO country ought to begin to develop its own nuclear capacity. The President wanted to know the Chancellor's opinion on whether this proposal had been helpful in easing the pressure existing in Europe for the development of unilateral nuclear capacities.

The Chancellor stated that he was convinced that it had achieved its purpose, but there was one question he wished to discuss with the President. It was a purely military one, namely: can the President of the US be reached at any time? This was a point made by General Heusinger, who had indicated how very decisive even one hour could be in nuclear warfare. This concern had resulted in the proposal made by General Norstad to the Eisenhower Administration, but it had not been taken up by the Eisenhower Administration any more. This was, in other words, a purely military concern which the Chancellor was in no position to judge. But he felt that he had to rely on the judgement of his military experts and their evaluation of possible developments along these lines.

The President inquired what proposal the Chancellor had reference to.

The Chancellor answered, the NATO Fire Brigade.

The President then indicated that 50% of SAC is even now on 15 minute alert and some of SAC is in the air 24 hours a day. When he is in the White House, the President can be reached at all times, when he leaves the White House there is two-way radio connection every two minutes, and there is two-way connection from the air. The President's various residences have a direct telephone line to the White House and to SAC. The requirements of our own national defense, the President stated, do not permit him to be further than two minutes away at any time. The President then stated that he does not know what the telephone connection between Bonn and Washington is. In theory at least, there is direct telephone between London and Washington and Paris and Washington. If no such connection exists with Bonn, it would be

well if

SECRET

SECRET

- 6 -

well if such were established, so that communication can be established within seconds.

(The next few minutes of transcript strike out at President's request.)

The Chancellor then told about an interesting case which had come to his attention very recently in Germany. Before one of the high courts of Germany a case is pending now, involving a Russian who killed a leading Ukrainian refugee in Germany by order of the Soviets. He used an entirely new method of killing the man, so that at first it was believed the victim had succumbed to a heart attack. No weapon had been used. After the murder the Russian had returned to the Soviet Union and had received a high decoration for his deed. Later he became fearful of his life and had returned to Germany, given himself up to the police, and was now in the hands of the court. The Chancellor cited this example in order to prove his theory that the Soviets were capable of any crime and he warned the President to be extremely careful. The President asked whether anyone had any idea how the man was killed. By poison?

The Chancellor stated that no one seemed to know how the deed was done. All he knew was that the murderer met the victim, a former President of the Ukraine, on the steps or in the hallway of a building. He did something, perhaps on the order of an injection, and the man collapsed and immediately died. None of the doctors had been able to establish what happened.

The President inquired whether the matter had received much publicity. The Chancellor replied only during the past two or three days. The President then stated that he might ask Allen Dulles for a report on the case. Then he asked whether the Chancellor was not afraid of a Soviet attempt on his life.

The Chancellor smiled and said that he was not as important as the President of the US. But he agreed, the Soviets would no doubt be happy to do away with him. As a matter of fact, a number of attempts had been made on his life, which had been frustrated, and they had not been given much publicity. However, the Chancellor felt, if someone really wanted to kill someone, they would find a way of succeeding. He then smilingly continued that Khrushchev had recently sent him a dozen bottles of Soviet champagne, which had all been poured out. The President then made the remark that Khrushchev had told him that Russia had now discovered a way of making vodka out of natural gas. The Chancellor replied that Khrushchev preferred to drink brandy.

In a more serious vein, the President then pointed out that the extraordinary thing about Khrushchev is his compulsion to feel that everything he has is better than everybody else's. No matter what one tells him, he

comes

SECRET

SECRET

- 7 -

comes up with something better. He has a purely compulsive need for recognition. The President didn't know whether this was a personal or national characteristic.

In reply the Chancellor made reference to a book which recently appeared in Germany by a man called Mahmert. The book is entitled The Soviet Man. It shows how by careful processes of control and orientation the Soviet Union has succeeded in forming the mentality and reactions of the people to such an extent that there now is what might be termed a "Soviet man," who believes that everything he has is better than what the others have. The Chancellor pointed out that a similar thing was achieved by the Nazis in their day with reference to a part of the German population. One should not lose sight of the fact that Khrushchev had achieved a fabulous career which, to some extent, had resulted in a degree of megalomania in him. Naturally, one should not believe everything Khrushchev claims. As an example, the Chancellor recalled how Khrushchev told him that the Western world is definitely doomed, and the Chancellor had laughed in his face. To be sure, Khrushchev was a peculiar mixture. The President interjected at this point: a mixture of inferiority and superiority.

Then the President asked for the Chancellor's opinion on how much pressure there is in Germany to change the Chancellor's stand on the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

The Chancellor stated that there was none.

(The next ten minutes or so were stricken from the record at the President's request.)

Coming back to the discussion of possible German pressure to produce nuclear weapons, the Chancellor told of some remarks the German Defense Minister had made to him recently. The Germans have been told repeatedly by the US that there are nuclear war heads in Germany, but they have been shown none. The French don't want any, but the Germans are ready to receive them and have fulfilled the requirements for storage facilities, etc., in that connection. The Chancellor hoped that the President would make clear to the Defense Minister what along these lines is actually available in Western Germany. He would greatly appreciate this, because it would greatly strengthen his hand to know.

The President promised that he would make sure that Mr. McNamara would tell the Chancellor and Mr. Strauss what was available in Western Germany at the present time and what further intentions there were along these lines.

The Chancellor

SECRET

SECRET

- 8 -

The Chancellor then indicated that Minister Strauss had told him that Israel would soon get the bomb.

The President stated that he knew that Israel had made progress and had established a nuclear center with the help of France. This center had been subjected to inspection by two American scientists, and the US would insist on further periodic inspections. While the President thought that it might be possible to make a bomb in the Israel center, he felt it would be difficult, and there were definite limitations on what could be done there. But, of course, there was no doubt that Israel was acquiring know-how in this matter.

(The rest of the transcript was stricken at the President's request.)

Prior to going to lunch the President invited the Chancellor to come upstairs to meet Mrs. Kennedy.

SECRET