

October 19, 1962

**Cable from USSR ambassador to the USA Dobrynin
to Soviet Foreign Ministry**

Citation:

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Summary:

Dobrynin reports a speech made by Kennedy during a closed conference, where he discusses Cuba.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

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At a closed conference taking place on 16 October for the editors and leading correspondents of the American press, radio, and television, to provide information on the evaluation of the current international situation and the USA's official position in it, President Kennedy spoke. This speech was given exclusively for the personal edification of those present, and it was denied all publication rights.

The content of the President's speech came down to the following.

The government's duty is to seek out global solutions to the global problems facing the USA. There was once a time when war could be seen as an acceptable extension of politics, but nuclear war in its extreme form cannot be seen as such, since it would lead to huge destruction and the loss of millions of lives in the countries taking part in it. The USA must learn to accept and live in the current conditions of direct confrontation between the USA and the USSR, and between Communism's strivings for expansion and the USA's strivings to support the sort of alignment of forces that allows the free nations to thrive, and that allows the USA in particular to safeguard its own interests. In similar situations earlier, the result of such confrontation has always been war--but now the question is how we can get through this period without war and, especially importantly, without nuclear war.

Some sort of crisis relating to Berlin is clearly brewing now, and we will have to see whether we can surmount it without recourse to military action. There are no signs that the Russians are preparing to soften their demands with regard to Berlin; they want us either to get out of there, or to share with them our rights in West Berlin. They would like to start a chain reaction that would ultimately lead to the elimination of American positions in West Berlin and many other places. The USA is determined not to let this happen. It cannot be allowed to occur. The West's presence in Berlin and its access to the city represent, as before, vitally important interests, and no concessions with regard to them can or will be made to Soviet pressure, whatever form that pressure may take. The problem now consists of the fact that we both have locked horns [in confrontation--ed.].

Nuclear war may be an irrational phenomenon, but there is more to it than this, since recognizing it as irrational does not necessarily signify being saved from it. If both sides come to the negotiating table with an absolute certainty that the other side will in no circumstances have recourse to nuclear war, then that would be one of the surest paths toward such a war, because one side or the other could go one step further and apply a pressure beyond what the other side is able to put up with, and for all intents and purposes we would be heading for catastrophe.

In government circles there is a feeling that we quite possibly have some difficult weeks and months ahead of us due to Berlin, and that a crisis of the first order may arise before Christmas.

With Cuba the situation is different. Berlin is a vitally important issue for both sides, and the fundamental positions of both sides with regard to it remain inflexible. Latin American is another vitally important region. Berlin and Latin America are two dangerous regions. No [U.S.] military actions concerning Cuba could be or should be undertaken until there are signs of overt Cuban aggression against the countries of the Western hemisphere. Cuba should be and is now under close observation, and the USA has been kept informed of what is happening there. The USA's policy consists, as before, in ensuring that the maintenance of Cuba be as expensive as possible both for the USSR and for Castro's regime. It appears unlikely that the USSR could afford to invest funds in Cuba that would be sufficient to meet Cuba's actual and long-term needs. Only the USA alone had a billion-dollar trade with Cuba before the Castro revolution.

According to the American government's calculations, there are currently in Cuba around five thousand Russian military specialists. One must suppose that the Russians are sufficiently experienced people to understand that the military equipment which they are supplying to Cuba, or can supply in the future, would make little difference if the USA were to consider itself forced to take military action against it. They have enough experience as well in East Germany and the Eastern European countries to recognize the limits of their capacities to revitalize and strengthen the Cuban economy, especially bearing in mind the distances involved. Meanwhile the Latin American countries have taken measures towards isolating Cuba and condemning to failure the Communists' attempts to spread their system throughout the other countries of the Western hemisphere.

There can be no talk of a recognition by the United States of some Cuban government in exile, since that step could free the current Cuban regime from the obligations fixed by treaty toward Guantanamo base and American citizens in Cuba. There can be no deal struck with the USSR regarding its renunciation of bases in Cuba in exchange for the USA's renunciation of bases in other parts of the world (in Turkey, for example). It is necessary to treat Cuba in such a way as to advance our cause in the general battle into which the USA has been drawn. The strategy and tactics of the USA should be defined by considerations of the defense of its vital interests and its security not only in connection with the Cuban situation, but also in connection with other more serious threats.

The preceding is communicated by way of information.

19.X.62 A. Dobrynin