

October 20, 1962

**Cable from Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko on 18
October 1962 meeting with President Kennedy
(excerpts)**

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Summary:

Gromyko expresses that the Soviet government is committed to assist Cuba in the face of a US blockade. Kennedy says that the recent build up Soviet supplies to Cuba negatively affected the US population and Congress and that his actions were meant to calm public opinion; also that the US had no intention of invading Cuba.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Cable from Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko on 18 October 1962 meeting with President Kennedy, 20 October 1962 (excerpts) During the meeting with President Kennedy at the White House on 18 October I transmitted to him, his spouse and other members of his family regards from the head of the Soviet government N.S. Khrushchev and from Nina Petrovna. Kennedy expressed his gratitude to N.S. Khrushchev for the regards. Further I said that I would like to give an account of the Soviet government policy on a number of important issues. [section deleted--trans.] Now I would like to expound the Soviet government's position on the Cuban issue and the USSR's assessment of the actions of the USA. The Soviet government stands for the peaceful coexistence of states with different social systems, against the interference of one state into the internal affairs of others, against the intervention of large states into the affairs of small countries. Literally, that is the core of the Soviet Union's foreign policy. It is well known to you, Mr. President, the attitude of the Soviet government and personally of N.S. Khrushchev toward the dangerous developments connected with the USA administration position on the issue of Cuba. An unrestrained anti-Cuban campaign has been going on in the USA for a long time and apparently there is a definite USA administration policy behind it. Right now the USA are making an attempt to blockade Cuban trade with other states. There is talk about a possibility of actions of organized policy in this region under the USA aegis. But all of this amounts to a path that can lead to grave consequences, to a misfortune for all mankind, and we are confident that such an outcome is not desired by any people, including the people of the USA. The USA administration for some reason considers that the Cubans must solve their domestic affairs not at their discretion, but at the discretion of the USA. But on what grounds? Cuba belongs to the Cuban people, not to the USA or any other state. And since it is so, then why are the statements made in the USA calling for an invasion of Cuba? What do the USA need Cuba for? Who can in earnest believe that Cuba represents a threat to the USA? If we speak about dimensions and resources of the two countries - the USA and Cuba - then it is clear that they are a giant and a baby. The flagrant groundlessness of such charges against Cuba is obvious. Cuba does not represent, and cannot represent, any threat to the countries of Latin America. It is strange to think as if small Cuba can encroach on the independence of either this or that country of Latin America. Cuban leaders and personally Fidel Castro have declared more than once in front of the whole world and in a most solemn manner that Cuba does not intend to impose their system, that they firmly favor the non-interference of states into the internal affairs of each other. The people who call for an aggression against Cuba allege that, they say, it is not sufficient to have those statements of the Cuban government, though those statements are supported by deeds. But by that whatever aggressive action or adventure can be justified. Solutions of almost all the international issues are results, you know, of statements, dictums, or negotiations between states, in the course of which corresponding governments give an account of their positions on either these or those questions, as for example takes place now during the conversations that we have with the USA administration. But does the USA administration not believe the statements of the Cuban government? Really, is it not convincing when the Cuban government officially declares its aspiration to settle all disputed questions with the USA administration by means of negotiations? In this regard may be quoted the well-known statement made by Mr. [Oswaldo] Dorticos, President of the Republic of Cuba, during the current session of the UN General Assembly, a statement of which the USA President is undoubtedly aware.¹ The Cubans want to make secure their own home, their independence. They appeal for reason, for conscience. They call on the USA to renounce encroachments upon the independence of Cuba, to establish normal relations with the Cuban state. The question is: Is it worthwhile to whip up a campaign and organize different sorts of hostile activity around Cuba and at the same time inimical actions against those states which maintain good relations with Cuba, respect its independence, and lend Cuba a helping hand at a difficult moment? Is it not a destruction of international law, of the UN principles and purposes? Is it possible, Mr. President, for the Soviet Union, taking into account all of this, to sit cross-handed and to be a detached onlooker? You say that you like frankness. Giving an account of the Soviet government position frankly as well, I would like to stress that nowadays is not the middle of the XIX century, is not the time of colonial partition and not the times when a victim of aggression could raise its voice only weeks and months after an assault. American statesmen frequently declare that the

USA is a great power. This is correct, the USA is a great power, a rich and strong power. And what kind of power is the Soviet Union? You know that N.S. Khrushchev was positively impressed by your realistic statement during the Vienna meeting about the equality of forces of the two powers--the USSR and USA. But insofar as it is so, inasmuch as the USSR is also a great and strong power it cannot be a mere spectator while there is appearing a threat of unleashing a large war either in connection with the Cuban issue or [with a] situation in whatever other region of the world. You are very well aware of the Soviet government attitude toward such an action of the USA, as the decision about the draft of 150 thousand reservists.² The Soviet government is convinced that if both of our countries favor a lessening of international tension and a solution of unsettled international problems, then such steps should be avoided because they are intended for sharpening the international situation. If it came to the worst, if a war began, certainly, a mobilization of an additional 150 thousand reservists to the USA armed forces would not have significance. And undoubtedly you are very well aware of this. For the present is not the year 1812 when Napoleon was setting all his hopes upon the number of soldiers, of sabres and cannons. Neither is it 1941, when Hitler was relying upon his mass armies, automatic rifles, and tanks. Today life and and military equipment have made a large step forward. Nowadays the situation is quite different and it would be better not to rely on armaments while solving disputed problems. So far as the aid of the Soviet Union to Cuba is concerned, the Soviet government has declared and I have been instructed to reaffirm it once more, our aid pursues exclusively the object of rendering Cuba assistance to its defensive capacity and development of its peaceful economy. Neither industry nor agriculture in Cuba, neither land-improvement works nor training of the Cuban personnel carried out by the Soviet specialists to teach them to use some defensive types of armaments, can represent a threat to anybody. Had it been otherwise, the Soviet government would never be involved in such aid. And such an approach applies to any country. The example of Laos convincingly illustrates this. If the Soviet Union were conducting another policy, not the present one, then the situation in Laos would be different. For the Soviet Union and its friends seem to have more possibility to influence the situation in Laos than the USA. But we were trying to achieve an agreement because we cannot step aside from the main principles of our foreign policy designed for lessening international tension, for undoing knots of still existing contradictions between powers, for the peaceful solution of unsettled international problems. And in this regard our policy is unvarying. Here is the position and views of the Soviet government on the Cuban issue. The Soviet government calls on you and the USA administration not to permit whatever steps are incompatible with the interests of peace and the lessening of international tension, with the UN principles which have been solemnly signed both by the USSR and the USA. We call on you to ensure that in this issue too the policies of the two largest powers pursue the object of peace and only of peace. Having listened to our statement, Kennedy said that he was glad to hear the reference to the settlement of the Laotian problem. We believe, he continued, that the Soviet Union really acts precisely in the way which you are describing, and just as the USA the USSR is endeavoring to comply with its commitments. Regarding the Cuban issue I [Kennedy] must say that really it became grave only this summer. Until then the Cuban question had been pushed by us to the background. True, Americans had a certain opinion about the present Cuban government and refugees from Cuba were exciting public opinion against that government. But the USA administration had no intentions to launch an aggression against Cuba. Suddenly, Mr. Khrushchev, without notifying me, began to increase at a brisk pace supplies of armaments to Cuba, although there was no threat on our side that could cause such a necessity. If Mr. Khrushchev addressed me on this issue, we could give him corresponding assurances on that score. The build-up of the Cuban military might has badly impressed the American people and the USA congress. As President I was trying to calm public opinion and I have declared that, taking into account the kind of aid rendered by the Soviet Union to Cuba, we must keep cool and self-controlled. But I was not able to find a satisfactory explanation for those actions of the Soviet Union. Kennedy said later, that the Soviet Union is aware of the American opinion regarding the present regime in Cuba. We consider that it would be better if there were another government. But we do not have any intentions to

attack Cuba. You are saying that we have established a blockade around Cuba, but that is not the case. We have only taken the decision that the ships, after bringing cargo to Cuba, will be barred entry to the American ports to pick up freight.

The actions of the Soviet Union create a very complicated situation and I don't know where the whole thing can bring us. The present situation is, perhaps, the most dangerous since the end of the Second World War. We, certainly, take on trust statements of the Soviet Union about the sort of armaments supplied by you to Cuba.

As President I am trying to restrain those people in the USA who are favoring an invasion of Cuba. For example, last Sunday in one of my speeches I declared against one of the American senators, who had previously supported such an invasion.³ I repeat, a very dangerous situation has nevertheless arisen regarding this issue and I don't know what can be the outcome. I answered Kennedy that once there was an attempt to organize an invasion of Cuba and it is known what was the end of the affair.⁴ From different official statements and your own statements, Mr. President, everybody know what were the circumstances and how that invasion was arranged. Everybody knows also that the USA administration needs only to move a finger and no Cuban exiles, nor those who support them in the USA and some countries of the Caribbean, would dare launch any adventure against Cuba. At this moment Kennedy put in a remark that he had already had an exchange of opinions with N.S. Khrushchev on the issue of the invasion of Cuba in 1961 and had said that it was a mistake. I should be glad, Kennedy stressed, to give assurances that an invasion would not be repeated neither on the part of Cuban refugees, nor on the part of the USA armed forces. But the issue is, Kennedy said, that as a result of the USSR government's action in July of the current year the situation suddenly has changed for the worse. Proceeding with the previous idea, I said that for the Cuban government the vital issue is the question what is to be done next. The question comes to the following: either they will stay unprepared to repulse new attempts at invasion or they must undertake steps to ensure their country from attack, take care of their defense. We have already said that the Soviet government has responded to the call of Cuba for help only because that appeal had the aim of providing Cubans with bread and removing the threat hanging over Cuba by strengthening its defensive capacity. Regarding help, rendered by the Soviet Union, in the use of some exclusively defensive armaments, by no means can it be seen as a threat to the USA. If, I repeat, the situation were different the Soviet government never would have gone along with such an aid. Kennedy said that, to make things completely clear on this issue, he would like to announce once more that the USA do not have any intentions to invade Cuba. Nevertheless, intensified armaments supplies to Cuba on the part of the Soviet Union, which began in July of the current year, have complicated the situation greatly and made it more dangerous. My intention, Kennedy stressed, consists in preventing any actions that could lead to war, so long as those actions would not be occasioned by some activity of the Soviet Union or Cuba. In order to confirm that the USA administration believes the declarations of the Soviet government about the defensive character of the armaments supplied to Cuba, Kennedy read the following passage from his statement on the Cuban issue of 4 September 1962: "Information has reached this Government in the last four days from a variety of sources which established without a doubt that the Soviets have provided the Cuban Government with a number of anti-aircraft defense missiles with a slant range of twenty-five miles similar to early models of our "Nike" [missile].

Along with these missiles, the Soviets are apparently supplying the extensive radar and other electronic equipment which is required for their operation. We can also confirm the presence of several Soviet-made motor torpedo boats carrying ship-to-ship missiles having a range of 15 miles. The number of Soviet military technicians now known to be in Cuba or en route--approximately 3,500--is consistent with assistance in setting up and learning to use this equipment. As I stated last week, we shall continue to make information available as fast as it is obtained and properly verified. There is no evidence of any organized combat force in Cuba from any Soviet bloc country; of military base provided to Russia; of a violation of the 1934 treaty relating to Guantanamo; of the presence of offensive ground-to-ground missiles; or of other significant offensive capability either in Cuban hands or under Soviet direction and guidance. Were it to be otherwise, the gravest issues would arise."

That is our position on this issue, said Kennedy, and in this way it has

been expounded by our Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, in his conversation with the Soviet Ambassador.⁵ From that position I was proceeding last Sunday when I was voicing the aforementioned statement. Thus, in all my actions I proceed with due regard for statements of the Soviet Union that the armaments supplied to Cuba have an exclusively defensive character. I [Gromyko] said in conclusion that from the corresponding statements of the Soviet government, including the statement delivered to the President today, the USA administration has a clear view of policy of the Soviet Union on the Cuban issue and also of our assessment of the USA policy and actions regarding Cuba. I had the task of giving the President an account of all of it.

[section deleted--trans.] Fourth. After the exchange of opinions on the issue of the [atomic] tests I broached the subject of the main principles of foreign policy of the USSR and the necessity to proceed from the thesis that difference of ideologies need not be an obstacle to peaceful cooperation between the USSR and the USA.

According to the instructions, received before departure, the question of a possible meeting of the heads of the two powers has been touched upon. The Soviet government, as before, is building its foreign policy on the recognition of that indisputable concept that difference in ideologies, to which our states adhere, need not be a barrier to their peaceful coexistence and cooperation in the interests of strengthening the peace. You and we, as it was underlined more than once by N.S. Khrushchev, are human beings and you have your own ideology, and you are well aware of our attitude towards it. The USSR is a socialist state, and is building communism. We are guided by communist ideology. Who will gain the victory in the end--this question must be solved not by the force of armaments, but by the way of peaceful competition and we, the communists, have urged this since the days of Lenin.

We resolutely condemn the calls to solve ideological disputes by the force of armaments. A competition in economics, in satisfying the material and spiritual requirements of the people--that is the field where in a historic, peaceful "battle," without use of armaments, must be solved the question of which ideology would prevail and which one would quit the stage of history. On behalf of the Soviet government I would like to reaffirm that [position] once more because it is one of the main principles of the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. In conclusion I would like to say the following:

The Head of the Soviet government N.S. Khrushchev has entrusted me to convey to you that his opinion is that it would apparently be useful to have a meeting between the Head of the Soviet government and the USA President in order to discuss the issues that separate us and first of all the questions of the German peace treaty and West Berlin. If N.S. Khrushchev has the opportunity, he will arrive in New York in the second half of November in order to attend the session of the UN General Assembly. Thus, we are speaking about a possibility of his arrival in the USA after the elections to Congress. Kennedy said that in the case of N.S. Khrushchev coming to the USA he would be glad to meet him once more.

Nevertheless, he said, it would be erroneous to speak about the only point of the agenda of this meeting - to discuss "the Berlin problem and the signing of the German peace treaty," because there are others who are also interested in discussing those questions besides our two countries. If Mr. Khrushchev comes to the General Assembly I would be glad to discuss with him questions that we are interested in without any formal agenda and without picking out any concrete issue that must be discussed.

I thanked the President for the conversation during which we have discussed questions that represent interests for both countries, concerning important aspects of the foreign policies of the USSR and the USA. I also underlined the view of the Soviet government that it would be a great historic achievement if the USSR and the USA come to terms over those questions that divide us. Kennedy responded that he agrees with that remark.

As I have already told Mr. Khrushchev, the USA is a large and rich country. The Soviet Union is also a large and rich country. Each of our countries has a lot of things to do inside our countries. As to the outcome of the competition between the, which I hope will be a peaceful one, history will decide it.

On Mr. Khrushchev, as the head of the Soviet government, and on me, as the USA President, rests enormous responsibility and we have no right to allow any actions that can lead to a collision. During the last 9 months while I am holding the post of President we were seeking by all means to settle relations between our two countries. We have reached some success on the Laotian issue. We were aspiring to reach agreements both on Berlin and German problems. Unfortunately we didn't

manage to do it. As to Cuba I cannot understand what has happened in July of this year, particularly taking into account statements made by Mr. Khrushchev that he understands the basis of the USA approach. In spite of success achieved on the Laotian question, the situation around the Cuban issue is becoming more and more complicated. In conclusion Kennedy transmitted his regards to N.S. Khrushchev and expressed gratitude for receiving the USA Ambassador in Moscow Mr. [Foy] Kohler and several American representatives who had visited the Soviet Union. For my part I assured the President once more that the policy of the Soviet Union always has been and remains directed at strengthening peace and the elimination of differences in the relations among all countries, above all in relations between the USSR and the USA, with whom the Soviet Union wants to live in peace and friendship.

[This policy] also applies to the Cuban issue, which was not invented by the Soviet Union, it applies to the question of signing the German peace treaty and normalization on its basis of the situation in West Berlin and it applies to all the other issues that separate our two countries. Our policy is the policy of peace, friendship, the policy of removing differences by peaceful means. In conclusion I promised to convey the regards from the President to the Head of the Soviet government N.S. Khrushchev and expressed confidence that he would accept it with pleasure. The conversation lasted 2 hours and 20 minutes. There were present: on the American side - Rusk, Thompson, Hillenbrandt and Akalovsky, on the Soviet side - Semenov, Dobrynin, and Sukhodrev.

A. GROMYKO20/10/1962¹ Gromyko here evidently refers to Dorticos' speech to the U.N. General Assembly of 8 October 1962. Dorticos stated: "Were the United States able to give us proof, by word and deed, that it would not carry out aggression against our country, then, we declare solemnly before you here and now, our weapons would be unnecessary and our army redundant." New York Times, 9 October 1962.² Kennedy had asked Congress to approve the call-up of 150,000 reservists on 7 September 1962.³ Not further identified.⁴ An obvious allusion to the failed attack on Cuba in April 1961 at the Bay of Pigs by CIA-supported anti-Castro Cuban exiles.⁵ The date of this conversation is not specified in the text, but Kennedy appears to be referring to the meeting between Robert Kennedy and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin on the same day as the 4 September 1962 statement to underline the President's concerns about Soviet military aid to Cuba.[Source: AVP RF; copy obtained by NHK, provided to CWIHP, and on file at National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.; translation by Vladimir Zaemsky.]