

the central bone structure of the alliance. I think this is a different kind of problem that we have to think very hard about.

Now, I think that, as far as I'm concerned, I would have to say to you that if we enter upon this path of challenging the Soviets, the Soviets who themselves have embarked upon this fantastically dangerous course, that no one can surely foresee the outcome.

I was prepared to say when I came over here, before when I got this information, that even the 50-sortie strike would very probably move by specific steps into much more general action, at least as far as Cuba is concerned, and possibly in other situations.

Now, there is another fact, Mr. President, that bothers me considerably. I think the American people will willingly undertake great danger and, if necessary, great suffering, if they have a deep feeling that we've done everything that was reasonably possible to determine whether this trip was necessary. Also that they have a clear conscience and a good theory of the case.

The first point, whether this trip is necessary. We all, of course, remember the guns of August where certain events brought about a general situation in which at the time none of the governments involved really wanted.²⁴ And this precedent, I think, is something that is pretty important.

We had a clear conscience in World War II, the Pearl Harbor attack up against the background of Hitler's conduct resolved that problem. In the case of Korea, we had an organized large-scale aggression from North Korea, and we were doing it as part of a general United Nations commitment. Even with that start, the Korean aspect of it—the Korean war—got out of control as far as the general support of the American people were concerned, before it was over.

Now, these considerations that I've just mentioned would militate in favor of a consultation with Khrushchev and an implication that we will act because, in the first instance, there is the possibility, only a possibility, that Mr. Khrushchev might realize that he's got to back down on this. We can't be . . . I have no reason to expect that. This looks like a very serious and major commitment on his part. But at least it will take that point out of the way for the historical record, and just might have in it the seeds of prevention of a great conflict.

24. Rusk was referring to events that preceded and immediately followed the outbreak of World War I in 1914, using the title of a well-known book recently published about this episode, *The Guns of August*, by Barbara Tuchman.