

→ Doc 6. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between the Under Secretary of State (Ball) and the Representative to the United Nations (Stevenson)<sup>1</sup>.

*Foreign Relations of the USA, 1961-63, volume XI, pp. 193-195.*  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v11/d66>

October 24, 1962, 11:45 p.m.

Ball—We've got another idea that I would like to try out on you. Do you think there is any chance that U Thant would be willing to send Mr. K a [letter?]. Let me bring you up to date. We've had a message from K in which he says in effect that he can't give instructions to his ships to abide by the blockade and that if we violate these rules, that will be our fault and they will be forced to take measures that they deem necessary and adequate to protect their rights, and they have what's necessary to do that. Implications being knowing that there may be a submarine or two in the waters, that could be an attempt to torpedo one of our ships. Would U Thant under all the circumstances knowing the possibility of a confrontation tomorrow be prepared to send a message to K along the lines that he is very concerned about possibility of a confrontation in connection with this quarantine, and that he asked K to hold his ships away from Cuban waters on the condition that we will not molest them while there is a discussion of the modalities of a possible negotiation.

Stevenson—Yes, I think he might do something like this.

Ball—If we could get something out like that tonight, I think we would hold off, because all we've got is a tanker coming through. We've just given instructions not to touch the thing tonight. We can buy a day or two here and see how it goes.

Stevenson—I think it would be a lot more helpful for me in trying to get U Thant to do this if I could have a copy of the message that we have from K.

Ball—I can give you. It's a garbled message, and it hasn't been cleaned up yet.

Stevenson—Well, if you could put on the wire to me, so that I would have it first thing in the morning a substantial text of it.

Ball—I think it would have to be done tonight if we're going to do it because we've got a time dislocation and things are moving so swiftly. Is there a chance of getting hold of Thant tonight.

Stevenson—He's awful hard to get when he goes home. I am afraid it will be almost impossible to do anything with him tonight.

Ball—If you could even talk to him tonight.

Stevenson—I could talk to him on the phone and tell him what the burden of this thing is and that I'm going to be around in the morning with a suggestion that he send a message to K saying that he. I don't know whether he should say that he has this word.

Ball—I don't think he needs to say that he has any word.

Stevenson—See, what he's already said is please hold off on everything.

Ball—What he can say is that he is disturbed about the possibility of a confrontation at sea under the quarantine before further action could be taken toward trying to get this into political channels and he would therefore like an agreement from K that he will hold his ships off on the condition, away from Cuban waters, we won't molest them while the discussion of modalities goes forward.

Stevenson—He says that all concerned should refrain from any actions which may aggravate the situation and bring with it the risk of war. He will say, well I've already said that.

Ball—Yes, but this is giving specific content to it in terms of what the real danger, an immediate confrontation, may be.

Stevenson—I think if he had some feeling that we were likely to present this thing in general subject or conditions, which he knows about, I think maybe he would send such a message.

Ball—This position, I don't want to misrepresent the President on it, but this position that I have from him is that we could hold off for a while while there is some discussions on the modalities of the thing if they will hold their ships away while we do that.

Stevenson—As I understand it, are there any ships nearby?

Ball—There is a ship which was going to be challenged at 2 o'clock tomorrow morning, which is just about 2-1/2 hours from now. We have got that held off.

Stevenson—That was a tanker?

Ball—Yes, and we can continue to hold that one off until we can see if something like this would work.

Stevenson—Would we stop it anyway?

Ball—Yes, we were going to stop it.

Stevenson—Although it was not carrying—

Ball—That is on the theory that we stop everything and challenge it and find out what's on board.

Stevenson—Let me call him. I think he may have trouble getting this message off tonight.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: Department of State, Ball Papers: Lot 74 D 272, Telcons—Cuba. No classification marking. Ball was in Washington; Stevenson was in New York.

Ball—You know, there is a little flexibility in this because we are challenging these ships 5 hundred miles out; we could outrun most of them and we could challenge them 200 miles out if necessary.

Stevenson—What's next ... .

Ball—I'm not very clear just what comes how soon. But we could adjust that. We don't want to let ships go through because this discredits our firmness of attention. What I think, if we could get an agreement from the Russians to hold their ships off while we talk about this, the modalities.

Stevenson—For a couple of days?

Ball—Yes, I think it would be that long probably before we get something settled. We won't take any action as long as their ships are held off, that way we avoid a confrontation until we can see if we can get the modalities with negotiation.

Stevenson—He has diverted the armed ships?

Ball—Yes.

Stevenson—Let me call him and see what I get.