

November 5, 1962

Memorandum of Conversation between Castro and Mikoyan

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Summary:

Mikoyan, Castro and the Cuban leadership further discuss the Soviet Union's lack of regard for the Cubans during the missile crisis and the nature of UN inspections.

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

A.I. MIKOYAN with Fidel CASTRO, Osvaldo DORTICOS, Raul CASTRO, Ernesto GUEVARA and Carlos Rafael RODRIGUEZ

5 November 1962

A conversation between A.I. Mikoyan and the same composition of the Cuban leadership, as on the previous occasion, took place on 5 November, at the Presidential palace. The conversation lasted 2 hours 30 minutes.

During the previous meeting F. Castro asked comrade Mikoyan a question which showed his doubts as if we had not given him all the messages from N.S. Khrushchev to president Kennedy. He asked how the statement of Kennedy of 27 October could be explained, insofar as there was already a reference to our consent to dismantle ground launchers for special equipment.

Comrade Mikoyan answered Castro that all confidential letters from N.S. Khrushchev had been given to the Cuban comrades and the open messages are known to them from the media. No other letters have been sent from N.S. Khrushchev to Kennedy, said Mikoyan.

In order to render the trend of developments more precisely, A.I. MIKOYAN suggested, to answer that question during consecutive conversation, that is on 5 November, after looking through the whole correspondence on this issue once more.

In the conversation [on 5 November], A.I. MIKOYAN said that the correspondence between N.S. Khrushchev and Kennedy had been looked through again, and the motives, which had prompted Kennedy to refer to our consent about the dismantling of the missiles, had been determined. You are aware of the content of all the messages from N.S. Khrushchev to Kennedy and I would like to say that Kennedy in his letter of 27 October, which attracted your attention, formally is answering the confidential message of N.S. Khrushchev of 26/X [26 October], but in essence he is simultaneously responding to Khrushchev's letter of 27/X [27 October], which had been published even before the aforementioned response from Kennedy and in which we had raised the question of dismantling the ground launchers in Cuba under the condition of liquidating the American base in Turkey. You have been given all the correspondence between N.S. Khrushchev and Kennedy except for one confidential message from Kennedy of 25 October, which is not connected to the issue of dismantling and only accuses us of denying the fact of the construction of ground launchers for special equipment in Cuba. We can read it out and then give you the translation. (The letter is read out.)

FIDEL CASTRO. Thank you. Now this issue is clear to me.

A.I. MIKOYAN. I'll continue. Having received that message we answered it on 26 October through confidential channels. In that letter there were no concrete proposals yet. We were speaking only about the necessity to eliminate the threat of an assault against Cuba. The letter included only the idea of seeking an agreement. We didn't receive an answer from Kennedy on the 26th. There was no answer on the morning of 27 October either. We came to the conclusion that the Americans were actively preparing for an attack, but were preferring not to disclose their plans before world public opinion. Therefore, in order to tie the Americans' hands, we decided to send Kennedy a new letter and publish it in the press. That was the letter of 27 October, known to you, where the demand for the liquidation of the American bases in Turkey was advanced. We published this letter very quickly, even before the American ambassador received its text. Our objective was to forestall the Americans

and frustrate their plans. Only then we received a message from Kennedy. It was sent on the evening of 27 October. We received it on 28 October toward the morning (the time difference [between Washington and Moscow--ed.] must be taken into consideration). This letter by its form seemed to be an answer to the confidential message from N.S. Khrushchev of 26 October, but in effect it was the response to the letter of 27 October. On 28 October in the morning, having received the letter from comrade Fidel Castro, and having at our disposal other data about preparations for an attack literally in the nearest hours, N.S. Khrushchev made an open radio statement that the Soviet officers had received orders to dismantle and evacuate the strategic missiles. As you understand, there was no time for consultations with the Cuban government. By publishing the messages we had the possibility to send them quickly to Cuba, but we could not wait for an answer because it would take a lot of time to encode, decipher, translate, and transmit them.

Acting in this way, we were proceeding from our conviction that the most important objective in that situation was to prevent an attack against Cuba. I would like to underline that our proposals to dismantle the strategic missiles and to liquidate the American bases in Turkey had been advanced before receiving the letter from comrade Fidel Castro of 27 October. The order for the dismantling of the strategic missiles and their evacuation was given after we had received the letter from Kennedy of 27 October and the letter from Fidel Castro. In our message of 28 October, as you have noted, the demand for the liquidation of bases in Turkey was no longer suggested. We did this because we were afraid that in spite of our proposal of 27 October the American imperialists could assault Cuba. We had nothing else to do but to work on the main task--to prevent an attack against Cuba, believing that our Cuban friends would understand the correctness of our actions, although the normal procedure of coordination had not been observed.

The question was that there were 24 hours left before an assault against Cuba. It must be taken into consideration that we had only a few [literally, "counted"--ed.] hours at our disposal and we could not act other than we did. And there are results: an attack against Cuba is prevented, the peace is preserved. However you are right that the procedure of consultations, which is possible under normal circumstances, was not followed.

F. CASTRO. I would like to respond to comrade Mikoyan.

We have listened with great attention to the information and explanations offered by comrade Mikoyan. Undoubtedly all those explanations are very valuable because they help us to understand better the course of events. We are thankful for the desire to explain everything to us, for the efforts undertaken in this regard. The arguments, that the strategic missiles after being discovered by the enemy practically lost whatever military significance or their significance becomes extremely small, also cause no doubts among us.

We are grateful for all these explanations and do understand, that the intentions of the Soviet government cannot be assessed only on the grounds of an analysis of the most recent developments, especially as the atmosphere is rapidly changing and new situations are created. The totality of adopted decisions, which became the basis for supplying strategic weapons and the signing of [the Soviet-Cuban--ed.] agreement, must be taken into consideration. It was supposed to publish that agreement after the installation of the strategic missiles and after the elections in the USA. These decisions are testimony to the firm resolution of the Soviet Union to defend Cuba. They help to understand correctly the policy of the Soviet Union. Therefore, I repeat, an analysis of the USSR position can be correct only with due regard for all the

events and decisions both before and during the crisis.

We do not doubt that if all the works on the assembly of the strategic weapons had been completed in conditions of secrecy then we would have received a strong means of deterrence against American plans for attacking our country. In this way objectives would have been achieved which are pursued both by the Soviet government and the government of the Republic of Cuba. However, we consider that the installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba was significant for the interests of the whole socialist camp. Even if we consider it to be a military advantage, it was politically and psychologically important in the struggle for the deterrence of imperialism and the prevention of its aggressive plans. Thus, the installation of the strategic missiles in Cuba was carried out not only in the interests of the defense of Cuba, but of the whole socialist camp. It was done with our complete consent.

We understood perfectly well the significance of this action and we considered it to be a correct step.

We also completely agree that war must be prevented. We do not object that the measures undertaken were in pursuit of two objectives, that is--to prevent an attack against Cuba and to avoid starting a world war. We completely agree with these aims pursued by the Soviet Union.

Misunderstanding arose in connection with the form of discussion of this issue. However, we understand that the circumstances were demanding urgent actions and the situation was abnormal. Assessing past events, we come to the conclusion that the discussion of these sharp questions could be carried out in another form. For example, the issue, which we have already discussed here, in regard to my letter in connection with the decision of the Soviet government and the publication of the Soviet government statement of 28 October. True, my letter bore no relation to issues mentioned in the messages of 26 and 27 October between the Soviet government and the USA Administration. Such a letter [from Castro to Khrushchev--ed.] pursued one objective--to inform the Soviet government about the inevitability of an assault against Cuba. There was not a word about any minor hesitation on our side. We clearly declared our resolve to fight. Besides, we didn't say that we were expecting an invasion. We wrote that it was possible, but not so likely. In our opinion, more probable was an air attack with the sole aim of destroying the strategic weapons in Cuba. The basis of the Soviet government decision of 28 October had already been reflected in the message to Kennedy of 26 October and clearly manifested itself in the letter from N.S. Khrushchev to Kennedy of 27 October. In those two documents there is the real basis for the decision announced in the letter of 28 October. So, Kennedy's letter of 27 October meant acceptance of proposals by N.S. Khrushchev of 26 October consisting of his consent to evacuate from Cuba not only strategic armaments, but all the weapons if the USA stops threatening Cuba with an attack. Because the threat on the part of the USA had been the only reason that forced Cuba to arm itself. When Kennedy accepted this proposal (we didn't know that he was accepting it), the conditions were created to develop the Soviet proposals and prepare a declaration regarding the agreement of the parties. The USA could have been told that the USSR was ready to dismantle the equipment but would like to discuss it with the Cuban government. In our opinion the issue should have been solved in this way instead of giving immediately an order to evacuate the strategic weapons. Such a procedure would have lessened international tension and secured the possibility to discuss the issue with the Americans in more favorable conditions. In this way it could have been possible not only to achieve a lessening of international tension and to discuss the issue in better conditions, but also to achieve the signing of a declaration.

It is only a simple analysis of previous events that does not have special importance right now.

Nowadays it is important for us to know what to do under the new conditions. In what way shall we seek to achieve our main goals and at the same time fight to prevent an

aggression and preserve peace. Certainly, if in due course we manage to secure a lasting peace, then we'll have an opportunity to better assess the undertaken steps in light of new facts. Future results of our struggle will demonstrate the importance of today's events. Certainly, only a little bit in this struggle depends on us personally.

We are very grateful for all the explanations given to us by comrade Mikoyan, for all the efforts undertaken by him in order to make us understand the recent events. We take into consideration the special conditions under which it was necessary to act. We have no doubts regarding the friendly character of our relations, based on common principles. Our respect for the Soviet Union is unshakeable. We know that it respects our sovereignty and is ready to defend us from an aggression on the part of imperialism. Therefore, the most important thing now is to determine our joint steps. I would like to assure you, comrade Mikoyan, of our complete trust.

A.I. MIKOYAN. I'm deeply satisfied by the statement of comrade Fidel Castro. We have always been confident of our sincere friendship which nothing can disrupt. I'll transmit word by word your statement to the CC CPSU and I'm sure that it will produce gladness on the part of the Central Committee.

I would like to make a small explanation, very briefly.

I agree completely with the assessment, made by comrade Fidel Castro of his own letter. He is interpreting it correctly. It's a legitimate question raised by him--could we have made another decision instead of [sending] instructions for dismantling the strategic weapons[?] But we had been informed that an attack against Cuba would begin within the next few hours. Perhaps it was really intended to deliver a blow first of all against the strategic missile sites, but it would be followed by a strike against Cuba. We had to act resolutely in order to frustrate the plan of attack on Cuba. We realize that by doing this we had to sacrifice the necessity of consultations with the Cuban government.

Regarding comrade Fidel Castro's opinion that in the letter from N.S. Khrushchev to Kennedy of 26 October, there was a promise to withdraw from Cuba all the weapons and all military specialists. The Americans did not demand from us such a step. The issue was the offensive weapons. Perhaps comrade Fidel Castro made such a conclusion on the basis of the phrase where a withdrawal of technical specialists was mentioned. But this implied specialists who operate strategic missiles. The fact that it regarded only them is confirmed by all the letters, by the totality of their context. They were about offensive weapons only.

FIDEL CASTRO confirms, that his understanding was just the same.

A.I. MIKOYAN. It is no coincidence that in his answer to this letter Kennedy does not raise the question of removing from Cuba all the weapons. If such a proposal had been present in our letter, Kennedy would undoubtedly have taken advantage of it. Therefore the opinion, outlined by comrade Fidel Castro regarding this part, is incorrect. There is nothing of the kind in the letters of 27 and 28 October.

I would like to mention, that the Americans are trying to broaden the list of weapons for evacuation. Such attempts have already been made, but we will not allow them to do so. On our part, we gave our consent only to withdraw strategic weapons. When I was speaking to McCloy he told me with a smile that it would be good if we removed from Cuba the anti-aircraft missiles, too. But those are defensive weapons, not offensive.

Half an hour before my departure from New York, those pilferers (now we are speaking about Stevenson) sent a letter to comrade Kuznetsov, saying that they supposedly had forgotten to raise questions about some kinds of weapons. They were referring to the IL-28 bombers and "Komar" ["Mosquito"] patrol boats. Stevenson wrote that it would be necessary to discuss that issue. Immediately I told comrade Kuznetsov that this issue was not a subject for discussion. These bombers have low speed and low altitude limits. Nor can the "Komar" patrol boats operate at great distance. Therefore those weapons are clearly defensive.

In the first Kennedy message [possibly an allusion to Kennedy's October 22 speech, which included a reference to the bombers--ed.] the American administration spoke about the bombers, later this question fell away. Now they want to raise again this question. We have resolutely rejected such a discussion. Comrade Kuznetsov received corresponding instructions from Moscow. This is nothing more than attempts to complicate the whole matter in order to create once again a tense atmosphere and dangerous situation.

Let me specify the list sent by Stevenson. Here it is. There are mentioned: bombers, "Komar" patrol boats, "air-to-surface" bombs and missiles, "sea-to-surface" and "surface-to-surface" projectiles [cruise missiles--ed.]. The Americans are impertinently continuing their attempts to complicate the situation.

It is very important to have a document of agreement, which one can use at the UN. It can be carried through the UN with the help of U Thant. But for that it is necessary to have evidence proving the dismantling and evacuation of weapons. Then the situation would improve. The earlier it is done, the more advantageous it will be for us.

For the Americans it is better to postpone the solution of this question. In this case they have the possibility to continue the quarantine and other aggressive actions. We would rather help U Thant in order to give him a chance to report to the UN that the Soviet side has carried out the dismantling and evacuation of offensive weapons from Cuba. We should talk about it.

We have resolutely rejected the American demand for aerial inspection. Nevertheless, with the help of air photography the Americans collected data that the dismantling of the strategic weapons had concluded and published that information by themselves. U Thant could have informed the UN, but he needs evidence, proving the evacuation of the weapons. UN representatives must see how the evacuation is carried out and inform U Thant on the results of their observation mission. Then the situation will become significantly simpler. The issue will be sent to the Security Council where the decisions are taken not only by the USA representatives.

I'm not insisting that you answer this question right now. Maybe you can do it tomorrow. If it would be acceptable for you, why, for example, not give consent for U Thant's representatives to verify how the weapons' loading onto Soviet ships is carried out. You know that different international commissions or representatives of foreign powers often operate at sea ports and that fact does not limit the sovereignty of the host country in the slightest measure. Such a possibility would allow U Thant to consider accomplished the decision to withdraw the strategic missiles from Cuba. These observers would be given the opportunity to visit Soviet ships, anchored at the ports, to verify the fact of the armaments' removal. From my point of view that would not represent any infringement of national sovereignty.

Socialist countries, insofar as we are marxist-leninists, have to find a way of securing a unity of actions even in those cases when our opinions are somewhat different. Moreover, I believe, it would be taken into consideration that there are Soviet troops on Cuban territory. Therefore, our cooperation in the fight against imperialism must

be especially effective. You may respond to this proposal [of mine] maybe not today, but tomorrow; in general, it seems to me that it is a minimum concession which would allow U Thant to present a report to the Security Council about the evacuation of the missiles. In the contrary case we will inevitably hear at the Security Council that the Cubans do not permit verification to be conducted, and that the Russians are only talking about control. But if the Security Council is given the opportunity to establish compliance of the promise of N.S. Khrushchev, then the quarantine may be lifted. The stage of diplomatic negotiations will begin. Roughly such an appeal was put forth by U Thant during his conversation with me. I ask you to discuss this proposal. I believe that the solution of this problem will help create definite conditions to settle the crisis situation which had developed in the Caribbean sea.

The Americans would like to delay the solution of this issue. Dragging it out gives them the opportunity to prolong the term of the quarantine. We told the Americans that we would be able to evacuate the weapons in 10 days. They are not in a hurry and say that it could take even a month. It is advantageous for the USA to preserve tension in this area. And we are standing for a lessening of tension, in order to solve this question at the Security Council. In our view, it's difficult for the Security Council to discuss this issue until the end of the USA elections. The elections will be held tomorrow and so it would be appropriate to think about its solution. It's very important to keep U Thant on our side. It seemed to me that he was very satisfied by his meeting with comrade Fidel Castro. But if we delay the solution, the Americans will seize the opportunity for their benefit.

C.R. RODRIGUEZ. So, if I understand you correctly, the question is about verification of loading at the Cuban ports as a minimum demand and the Americans would consider such a control a sufficient guarantee? Won't they later demand an on-site verification, in the forests? I'm afraid if we go along such route we can even reach an inspection on site, where the strategic missiles previously have been located.

A.I. MIKOYAN. The imperialists are not the point. Such a verification is necessary for us. If the imperialists protest we can send them to hell. But it's necessary to take into consideration that the support of U Thant is very important for us, and the imperialists can say what they want. We'll send them to hell, the more so as they have already been convinced of the dismantling of the missiles with the help of air photography. If we manage to come to an agreement over verifications on ships, then the UN representatives will be able to control the process of loading also. We will not accept any more. Indeed, appetite comes with eating, but we will resolutely oppose such a rise of appetite, we'll do a step forward and that's enough for them. We rejected inspection, we didn't allow surface verification, we won't permit control over dismantling. But in order to strengthen our position at the UN, the representatives of this organization should be given the facts. Otherwise it will be difficult to restrain revisionists at the Security Council. But if the evacuation of weapons would be carried out and verified, then we'll obtain the lifting of the quarantine. I think, we should not put the sign of equality between the UN and the American imperialists. The matter is that the UN cannot exceed the limits settled by the two messages. If we manage to receive support from the UN, then the Americans would go to hell. We promised to allow verification of the evacuation. That verification can be organized by means of the UN. We didn't pledge anything else. But if we do not fulfill our promise, the situation may become considerably complicated. Perhaps you will discuss this issue without our presence and at the same time consider the possibilities of our further joint actions. If you find the opportunity we can meet today. However the meeting can be held tomorrow.

F. CASTRO. And what will the inspection look like?

A.I. MIKOYAN. Representatives of U Thant will arrive at the port of loading. Currently there are 4-5 ships assigned for that purpose. Then they'll climb on board. They will be shown the cargo and given corresponding information. In this way they will be

convinced that we are fulfilling our promise and will go away. That is my understanding of this form of verification. If we come to an agreement regarding this proposal, I'll inform our representative to the UN and then we'll have the opportunity to settle the technique and procedure of this work.

I would be able to inform Moscow that we agreed to give both U Thant and the UN information necessary to declare the verification to be carried out.

F. CASTRO. Isn't it possible to do the same on open sea?

A.I. MIKOYAN. The form of loading verification is more suitable for U Thant. It is not hurting your sovereignty either, because the verification will be carried out not on your territory, but aboard our ship.

F. CASTRO. I understand very well the interest in keeping U Thant on our side. But such an inspection will undoubtedly have a painful effect on the moral condition of our people. The Americans are insisting that the agreement on verification has been achieved by the exchange of messages. And, indeed, in the letter from Khrushchev to Kennedy of 28 October, it is said: "As I informed you in the letter of 27 October, we are prepared to reach agreement to enable United Nations representatives to verify the dismantling of these means."

Therefore it implies representatives of the Security Council for the mission of verification of dismantling on the site.

In the message of N.S. Khrushchev it is said, that consent would obviously be needed on the part of the governments of Cuba and Turkey in order to organize control of compliance of undertaken commitments. That means that N.S. Khrushchev in his letter of 28 October, is making reference to the message of the 27th. The necessity of obtaining consent on the part of Cuba is mentioned there, but that is not a responsibility of the Soviet Union, insofar as the USSR has already warned in the letter of 27 October, that the permission of the Cuban government is needed.

Comrade Mikoyan is saying that the imperialists could be sent to hell.

On 23 October I received a very clear letter where the precise position of the Soviet government is explained. Kennedy's statement is characterized therein as an unprecedented interference into internal affairs, as a violation of international law and as a provocative act. The Republic of Cuba, like all sovereign states, has the right to reject control and decide by itself what kinds of weapons it requires. No sovereign state must give an account of such actions. These concepts of the letter of 23 October are very precise and correctly reflected our position.

One more question. The formula that foresees UN observers in Cuba, in the USA, Guatemala and other countries seems to me a more reasonable verification. A unilateral inspection would affect monstrously the moral spirit of our people. We made big concessions. The American imperialists are carrying out aerial photography freely and we do not impede them due to the appeal of the Soviet government. It is necessary to look for some other formula. I would like to explain to comrade Mikoyan that what I'm saying reflects the decision of the whole Cuban people. We will not give our consent for inspection. We don't want to compromise Soviet troops and endanger peace in the whole world. If our position imperils peace in the whole world, then we would rather consider the Soviet side to be free of its commitments and we would defend ourselves. Come what may. We have the right to defend our dignity.

O. DORTICOS. The statement voiced by comrade Fidel Castro reflects our common resoluteness and we consider that this issue does not deserve further discussion.

A.I. MIKOYAN. I don't understand such a sharp reaction to my proposal. What we were speaking about was not an inspection of Cuban territory, but a verification procedure in the ports. Foreign representatives can be found in any port. It does not have anything to do with aerial or surface inspection. I'm saying that not to call into question your statement, but in order to explain.

Besides the issue we have just finished discussing, we were going--according to your proposal--to talk over a plan of joint actions. We can have such a discussion not now, but at a time convenient for you.

F. CASTRO. On the basis of yesterday's meeting we came to the conclusion that the Soviet government understood the reasons for our resoluteness not to allow a verification of Cuban territory. That resoluteness is a starting-point for us. We proceeding from the same point regarding joint actions as well. It's difficult to talk about them, if we have not come to an agreement on the previous issue.

That issue is the most important from Cuba now from a political point of view. The guarantees are very problematic. It is not peace that we are speaking about. But inspection is a component of their strategy in the struggle against the Cuban revolution. The American position is weaker. The journal "Time" wrote that the dismantling was proceeding rapidly. Verification in the ports and at sea is just the same. But verification in the ports is very insulting for us from the political point of view and we cannot fulfill this demand of the USA administration.

A.I. MIKOYAN. My proposal was regarding not the Cuban territory, but only the Soviet ships, vessels are considered to be territory of that state, whom they belong to. Such a proposal I put forward on my personal behalf. Moscow did not entrust me to suggest it. Speaking frankly, I considered that insofar as such a verification did not regard Cuban territory, but Soviet ships, it could be accepted. I was saying that although we understand the Cuban position, the verification procedures were not dangerous. I don't understand your reaction to my proposal.

Our Central Committee entrusted me to explain in detail the Soviet position on all the issues that are of interest to the Cuban comrades, entrusted me neither to impose our opinion, nor pressure you in order to obtain consent for inspection of the Cuban territory.

F. CASTRO. But verification would be carried out from the Cuban territory.

A.I. MIKOYAN. No, it could be carried out only aboard the ships. For that purpose Soviet and neutral country ships could be used. The UN representatives could live and sleep aboard those steamers.

F. CASTRO. Such a verification in the ports does not differ from control on ships on open sea.

A.I. MIKOYAN. There is no doubt that a verification can be carried out on open sea too, but does not bear relation to Cuba.

O. DORTICOS. It seems to me that now we should interrupt our work. We can agree upon further meetings through Ambassador Alekseev.

Ambassador Alekseev was also present on the Soviet side.

Recorded by V. Tikhmenev

[signature]