

October 24, 1962
Telegram from Soviet Ambassador to the USA
Dobrynin to the USSR MFA

Citation:

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Summary:

Dobrynin relays the results of a meeting with R. Kennedy during which R. Kennedy is outraged at the "deception" of the Soviet Union by putting long-range missiles in Cuba.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

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CIPHERED TELEGRAM

Late in the evening of October 23, R. Kennedy came to visit me. He was in an obviously excited condition and his speech was rich in repetitions and digressions. R. Kennedy said approximately the following.

I came on my own personal initiative without any assignment from the President. I considered it necessary to do this in order to clarify what exactly led to the current, extremely serious development of events. Most important is the fact that the personal relations between the President and the Soviet premier have suffered heavy damage. President Kennedy feels deceived and these feelings found their own reflection in his appeal to the American people.

From the very beginning, continued R. Kennedy, the Soviet side--N.S. Khrushchev, the Soviet government in its pronouncements and the Soviet ambassador during confidential meetings - have stressed the defensive nature of the weapons which are being delivered to Cuba. You, for instance, said R. Kennedy to me, told me about the exclusively defensive goals of the delivery of Soviet weapons, in particular, the missile weapons, during our meeting at the beginning of September. I understood you then as saying that we were talking only about /and in the future, too/ missiles of a relatively small range of action for the defense of Cuba itself and the approaches to it, but not about long range missiles which could strike practically the entire territory of the USA. I told this to the President, who accepted it with satisfaction as the position of the Soviet government. There was a TASS declaration in the name of the Soviet government in which it was clearly stated that all military deliveries to Cuba are intended exclusively for defensive goals. The President and the government of the USA understood this as the true position of the USSR.

With even greater feelings of trust we took the corresponding declarations /public and confidential/ of the head of the Soviet government, who, despite the big disagreements and frequent aggravations in relations between our countries, the President has always trusted on a personal level. The message which had been sent by N.S. Khrushchev via the Soviet ambassador and [Kennedy adviser Theodore] Sorensen, about the fact that during the election campaign in the USA the Soviet side would not do anything to complicate the international situation and worsen relations between our countries, had made a great impression on the President.

All this led to the fact that the President believed everything which was said from the Soviet side, and in essence staked on that card his own political fate, having publicly announced to the USA, that the arms deliveries to Cuba carry a purely defensive character, although a number of Republicans have asserted to the contrary. And then the President suddenly receives trustworthy information to the effect that in Cuba, contrary to everything which had been said by the Soviet representatives, including the latest assurances, made very recently by A. A. Gromyko during his meeting with the President, there had appeared Soviet missiles with a range of action which cover almost the entire territory of the USA. Is this weapon really for the defensive purposes about which you, Mr. Ambassador, A. A. Gromyko, the Soviet government and N.S. Khrushchev had spoken?

The President felt himself deceived, and deceived intentionally. He is convinced of that even now. It was for him a great disappointment, or, speaking directly, a heavy blow to everything in which he had believed and which he had strived to preserve in personal relations with the head of the Soviet government: mutual trust in each

other's personal assurances. As a result, the reaction which had found its reflection in the President's declaration and the extremely serious current events which are connected with it and which can still lead no one knows where.

Stressing with great determination that I reject his assertions about some sort of "deception" as entirely not corresponding to reality and as presenting the actions and motives of the Soviet side in a perverted light, I asked R. Kennedy why the President - if he had some sort of doubts - had not negotiated directly and openly with A. A. Gromyko, with whom there had been a meeting just a few days ago, but rather had begun actions, the seriousness of the consequences of which for the entire world are entirely unforeseeable. Before setting off on that dangerous path, fraught with a direct military confrontation between our countries, why not use, for instance, the confidential channels which we have and appeal directly to the head of the Soviet government.

R. Kennedy said the President had decided not to address A. A. Gromyko about this for the following two reasons: first, everything which the Soviet minister had set forth had, evidently according to the instructions of the Soviet government, been expressed in very harsh tones, so a discussion with him hardly could have been of much use; second, he had once again asserted the defensive character of the deliveries of Soviet weapons, although the President at that moment knew that this is not so, that they had deceived him again. As far as the confidential channel is concerned, what sense would that have made, if on the highest level - the level of the Minister of Foreign Affairs - precisely the same is said, although the facts are directly contradictory[?] To that same point, added R. Kennedy, long ago I myself in fact received the same sort of assurances from the Soviet ambassador, however, all that subsequently turned out to be entirely not so.

- Tell me, - R. Kennedy said to me further - [do] you, as the Soviet ambassador, have from your government information about the presence now in Cuba of around half a dozen (here he corrected himself, saying that that number may not be entirely accurate, but the fact remains a fact) missiles, capable of reaching almost any point in the United States?

In my turn I asked R. Kennedy why I should believe his information, when he himself does not want to recognize or respect that which the other side is saying to him. To that same point, even the President himself in his speech in fact had spoken only about some emplacements for missiles, which they allegedly had "observed," but not about the missiles themselves.

- There, you see - R. Kennedy quickly put forth, - what would have been the point of us contacting you via the confidential channel, if, as it appears, even the Ambassador, who has, as far as we know, the full trust of his government, does not know that long-range missiles which can strike the USA, rather than defensive missiles which are capable of defending Cuba from any sort of attack on the approaches to it, have already been provided to Cuba[?] It comes out that when you and I spoke earlier, you also did not have reliable information, although the conversation was about the defensive character of those weapons deliveries, including the future deliveries to Cuba, and everything about this was passed on to the President.

I categorically responded to R. Kennedy's thoughts about the information which I had received from the government, stressing that this was exclusively within the competence of the Soviet government. Simultaneously, his thoughts of "deception" were rejected again. Further, in calm but firm tones I set forth in detail our position on the Cuban issue, taking into account the Soviet government's latest announcement on Cuba, N.S. Khrushchev's letter in response to the President, and also other speeches and conversations of N.S. Khrushchev.

I particularly stressed the circumstance that, as far as is known to me, the head of the Soviet government values the warm relations with the President. N.S. Khrushchev recently spoke about that in particular in a conversation with [U.S.] Ambassador [to Moscow Foy] Kohler. I hope that the President also maintains the same point of view, - I added. On the relationships between the heads of our governments, on which history has placed special responsibility for the fate of the world, a lot really does depend; in particular, whether there will be peace or war. The Soviet government acts only in the interests of preserving and strengthening peace and calls on the United States government to act this way too. Stressing again the basic principles of our policy on which we will insist without any compromises (in the spirit of our declaration and N.S. Khrushchev's response letter), I simultaneously expressed the hope that the USA government show prudence and refrain from taking any actions which can lead to catastrophic consequences for peace in the whole world.

R. Kennedy, after repeating what he had already said about the President's moods (around this time he cooled down a bit and spoke in calmer tones), said that the President also values his relations with N.S. Khrushchev. As far as the future course of actions is concerned, then he, R. Kennedy, can not add anything to that which had been said by the President himself, who stressed all the seriousness of the situation and understands with what sort of dangerous consequences all this may be connected, but he can not act in any other way.

I once again set forth to him our position in the above-mentioned spirit.

Saying goodbye, already at the door of the Embassy, R. Kennedy as if by the way asked what sorts of orders the captains of the Soviet ships bound for Cuba have, in light of President Kennedy's speech yesterday and the declaration which he had just signed about the inadmissibility of bringing offensive weapons to Cuba.

I answered R. Kennedy with what I knew about the instructions which had been given earlier to the captains: not to obey any unlawful demands to stop or be searched on the open sea, as a violation of international norms of freedom of navigation. This order, as far as I know, has not been changed.

R. Kennedy, having waved his hand, said: I don't know how all this will end, for we intend to stop your ships. He left right after this.

Overall, his visit left a somewhat strange impression. He had not spoken about the future and paths toward a settlement of the conflict, making instead a "psychological" excursion, as if he was trying to justify the actions of his brother, the President, and put the responsibility for his hasty decision, in the correctness of which they and he, evidently, are not entirely confident, on us.

We think that in the interests of the affair it would be useful, using this opportunity to pass on to the President, through R. Kennedy, with whom I could meet again, in confidential form N.S. Khrushchev's thoughts on this matter, concerning not only the issues which R. Kennedy had touched on, but a wider circle of issues in light of the events which are going on now.

24.X.62 A. DOBRYNIN

[Source: AVP RF, copy courtesy of NSA; translation by Mark H. Doctoroff.]