

November 12, 1962
Telegram from Soviet Ambassador to the USA A. F. Dobrynin to USSR Foreign Ministry

Citation:

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Summary:

Dobrynin sends the results of a meeting with Robert Kennedy where the two discuss the removal of IL-28 bombers in Cuba and the lifting of the American quarantine.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Your instructions have been carried out. Robert Kennedy has familiarized himself attentively with the content of N.S. Khrushchev's confidential oral message to the President. When he got to the place that spoke of Nixon's defeat in the elections,¹ he immediately grinned, saying: "Your chairman is a real master of colorful expression that expressed the true essence of the issue. Yes, we are quite satisfied with Nixon's defeat, and in general we are not complaining about the results of the election." It was felt that this portion of the message was received with definite satisfaction.

When Robert Kennedy had familiarized himself with the whole message, he said that for the President, for domestic policy considerations, it was very important to receive the Soviet Union's firm agreement to the removal of the IL-28 planes, especially now that there were essentially no inspections being conducted in Cuba itself. The correspondence between N.S. Khrushchev and President Kennedy of 27 and 28 October implied that an agreement between our countries had been reached. But we understand the difficulties in this area that have now arisen because of Premier Fidel Castro's position, and we are not insisting on this as an unalterable and fundamental condition. But the removal of the IL-28 planes--in an atmosphere of growing criticism within the USA--is a matter of great concern to the President. Let us reach an agreement, continued Robert Kennedy, on the following points: that the Soviet Union will remove its IL-28 planes by a definite date announced in advance, and that on that same day the USA will officially lift its quarantine. All this may be announced immediately.

I answered Robert Kennedy that his proposal is entirely unacceptable for the Soviet side. I then demonstrated the unacceptability of this proposal by using the argument contained in N.S. Khrushchev's oral message that had been passed on to him. In conclusion I expressed my certainty that conveying his proposal to Moscow would prove fruitless.

Thinking a moment, Robert Kennedy said that he would like to confer with his brother the President, after which he would again contact me later the same day. I agreed.

After an hour and a half (all this happened in the evening), Robert Kennedy came to my residence. He said that now, after speaking with the President, he could formulate the American proposal in the following way:

N.S. Khrushchev and the President would reach an essential agreement that the IL-28 planes would be removed by a definite date. After such an agreement has been reached, the USA would, as early as the next day, lift any quarantine even before the removal of the planes had been completed. The Americans would of course prefer that the date agreed upon for the removal of the IL-28 planes be publicized. However, if the Soviets have any objections to the public disclosure of that date, then the President would not insist on it. For him a promise from N.S. Khrushchev would be entirely sufficient. As far as the date is concerned, it would be good if the planes were removed, let us say, within 30 days. We ask that N.S. Khrushchev be informed of this whole proposal.

Robert Kennedy was told that the President's proposal would of course be communicated to N.S. Khrushchev. As a personal opinion, however, I noted that it was unlikely that such an imminent date could be acceptable to us, all the more so since the fundamental USA obligations--guarantees of non-aggression against Cuba, and other obligations--remain, as before, unfulfilled; moreover, they themselves are pushing everything later and later. And this is happening in circumstances in which the Soviet government is sincerely fulfilling, and essentially has already fulfilled, its own obligations for the removal of the missiles. It is now the Americans' turn.

Robert Kennedy said that the time-frame he had referred to--30 days--is not in any way definitive. That time-frame had been "given to him," but he thought that there

was room for negotiation here as long as the period was not too great, and as long as N. S. Khrushchev generally found the President's proposal acceptable. I want now to make note of one more condition, Robert Kennedy continued. After such an agreement has been reached, especially if it is not publicized, it would be important for us that, even if the end of the agreed-upon period for the removal of the IL-28 planes has not yet been reached, at least some planes will have been disassembled by this time, or if they have just been taken out of containers, that a portion of them be returned to their containers. We need all of this, Robert Kennedy remarked, so that we can satisfy our domestic public opinion by reporting that there has been some progress in the removal of the IL-28 planes. This is necessary, since even [West German Chancellor Konrad] Adenauer is starting now to criticize us publicly for trusting the word of the Soviet Union without inspections in Cuban territory--not to mention the Cuban émigrés in certain republics [states--ed.] who are making similar accusations. But the President, Robert Kennedy emphasized, has faith in N. S. Khrushchev's word, and is willing to lift the quarantine immediately if the agreement mentioned above can be reached, even though we really do not have any guarantees with regard to inspections in Cuban territory.

I answered Robert Kennedy that it would be much better if Adenauer kept his nose out of everyone else's business, and if the USA government told him so directly (here Robert Kennedy energetically nodded his head in a gesture of agreement). I then said that in the proposal that he had advanced, the issue is once again raised of a full elimination of all the tension that has existed, that is, beyond the immediate lifting of the blockade, the obligations of all the parties should be fixed in appropriate UN documents, and non-aggression against Cuba and a strict observation of its sovereignty should be guaranteed; there would also be UN posts established in the countries of the Caribbean region as guarantees against unexpected actions harming another state.

Robert Kennedy said that he believed that an agreement could be reached on all this points. It is important, from the point of view of American public opinion, to have some inspection conducted in Cuba, even in the form of several UN posts. Castro will scarcely go for this unless a similar procedure is imposed on the other countries of the Caribbean basin. But is possible to resolve this too. Robert Kennedy mentioned, as an alternative to this, the plan put forth by Brazil, but then he immediately said that this aspect of the issue was being studied by Stevenson, and that he, Robert Kennedy, could not go into details with regard to it. I can however repeat the firm assurances of the President not to invade Cuba. He authorized me once again to say this now. He was grateful to N.S. Khrushchev for the latter's clarification that the IL-28 planes are manned by Soviet rather than Cuban pilots, but nevertheless the issue of the removal of these planes remains a very important one for the President, and he asks that we consider his proposal.

Further discussion came down to a reiteration of the positions of the parties. Robert Kennedy said in conclusion that he was flying now to New York on personal business, and that he would be willing to meet with me at any time.

When he left, he glimpsed a crowd of dancing couples in the embassy's parlor. Realizing that this was a friendly welcome party arranged by the embassy community for the Bolshoi Theater troupe that had just arrived in Washington, he said that he would like to meet with the troupe. Mingling with and greeting almost all the members of the troupe, he delivered a welcome speech in which he said that the President was preparing to attend their premier the following evening. At the end, he kissed Maya Plisetskaya when he found out that he and she had been born in the same year, month, and day, and said they would celebrate their birthdays in a week. None of this needs to be mentioned especially, but all in all the behavior of Robert Kennedy, who is ordinarily quite a reserved and glum man, reflects to some degree the calmer and more normal mood in the White House after the tense days that shook Washington, even though this fact is concealed in various ways by American

propaganda.

12.XI.62 A. DOBRYNIN

1. Nixon had been defeated by his Democratic rival in the California gubernatorial elections, upon which he announced his retirement from politics. The relevant passage in Khrushchev's 12 November 1962 message read: "Now the elections in your country, Mr. President, are over. You made a statement that you were very pleased with the results of these elections. They, the elections, indeed, were in your favor. The success does not upset us either--though that is of course your internal affair. You managed to pin your political rival, Mr. Nixon, to the mat. This did not draw tears from our eyes either...." See James A. Nathan, ed., *The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 290.

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