

October 29, 1962
**Record of Conversation between Soviet Deputy
Foreign Minister Kuznetsov and UN Secretary
General U Thant**

Citation:

"Record of Conversation between Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov and UN Secretary General U Thant", October 29, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation (AVP RF), Moscow; copy obtained by NHK (Japanese Television), provided to CWIHP, and on file at National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.; translation by John Henriksen, Harvard University.

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Summary:

Kuznetsov's record of a conversation with U Thant discussing the dismantling of Russian weapons and the American quarantine.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

From the diary of V. V. Kuznetsov

RECORD OF THE CONVERSATION
WITH ACTING U.N. SECRETARY GENERAL U THANT
on 29 October 1962

The meeting took place in the UN Secretariat. Present were: on the Soviet side, V.A. Zorin, P.D. Morozov, L.I. Men-delevich, and V.N. Zherebtsov; from the UN Secretariat, U Thant, E.D. Kiselev, O. Loutfi, Narasimhan, and General Rikhye.

At the beginning of the conversation, V.V. Kuznetsov conveyed to U Thant the heartfelt greetings of Comrade N.S. Khrushchev, and the latter's great appreciation for U Thant's efforts in a noble endeavor, the attainment of a speedy settlement of the Cuban crisis.

He said that the government of the USSR had ordered him to arrive in New York to aid U Thant in his efforts to eliminate the dangerous situation that has arisen. Although the USSR's position with regard to the crisis in the Caribbean area seems to be quite familiar to U Thant, V.V. Kuznetsov would nevertheless like to make use of this first meeting with U Thant first and foremost emphasize to certain basic features of the Soviet Union's position, and the steps taken by the USSR government to assure the fastest possible settlement of the crisis through peaceful means, with the goal of affirming peace and security, and taking into account the interests of all parties.

V. V. Kuznetsov reminded U Thant that the government of the Soviet Union has introduced a series of constructive proposals that received general recognition, and that provide a good and fair foundation for resolving the whole problem. The Soviet government, bearing in mind U Thant's recommendation, has undertaken to suspend temporarily the traffic of its ships bound for Cuba, and to keep them away for a short period of time from the region declared by the United States as being under quarantine.

The government of the USSR has also declared that on board these ships there are not, and will not be, any arms that President Kennedy and the USA government see as "offensive."

Later the government of the USSR agreed to dismantle and send back to the Soviet Union the launchers now in Cuba that are seen by the United States as "offensive."

In brief, said V.V. Kuznetsov, the government of the USSR has undertaken to approve and accept U Thant's proposal; at the same time it has declared and still declares that for its part it will take any and all measures to prevent an exacerbation of the situation, which could lead to a worsening of the conflict and an unleashing of thermonuclear war. In its actions the government of the USSR is bearing in mind the sincere desire of nations to safeguard peace and calm throughout the globe.

The Soviet government has stressed and continues to stress that the actions of the United States, manifested by the imposition of the blockade, as well as the whole USA policy towards Cuba, are aggressive, and aimed at an exacerbation of the situation rather than a normalization of it. There is no need at present to provide a detailed description of American actions during the past week. That has lucidly been done by the Soviet government's statement, as well as by N.S. Khrushchev's messages to the USA President Kennedy and to U Thant.

If it were to assess the situation as it exists today, V.V. Kuznetsov continued, the Soviet government would note with satisfaction, as has already been noted in N.S.

Khrushchev's message, that the USA at the present moment has taken a position which makes it possible to settle the whole Cuban problem on the basis of the Soviet proposals. All this has been the result of the efforts made by the Soviet government, as well as by the United Nations Organization and by U Thant himself. The Soviet Union acknowledges the great efforts that were displayed by U Thant.

President Kennedy's latest response to N.S. Khrushchev's message testifies to the fact that the American government believes it possible to reach an agreement on the basis of the USSR's proposals. This we consider to be a positive factor. With regard to this it seems to us that the moment has arrived for making a transition from general statements to concrete matters. The government of the USSR is ready to do so.

U Thant has expressed his hope that the exchange of opinions will be fruitful and positive, and that it will help eliminate the threat now present in the Caribbean region. He has also expressed his thanks to N.S. Khrushchev for his greetings and his appreciation of his (U Thant's) efforts to maintain peace. U Thant has asked V.V. Kuznetsov to convey his sincere gratitude for all the understanding and cooperation he has received.

After this U Thant said that he recognizes the danger of the existing situation. That danger intensified late Saturday night and early Sunday morning. At that time there were indications that the point of no return had arrived. U Thant did not sleep that night, conducting endless consultations with Narasimhan and Rikhye. Fortunately nothing tragic occurred.

Khrushchev's response yesterday to Kennedy's message represents a very great commitment to the peaceful resolution of the Cuban crisis. U Thant emphasized that this was not just his personal opinion, but also the opinion of all his colleagues and the overwhelming majority of the permanent UN delegates with whom he has met. For this fruitful and positive gesture, said U Thant, the whole world expressed its gratitude to N.S. Khrushchev and to the government of the Soviet Union.

U Thant said that he too was concerned about the continuing blockade of Cuba on the part of the United States. He recalled his own proposals for a voluntary suspension by the Soviet Union of arms stockpiling in Cuba for a short period of time in return for the United States' voluntary suspension of the blockade. After three-day talks on this issue with the Soviet delegate to the UN, V.A. Zorin, and the USA delegate to the UN Stevenson, U Thant put all his efforts, he said, into finding the fastest resolution of this issue.

At the present time, U Thant said, after his trip to Cuba had been decided, and after the conversation taking place between V.A. Zorin and U Thant on 28 October, he again addressed a request to the United States to suspend its blockade. In doing so he emphasized that the Soviet Union had undertaken to give orders to its ships to temporarily suspend traffic to Cuba, which signals the acceptance by the Soviet Union of the preliminary settlement proposed by U Thant. U Thant said that he had also declared to the Americans that a continuation of the blockade is especially undesirable during his visit to Cuba. U Thant has still not received a response from the Americans, but hopes to have one in the near future, possibly even today.

V.V. Kuznetsov thanked U Thant for the warm words addressed to the USSR government and personally to N.S. Khrushchev, and said that he would immediately convey them to their destination.

V.V. Kuznetsov agreed that the time has come for turning to concrete problems and ranking them on the basis of their urgency and importance. He was happy to note that, in his outlines as in U Thant's plans, the quarantine issue occupies first place. This suggests that our thoughts and desires are heading in the same direction.

In connection with this, V.V. Kuznetsov recalled that the Soviet government, as N.S. Khrushchev informed U Thant on 25 October, had accepted the first proposal of U Thant, which stipulated in particular a voluntary suspension of all arms transfers to Cuba for a period of two to three weeks, and the simultaneous temporary cessation of the quarantine activity on the part of the United States.

The most recent declarations of the USSR government have created even more favorable conditions for carrying out the proposal to end the quarantine. Nevertheless the quarantine activity still continues. However, as U Thant knows, ship captains have received instructions to remain on the open sea, outside the boundaries of the quarantine activity, for a certain period of time. Such a situation cannot continue for long, since it is depriving Cuba of peaceful goods that are necessary to it, it is creating difficulties for the fueling of the ships remaining on the open sea, and it is incurring losses because of their enforced inactivity. With regard to this, we welcomed U Thant's thoughts on the necessity of resolving this whole issue in the next one or two days. But the imposed quarantine has already been going on for more than five days, and now there are no longer any reasons for not suspending the quarantine activity.

The declaration of the quarantine by the United States is illegal, and is recognized as such by the whole world.

Nevertheless, proceeding from the situation at hand and guided by the interests of peace, the government of the USSR at the present moment is set on the issue of suspending the practical operations of the quarantine. It is quite natural that we would like these operations to cease immediately. In any case we have every right to expect a response from the United States in the very near future, perhaps even before U Thant's departure for Cuba.

U Thant again repeated that the day before he had addressed this question to the Americans, and was awaiting an answer from them that day.

V.V. Kuznetsov asked U Thant what the basic difficulties were in settling this issue.

U Thant answered that the Americans are fully aware of the instructions given to Soviet ships to remain for a short period of time outside the boundaries of the quarantine activity. They are also aware that these instructions have a definite time limit. Before this they have been trying to avoid direct contact between Soviet and American vessels. However, the Americans are afraid that if they allow Soviet ships to approach Cuba, those ships may be carrying arms. For this reason they are insisting that some mechanism be created for ascertaining whether or not such ships are conveying weaponry.

After his talks with V.A. Zorin, U Thant met with the UN delegate from Cuba, Garcia-Inchaustegui, to whom he declared that, since the USSR is not agreeing to the creation of some verification mechanism for ships on the open sea, he, U Thant, proposes to the government of Cuba to examine the possibility of creating such a mechanism in ports of call. In doing so he informed the Cuban delegate of the Soviet views on this matter.

V.V. Kuznetsov thanked U Thant for the information, and said that he understood the latter's position.

He went on to say that the government of the USSR has examined in a spirit of cooperation the ideas expressed by U Thant on the fastest suspension of the quarantine. U Thant proposed three possible ways in which the issue could be resolved:

- 1) the monitoring of Soviet vessels by American ships;
- 2) checks on the vessels by certain neutral countries;
- 3) sharing these functions with the International Red Cross.

The government of the USSR has examined the issue and has asked to communicate that, if U Thant is not successful in reaching an agreement with the Americans on the temporary suspension of the blockade with the observation of our vessels bound for Cuba, then the Soviet government is prepared to allow, as a temporary measure, the boarding of Soviet vessels bound for Cuba by representatives of the Red Cross for ascertaining that those ships contain no sorts of weapons that concern the President and government of the USA, who refer to them as "offensive weapons."

V.V. Kuznetsov emphasized that the USSR government, in taking this step, is acting on a sincere desire to resolve this problem in the interests of peace, taking into full account the position of the Republic of Cuba.

U Thant expressed his thanks to the government of the Soviet Union for this important decision, made with the purpose of reducing tension and contributing to settling the Cuban problem through peaceful means. He promised to convey immediately the content of this Soviet proposal to the United States.

V.V. Kuznetsov noted that, in accepting one of U Thant's ideas, the Soviet government had not yet worked out the details of the monitoring system, but is raising the possibility that Red Cross representatives could be conveyed onto the Soviet vessels either by Soviet ships, or by the ships of neutral countries. As far as possible cargo checks in the ports of call are concerned, this issue is for the Cuban government to decide, since that is its own territory, and the Soviet government itself cannot make any decision on this matter without Cuban consent.

U Thant thanked V.V. Kuznetsov for his explanation, and said that he would immediately pass this information on to the government of Cuba.

U Thant noted that in the event that the Red Cross takes on the execution of these functions, he himself would determine, according to existing practices and rules of procedure, the national composition of the inspectors. He asked V. V. Kuznetsov to give his opinion on this matter.

V. V. Kuznetsov said again that we had not yet given thought to the details, but that we would prefer that the groups of Red Cross inspectors be made up of citizens of neutral countries. If U Thant has any thoughts, then they could be discussed, and the Soviet government's views on them could be sought.

U Thant said that, as practice shows, in all cases in which the aid of the Red Cross was requested, the national make-up of its representatives was 95% Swiss.

V. V. Kuznetsov asked U Thant that on future considerations of this matter he take into account our views, as well as the fact that Switzerland is not a member of the UN.

Then he asked U Thant to describe the goal of his trip to Cuba, and any thoughts he has in connection with this trip.

U Thant said that the problem most immediately faced by the Security Council involves three governments: those of the Soviet Union, the USA, and Cuba. For the USA the most urgent problem is the lifting of the quarantine. For the USSR, it is the

matter of arms provisioning, the dismantling of missile launchers, and the shipping of them back to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union has already given its consent to all this, and has even agreed to the 2 to 3 week arms provisioning point. The United States has not fully agreed to U Thant's proposal. The quarantine continues even now, and the United States is demanding the creation of a mechanism for ascertaining that arms provisioning is not continuing.

The Soviet Union's decision on the possible use of Red Cross services will in many ways contribute to the settling of this problem.

One of the goals that U Thant is setting for himself on his trip to Cuba is get an idea of what is being done or has already been done with regard to the removal of missile launchers from Cuba. He intends to give a report on this to the Security Council.

U Thant intends moreover to discuss with Castro measures for the safeguarding of the security of Cuba, as well as for the elimination of threats from the USA and certain other countries of Latin America. U Thant emphasized that precise and definite guarantees were equally important both for the United States and other Latin American countries, and for Cuba. For this reason, U Thant intends to propose that United Nations observers be placed not only on Cuban territory, but also on the territory of the United States and several Latin American countries neighboring Cuba.

V. V. Kuznetsov said that we now have a clearer idea of the task that U Thant is setting for himself during his trip to Cuba. In connection with this he expressed some of the Soviet views on this matter. First and foremost, Kuznetsov stressed, as is already known from N. S. Khrushchev's messages, the missile installations in Cuba are in the hands of Soviet specialists. The Soviet government has stated that it is dismantling and removing these launchers from Cuba.

It is evident from the message sent by N. S. Khrushchev to Kennedy on 27 October and from the later message with which the American government generally agreed, that the Soviet government has agreed to the imposition of on-site checks after the above-mentioned dismantlings, of course with the consent of the government of the Republic of Cuba.

V. V. Kuznetsov asked whether the Americans are not moving away from the position laid out in Kennedy's message.

V. V. Kuznetsov expressed his agreement with the Soviet Union's granting of guarantees on arms provisioning and the dismantling of missile installations, and so too the United States should make guarantees to the effect that it will not infringe upon the security and sovereignty of Cuba either with its own armed forces, or through support for other countries, and that it will not permit or aid the activity on its own territory of subversive sabotage groups. These pledges must be firm.

We have made note of Kennedy's statement that the USA will guarantee that no aggression against Cuba will take place. However, on one hand Kennedy declares that the Soviet Union's statements are reassuring, while on the other hand the USA is making new demands that place the two parties in unfairly different positions.

V. V. Kuznetsov concluded that his idea comes down to the point that the statements existing at the present time are sufficient to lift the quarantine without having to take any measures related to the speedy establishment of checks on the dismantling of missile sites in Cuba.

With regard to this he recalled N. S. Khrushchev's message to Kennedy of 28 October, which said that the Soviet Union was prepared to reach an agreement with the United States on the possibility of UN representatives monitoring this dismantling process. In doing so, Khrushchev referred to his earlier message of 27 October, which said that agents of the UN Security Council could conduct on-site inspections on the

fulfillment of the obligations that have been taken on. Of course it will be necessary to receive the permission of the government of the Republic of Cuba to allow these authorized officials to enter the country.

U Thant declared that he now understands better the problem connected with establishing on-site inspections on the dismantling and removal of the missile launchers from Cuba. Now, after N. S. Khrushchev's messages of 27 and 28 October, and the explanations offered by V. V. Kuznetsov, he has a clear idea of the Soviet government's position.

During his stay in Cuba he, U Thant, intends to raise the issue of the dismantling and removal of missile materials from Cuba in his talks with Prime Minister Fidel Castro, and it is possible that the latter will have something to say on this matter.

Returning to the question of guarantees, U Thant said that such guarantees should be bilateral. On his own initiative he decided to raise the issue of the presence of UN representatives in all the countries of this region. If the government of Cuba agrees to some UN presence, said U Thant, then he intends to propose to the Organization of American States and the United States to admit UN representatives onto the territory of the USA and the Latin American countries, in the interests of removing the threat to peace in this area. In its general outlines, U Thant has informed the Americans of this idea.

V. V. Kuznetsov declared that the Soviet Union has formulated its duties clearly and concisely, and that there should be no doubt in anyone's mind about the fulfillment of these duties. As far as the USA guarantees to Cuba are concerned, they have already been generally laid out in outline form. With regard to this, V. V. Kuznetsov has directed U Thant's attention to the passage from N. S. Khrushchev's message of 27 October which refers to what the USA should do about making guarantees to Cuba, and especially: the USA government will declare in the Security Council that the USA will respect the inviolability of Cuba's borders, its sovereignty, and that it pledges not to interfere in its domestic affairs, not to invade it or let its territory serve as a base for any invasion of Cuba, and that it will also restrain those who wish to take aggressive action against Cuba either from within USA territory, or from the territory of the countries that neighbor Cuba.

V. V. Kuznetsov remarked that, as can be inferred from the Soviet Union's proposals, the duties of all parties should be formulated and represented in the form of joint or individual declarations to the Security Council that express their positions. In this way such obligations will have a more definite character. This can be inferred as well from the proposals of U Thant himself.

According to the Soviet Union, in examining the issue of guarantees it is necessary to take into consideration the views that have been expressed on this matter by Prime Minister Castro of Cuba.

V. V. Kuznetsov again asked about the desirability of receiving an answer regarding the temporary suspension of the quarantine before U Thant's departure for Cuba. In doing so he emphasized that the Soviet Union for its part has made many conciliatory gestures, and that now it is necessary to persuade the other side to make similar ones.

U Thant said that he would immediately communicate information about the Soviet Union's favorable reaction to his proposal about possibly making use of the services of the Red Cross, and with regard to this he wanted to clarify certain details. First, in the event that the Red Cross agrees, the personnel of the inspection groups can be appointed only by that organization. The UN cannot make recommendations to it on that matter. Second, as U Thant understands it, vessels carrying the inspection groups will be supplied by the Soviet Union or neutral countries. Third, the Americans

in their talks with U Thant have asked about the vessels chartered by the Soviet Union for carrying its own cargo.

V. V. Kuznetsov said that he was authorized, naturally, to speak only about Soviet vessels.

V. A. Zorin added that the Americans can be sure that Lebanese or Swedish vessels, say, are not carrying arms, as these governments have officially declared.

V. V. Kuznetsov noted that if the USA wanted an agreement, they would have quickly resolved this matter. If they have no such desire, they can find a million pretexts and ask a million questions. V. A. Zorin said that such an agreement could indeed be reached today, since the positions of all the interested parties have in general been clearly presented.

At the conclusion of the meeting it was agreed that during U Thant's stay in Cuba, contact with him would be sustained through Narasimhan.

The conversation was recorded by V. Zherebtsov.

[Source: Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation (AVP RF), Moscow; copy obtained by NHK (Japanese Television), provided to CWIHP, and on file at National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.; translation by John Henriksen, Harvard University.]