

November 11, 1962

Telegram from Nikita Khrushchev to Anastas Mikoyan

Citation:

"Telegram from Nikita Khrushchev to Anastas Mikoyan", November 11, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, From the personal papers of Dr. Sergo A. Mikoyan, donated to the National Security Archive. Translation by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/115098>

Summary:

This telegram, written in Khrushchev's stream-of-consciousness style, outlines the rationale behind the decision to remove the missiles from Cuba that caused the crisis: It was much better to end the crisis by giving up planes that were already obsolete—to show that the Soviet Union and Cuba had fulfilled all the promises Khrushchev had given Kennedy—and consequently to expect, and demand, full compliance with the non-invasion pledge on the part of the United States, than to retain the planes and give the Americans a justification to violate their pledge. The telegram also spells out, in Khrushchev's words, of the reasons why the weapons were deployed to Cuba in the first place.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

(Special No. 1013)[1]

In connection with the last letter from President Kennedy which was sent to you, and the issues which he raised, we are informing you about our considerations and the steps we are planning to take with the goal of achieving a favorable result and fulfilling the obligations undertaken by the United States, as set forth in the president's letters and in our October 28 letter to the US president. We are passing them along to you for your consideration and reflection. We would like to know your opinion, since by now you are almost like a Cuban.

We discussed these issues before the full quorum of our collective leadership and our military, and all those present arrived at the unanimous conclusion that it would be reasonable to act as follows—to agree to the removal of all Il-28s from Cuba; we have forty-one of them altogether.

What do we lose and what do we gain as a result of the removal of the Il-28s from Cuba? There are no particular losses. There will be only moral losses for Cuba. From the military perspective, there are almost no losses because these planes, as is well known, are obsolete and do not play any role in the armed forces; we have already discontinued their production a long time ago, and are breaking up the Il-28 units. The remaining planes, which we still have, exist as a result of US actions and our response to these actions. If there had been no such action by the president when he demanded authorization to mobilize 150,000 reservists, we would not have had these planes and units supporting them; those planes would already have been removed from service.

We can imagine how difficult it would be to impress such an understanding on our friends. But therein lies the art of politicians—when encountering difficulties to show the ability to overcome such difficulties.

We take into account the fact that our agreement on the removal of the Il-28s from Cuban territory will inspire internal counterrevolution in Cuba, and will inspire aggressive forces in the United States to turn this to their advantage and exaggerate this as their own success.

After all, we could [choose to] not agree with the US demand and remove the Il-28s. We are confident that this would not cause a military conflict or an immediate invasion of Cuba, although this can never be guaranteed, of course, when one has to deal with lunatics. However, we think that in the present conditions it would be difficult for the United States to take such a step.

The insistent demand of the United States to remove the Il-28s can be explained first of all not because they are worried about their presence in Cuba, or because they want to remove them from Cuba, saying that they are offensive weapons. This is an argument they made up because the United States themselves, the American military, understands that this is a weapon that is completely not suited for use abroad because, due to its slow speed Il-28s need antiaircraft cover. But the main problem is not the speed but the ceiling, because their ceiling is only 12,000 meters, and such planes, as you know from your sons' reports, have already been rejected by us even as flying targets, because they do not satisfy the requirements. We cannot use them for training troops for antiaircraft cover.

The Americans, of course, are aware of all this.

Why are they focusing attention on these planes now? Here, so to speak, two factors play a role. First is that the president mentioned the planes—the bombers—in his proclamation. And before that, as you will see from the letter, in his speech on 22

October, he spoke about the “jet bombers capable of carrying nuclear arms,” and so on. This is one point. This is an issue, so to speak, of prestige—an issue of presidential prestige, and of the prestige of the country. However, the main issue, we think, is that currently criticism of the president’s position is growing in the United States because the president, in his correspondence with us, bound himself by the following obligation: If the other side fulfills certain conditions, then the United States will undertake an obligation not to invade Cuba and to restrain its allies—that is, countries in the Western Hemisphere—from doing so. This is the main concern that worries Kennedy now because the fire of his [domestic] opponents’ criticism is targeted exactly on this point.

Therefore the president now wants to do a maneuver: either to obtain full satisfaction of those conditions he put forward—to remove missiles and Il-28 bombers from Cuba—or alternatively, to abrogate the agreement, i.e., not to fulfill the obligations he undertook in his letters from 27-28 October, justifying this before world public opinion by saying that we do not fulfill our obligations. This is his main point.

Now we are faced with the following task: We have to assess the situation as revolutionaries and as leaders, to weigh what is most important and what factor should be given preference in the interests of Cuba—to leave the bombers, and consequently to undermine the fulfillment of the obligations that were given on condition of the removal of the missiles, but to keep the Il-28s in Cuba, or to remove the Il-28s as we removed the missiles, but to have an agreement on noninvasion of Cuba both on the part of the United States and on the part of other Latin American countries surrounding Cuba.

All this should be weighed. When we were thinking about and discussing these issues, all those present arrived at the indisputable conclusion that these [two alternatives] are not equivalent. The Il-28s are no longer any good for offensive action, as we have already explained, and the Americans understand that. As far as defense is concerned, Il-28 planes are not absolute weapons that would make the territory where they are deployed impenetrable to the enemy. We understand this very well, and we are able to estimate the situation, and we think that this would be a persuasive argument for our friends as well. If our enemy, for example, had the weapons Cuba has, including Il-28s, then for the Soviet state, assuming we have the weapons we do, it would not be an obstacle to aggressive actions by us because it would not be possible to resist the might that we possess. With these weapons one can exhibit heroism, but to achieve the main goal—to repel aggression—these means are insufficient. They are sufficient for repelling aggression like that in 1961, and even aggression by more powerful forces, but not all those forces in the possession of the United States.

Through diplomatic channels we are aware that the US representatives, while agreeing that Il-28 planes are indeed obsolete weapons, and that they do not represent a great danger for the United States, justify their demand for the removal of Il-28s from Cuba by saying that this weapon represents a great threat for Latin American countries. They therefore state that there should be a guarantee that there would be no threat to countries in the Caribbean. That should also be taken into consideration, because the removal of Il-28s from Cuba gives serious grounds to demand that there should be a guarantee from the other side as well, that is, a guarantee through the United Nations that no Caribbean country would undertake actions of aggression, attack, or sabotage against Cuba. These would be mutual obligations for all Caribbean countries.

Therefore, we believe that if our friends would understand us correctly then from the point of view of cold reason we should agree to withdraw Il-28s from Cuba with all service personnel, and, as the United States demands, with all the equipment. As a result, we would create such conditions for the United States that it would be forced to fulfill its obligations as set forth in the president’s messages of 27 and 28 October.

And we believe that this is more important than a show of resolve in retaining the Il-28s in Cuba.

It is true, some people can say that the appetite grows at mealtime and that the United States would pose new demands and insist on their fulfillment. But we will resist that in our negotiations.

With respect to the question of our instructors' staying in Cuba after the removal of the missiles and Il-28s, there would be no weapons that the Cubans could not master on their own. Therefore, the question regarding the Soviet instructors in Cuba is not a problem, not for today.

We shipped some weapons to Cuba that were required to protect the people operating the missiles; now that the missiles have been removed the need for this protection is no longer there.

But the weapons that were shipped to Cuba are already there, and nobody is thinking of removing them. Later, when the situation is normalized, most likely it would be expedient to transfer those weapons to the Cubans. They are quite capable of mastering them (tanks, armored personnel carriers, and other types of weapons) themselves. A portion of the anti-aircraft systems is already in Cuban hands. In the future, a situation could emerge where, we think, there would be no need to have our troops operating these anti-aircraft systems. (But this is for you [personally]; this is, so to speak, for the future.)

Now, about the Il-28s. From the point of the view of ensuring Cuban security and using them for defensive purposes, the fighters they already have are a better means than the Il-28s. But those are fighter planes; we are not talking about them now. The Americans, to the contrary, are saying (Robert Kennedy in his conversation with Dobrynin on November 5), that they are not raising the issue about the recall of the fighters from Cuba, and by the way, the fighters are more modern weapons.

We are mentioning the fighters to you so that when you talk to our friends, tell them that the fighters that are already in Cuba would carry out the same defensive functions, for which the Il-28s were intended—and more successfully. Moreover, they are more versatile because they can take part in aerial combat, of which the Il-28s are not capable.

Not now but later, depending on how events develop, if there is a need we may have to give reinforcements to the Cubans, but not in the form of bombers, but in the form of fighters, about which they should be informed.

We believe that on the question of verifying fulfillment of the agreement on removing the Il-28s, we would be able to agree with Americans that this verification would be based on the same conditions mutually agreed upon in relation to the missiles—inspections on ships in neutral waters. This order would not require inspections on Cuban territory.

This is how we understand the issue of verification. Of course, when we start concrete negotiations about this, obviously the United States will exert some pressure on us, but this should be anticipated, and we think that the precedent that we already have will be applied for this weapons system as well.

Regarding the presence of our military instructors in Cuba: This question, as we understand it, was set forth in the US president's letter not as a condition for the resolution of this conflict but as a suggestion for the future in order to finally

normalize the situation. It seems as if it is an acceptable suggestion for the future, and it would not create difficulties either for Cuba or for us on the condition that the agreement is reached on the same basis as was laid out in the letters, and if that agreement is followed.

The psychological side of the issue is the most difficult one. And each person's psychology reveals itself in a special way; you cannot prove [dokazat'] it completely; the issues are resolved in discussions about the possible and the impossible. When our Cuban friends say that they cannot trust the United States, this is true—one cannot disagree with this; we know it from our own experience. But on the other hand, so far we have no alternatives other than to rely on these words and the assurances we have received. In fact, this is basis of coexistence between two state systems with different sociopolitical structures. While exhibiting vigilance and caution, we should build normal relations between states because there are no other alternatives.

If we start from the assumption: I do not believe, I do not tolerate—that would mean to deny the possibility of peaceful coexistence. That would mean, so to speak, permanent war, until one side emerges as the absolute victor.

However, we have our own understanding on this issue. It is set forth in the decisions of the congresses of our party in the Program of the CPSU, and it found its own expression in the Declaration of Communists and Workers Parties of 1957, and in the Statement of Eighty-One Parties of 1960. We live in a time when two worlds exist—the socialist world and the world of capitalist countries, as well as intermediate transitional states, which at decisive moments unfortunately do not vote with us at the UN on the main issues.

We must take all of this into consideration. I think that our friends understand that if we now chose exacerbation of the situation in the Caribbean, and did not make compromises and mutual concessions, that would be a movement towards a dead end. We do not want that. Apparently, our enemies—the imperialist camp—are being forced to accept the fact that if they do not exhibit understanding and restraint on their part, the matter could end in catastrophe.

Therefore, we believe that for our camp, precisely for our camp and not only for Cuba—but for Cuba primarily—the elimination of the tensions that have been created in the Caribbean by means of an agreement based on conditions set forth in the exchange of letters between the United States and the Soviet Union would be a positive result. Moreover, there would be other pluses for us, and for Cuba, because this is an unequal and uneven agreement: on the one hand, the obligations undertaken publicly and solemnly by the United States that they and other countries of the Western Hemisphere will not invade Cuba, and on the other hand, withdrawal of the Il-28s from Cuba.

A person who is free from a certain moral psychological factor, and who with his mind's eye could get a wider view of the situation that has emerged in connection with Cuba, would understand the clear benefit of such an agreement for us and for Cuba.

Let's return to the Cuban statements to the effect that the United States cannot be trusted. In general this is correct, and this is what we call vigilance. But we think it is hard to believe that the United States now, having entered into an agreement with us, would decide to invade Cuba after the removal of the Il-28s. To think like this means to not understand the importance of the Il-28s, to overestimate their capabilities as a weapons system, and at the same time to underestimate the capabilities of the enemy and the weapons they possess.

According to the considerations of our Cuban friends, the situation looks like this: The Americans cannot be trusted, and if we remove the Il-28 planes after removing the missiles, that would create better conditions for aggression against Cuba. This picture does not correspond with reality, because if the United States had indeed intended to invade then the Il-28s would not be a deterrent factor. To think otherwise would be not to comprehend the real state of affairs.

Of course, the removal of the Il-28s is a concession on our part. We wanted to separate that weapon from the missiles, but to some extent it fits under the category of offensive weapons because it is a bomber and it has quite a long range. In its time, about twelve years ago, it was the best bomber in the world and we publicized it widely. But now it has already become obsolete, and we retired it from service.

We are telling you all this so that you yourself, so to speak, will comprehend it, and if something is unclear to you, you can ask us for additional explanation in order to help you prepare to conduct discussions, and to try to persuade our Cuban friends that this step we are suggesting is a step toward the stabilization of the situation in Cuba.

For us sitting here in Moscow, and for you there, it is clear that if we drag out the debate now we will postpone an agreement, prolong an abnormal situation in the Caribbean, and maintain tensions.

Now difficulties have been created for the movement of ships to Cuba. And in general, of course, with the blockade of Cuba, there is no possibility to send ships to Cuba under protection in order to break through the blockade, because the distance and geographical situation of Cuba—and our Cuban comrades should understand that themselves—are very unfavorable for us. Therefore, Cuba would suffer from the continuation of the blockade because it needs uninterrupted communications with the external world, and most of all with the Soviet Union. This is also a factor that the enemy is taking into account, and it wants to exploit this factor—that is, to prolong the blockade, or, as the United States calls it, the quarantine (but it is a blockade). The United States can maintain this situation for a long time, and maybe even indefinitely. But for Cuba—I don't know how Cubans see this—we think that it would be very hard to live through this.

They can say we will handle it, we will die. . . . We know this ourselves; we have handled things for forty-five years already, and we were under a blockade—barefoot, hungry, living on 250 grams of porridge—and battled on. Therefore, such arguments for us are something we have already experienced in the past. We marched on and we died, and many more of us died. But after all we were not fighting in order to die, although our song went: “We all will die as one for the power of the Soviets.” Those who went into battle sang that song, but the people sent their representatives to battle in order to survive and to win. And we have achieved that.

And Cuba will survive and win, too. But in this struggle, we must now rely not only on weapons or act too forcefully. No, we must show flexibility, taking the current situation—and first of all Cuba's peculiarities and geographical location—into account. The question is not and cannot be defined the same way in relation to Korea or Vietnam—we are not even talking about the European socialist countries—these countries have already been written off for capitalism. However, in the Western Hemisphere the imperialists, of course, will do everything possible to achieve their goal. But we should not make it easier for them to exploit the benefits of their situation. And to exacerbate the situation to the extreme, to armed conflict, would do exactly that. This is one approach. And there are some forces in America that would desire such a development of events.

But obviously the most important method that the president of the United States and

his circle have chosen for themselves is to strangle Cuba economically by isolating it commercially. They want, as the US press put it before the crisis, to make Cuba too expensive an experiment for the Soviet Union so that it will exhaust the resources the Soviet Union has available for aid, and therefore undermine the economy of Cuba and to make Cuba not only an unattractive but even a repulsive model for the Latin American peoples. They want living standards in Cuba to drop even lower than they were before the revolution, when Batista was in Cuba.

These stakes are not new for us. Some time ago, similar calculations were made in relation to Soviet Russia when they tried to strangle our revolution with the bony hand of hunger. The imperialist interventionists, when they were thrown out of Soviet territory and lost the opportunity to crush the revolution with armed force, also believed that their main approach would be to create conditions of economic disaster and undermine the socialist revolution in Russia by economic means. They are currently pursuing the same goals in relation to Cuba.

If the Cuban comrades, our friends, correctly understand us and trust our conclusions, if they agree with the steps that we are planning, then Cuba will live. We will not abandon Cuba—we are Cuba's brothers; we have said this publicly, and we repeat it now. We will do everything in our power so that Cuba will rise again—and it has the ability to do so. Along with sending military assistance, we also sent our technicians, agricultural specialists, veterinarians, irrigation specialists, and scientists so that they could focus their efforts on strengthening Cuba's economy. This is the main factor. And Cuba can demonstrate before the entire world its economic capacity, which emerged as a result of the expulsion of the US monopolies and the seizure of power by the people under the leadership of their chief, Fidel Castro, and his comrades in arms.

Strictly speaking, this is how the question stands now in our understanding.

If we look back to the history of our state, during Lenin's period, Lenin was willing to undertake serious maneuvers, compromises, and mutual concessions. And this was correct and justified by history. One cannot submit to a loud revolutionary phrase. That is perhaps as useful as lightning in darkness: It flashes, illuminates the road, and disappears immediately. It is good on the barricades. But when the barricade battle ends, that means that the period of acute struggle is over and that it is passing into a phase of protracted struggle and a period of prolonged coexistence. And this prolonged coexistence necessarily carries with it mutual struggle because the social systems confronting each other are antagonistic and it is impossible to reconcile them. On this long historical path—and there is no measure for how many years this path would take—we must be guided not only by feelings but also by facts, by our theoretical Marxist-Leninist principles, and by the successes in the development of the economies of socialist states—and on this basis we should show our skill in this struggle. If cannons do not fire, then diplomacy carries out the functions of the cannons. One must not exclude the other: not just cannons, and not just Il-28s. No, that is incorrect. At this point, a rational step that puts the enemy in an unfavorable position before the entire world would often be more useful than 100 cannons.

The law is on Cuba's side. Cuba wants to be an independent sovereign state, and all the states of the world understand this. Even the unbridled imperialists cannot openly trample upon this right and cannot deny such aspirations of the Cuban people. It is precisely this that will create even greater problems for the imperialists when the independence and sovereignty of Cuba are protected by an agreement affirmed through the United Nations.

If one talks about whether to trust or not to trust the United States, then history teaches that there was the League of Nations, then it collapsed, and then there was a world war. Could the UN now collapse? We give no guarantees. Yes, it could. Could

world war break out? It could, and we are close to this. But we, as people, as politicians, as Communists, who enjoy the trust of their own people—and not just our own but of the peoples of other countries as well—should utilize everything in order to preserve peace and ensure the independence of their own states and the right of every people to develop in a direction chosen by the people of each country.

This should be understood. Therefore, the words “to believe or not to believe” have meaning only at a rally, and a very transient one at that. And in politics, we should rely on factors of a more constant character, acting over a longer term. This is the meaning of the agreement at this stage.

We learned from your letter that Fidel Castro, in his impulsiveness, said that if the Cuban position (on the issue of inspections) jeopardizes peace throughout the world, then the Soviet side may consider itself free of its obligations. What can we say to that? Only one thing: We are very disappointed by this understanding on the part of our friend, Fidel Castro, toward whom we feel limitless trust and respect, as to a real hero selflessly devoted to the Revolution. And when he said that, we think that he himself understood that we of course have such a right—to free ourselves from obligations, just as the other side has the right to tell us about it. This is logical and understandable to us. But to say it at this moment and in this connection, understanding us incorrectly, means to injure us, to force us to suffer deeply.

Ask Fidel and his friends: What motivated us to come to an agreement with them and to send our people to Cuba; what motivated us to send our weapons there, what motivated us to send our technical specialists, to send our fishermen, what motivated us to send them oil and other goods and to buy their sugar? How could the Cuban comrades think that we pursued any commercial aims, that we got any sort of economic benefit from that? Apart from material expenses, this gives us nothing, and this is known to everyone and is known to our Cuban comrades.

We sent our people to Cuba when an invasion was expected. We knew that if there was an invasion the blood of both the Cuban and Soviet peoples would be spilled. We did that. We did that for Cuba, for the Cuban people. Yes, we also did it in our own interests. But our interests here were expressed as common revolutionary interests, the interests of the revolution, the interests of the international worker's movement, and Marxist-Leninist teaching. We did it only in the name of all that.

And now that the situation we expected has developed—and we expected it when we took this step, almost all of us foresaw this—this is how they see us [i.e., as caring only about Soviet interests]. It was painful for Mikoyan to listen to that and for us it was no less painful to read about it.

Tell Fidel and our other friends that we could have adopted “the most revolutionary” position as some do now. And how would that, so to speak, revolutionary character be expressed? In empty phraseology. When the crisis erupted and a threat hung over Cuba, we could have passed a resolution, an address with the most abusive words against imperialism, the United States, and world imperialism, and we could have written there that they were capable of every base act, that they were mean and ignoble and we could have broadcast it on every radio station in all the languages of the world. And we would have considered that our revolutionary duty toward heroic Cuba had been fulfilled.

So what? Would it have had great significance? As we know, the imperialists don't lose weight from our insults—we have cursed them for forty-five years. And if our efforts had been limited only to cursing imperialism without undertaking any measures for the real strengthening of the forces of socialism, the forces of revolution, then most likely we would have stopped cursing them long ago. They would have physically compelled us to shut up, as they are capable of doing. They

would have dealt with us as they have [previously] dealt with more than one revolution in more than one country.

Under Lenin's leadership in the first years of the Russian Revolution, when we did not have diplomatic relations with anybody and when diplomatic channels for expressing the will of the Soviet government were completely unavailable, then we only had one opportunity: to curse the imperialists. And then we had only one radio station; it was called "Named after the Comintern" [Imeni Komintern]. And then we, so to speak, would plaster the imperialists and capitalists of all countries with curses in every language. That was the extent of our diplomatic activity.

But we got through those times. We developed different kinds of relations with the outside world. Now not only the Soviet Union but one-third of the world lives under the banner of Marxism-Leninism. We have diplomatic relations with most of the countries of the world. Therefore, now the resolution of issues depends not only on the correlation of forces, although the correlation of forces—economic and military—is of course the main factor. But when the cannons are silent, diplomacy is assigned a sufficiently large role, and it would be unreasonable for us to reject this instrument that has been developed and tested for ages. One has to have weapons. But weapons bring extermination, especially in our age. Therefore, there is a great deal of work for diplomacy here.

Of course, it would have been easy for us to fulfill our revolutionary duty if we had done like certain others: showed our solidarity with the Cuban people and offered to give our own blood at donation centers so they could mix it with Cuban blood. That is quite a cheap revolutionary gesture. We could have sent a lot of blood once the war had begun; but this blood would have been mixed not with blood but with Cuban soil. And it is doubtful that it would have helped the Cuban people.

We have undertaken steps of a different character. We upgraded the armed forces of the Soviet Union and our missile technology to combat readiness, and set in motion the diplomatic machinery. And we believe that we achieved [our] goals in the interests of Cuba, in the interests of the people of the Soviet Union and of all the people of the world. We demonstrated the aggressiveness of the United States of America; we showed the peace-loving nature of the socialist countries and the Soviet Union, as the most powerful among the socialist states. And that is not the least factor in the struggle for the minds of the people today.

That's why we are disappointed that our friends obviously did not understand that; we took these steps in the name of friendship. They not only did not value this, but even said words that hurt our noblest feelings and our noblest revolutionary outpourings of friendship to the Cuban people.

Fidel Castro in a conversation with you expressed the idea that the deployment of our missiles in Cuba was carried out in the interests of the entire socialist camp. Explain to Fidel that this is not our understanding of the situation. The interests of the defense of the socialist camp, and the USSR as the most powerful socialist state, did not require the deployment of our missiles in Cuba. We possess sufficiently powerful missiles on the territory of the USSR to ensure this defense, and we can use them against the imperialist aggressor.

In deciding to deploy the missiles in Cuba, upon our agreement with our Cuban friends, we pursued the goal of rendering assistance to Cuba, of defending it in the face of the threat of aggression. We understood that this would cause a great shock among the American imperialists, and it did cause such a shock. They drew a conclusion regarding non-invasion guarantees to Cuba, which were expressed in Kennedy's letters. We believe that the goals we pursued have been achieved and our action of deploying the missiles in Cuba has been justified.

We received information from our military comrades that at a ceremonial session that was arranged by our people on November 6, the head of the intelligence administration general staff of Cuba, Pedro Luis, tried several times to raise a toast “to Fidel and Stalin” at his table.

We have raised a toast to Fidel ourselves. We have raised a toast to Fidel ourselves here, but we condemned Stalin. We are offended that Pedro Luis, a person who enjoys great trust, a person who works in the intelligence service, catches our enemies, would extol that which we have condemned, especially at this moment of tensions between the countries of socialism and the countries of imperialism. This is to some extent a violation of the relationship of trust between the Soviet Union and Cuba. It was very unpleasant for us to read this report, and it was unpleasant for our people in Cuba to hear it. (This information should be carefully checked. You should talk to the comrades who were present; you should talk to comrades Gribkov and Pavlov.)

We wanted to say everything to you candidly. These are not the last difficulties that we will experience. We should be able to assess the situation today patiently and skillfully, and to look toward tomorrow, toward the future—and this future is good. We will have to live through this crisis. This will not be the final crisis because the imperialist camp will not leave us alone and will create crises in other places. Therefore, we should remember one thing: if we really share the same positions, the Marxist-Leninist positions, then we should look for joint decisions and undertake coordinating steps that correspond to the interests of the socialist camp, the interests of peace and socialism.

Our efforts are following this course. Cuba today finds itself in the epicenter of the struggle for these ideals. Therefore, we are doing everything in order to secure a position such that Cuba would be following the path chosen by its people—it would be developing on a socialist basis.

Regarding the inspections: We agree that unilateral inspections are unacceptable for any country, including Cuba. But U Thant’s proposal about “the UN presence” is beneficial for Cuba. In general, this is beneficial for any small country because in this case the United Nations—the world organization—to some extent becomes a guarantor against an invasion of the country that is threatened by invasion. Of course, this must be implemented on an equal basis so that UN observers would be [stationed] in Cuba, in some region of the United States and also in other countries of the Caribbean. Then sovereignty, equality, equal conditions, and equal guaranties will be ensured. If the imperialists announce that Cuba is planning an attack and therefore they want to have observers there, then in its turn Cuba, if someone is planning an attack against it, can demand that observers be sent and observer posts be established in those countries from which such aggression is possible.

We believe this approach to be correct. As early as 1955 and then in 1958, we ourselves introduced proposals at the disarmament negotiations, which presupposed establishing observer posts at airports, at railway hubs, on highways, and in large ports on a mutual basis. Those proposals remain in force today. Their purpose is to avert the danger of some aggressive country preparing a sudden attack, concentrating forces, and carrying out an invasion of the other country.

Apparently, even if we eliminate the crisis we are currently living through—and we think that we will eliminate it on the basis of a mutual agreement—this question will take on an importance beyond Cuba (but Cuba could start the process). This system then could be expanded to Europe and Asia, which would serve the cause of guaranteeing the security of all countries of the world and most of all of the two camps—of the countries of the socialist camp and the countries of the imperialist camp that have joined NATO’s military bloc.

We believe that this is reasonable. Therefore now we need to enter diplomatic negotiations, which have already started. In order to create a basis for that, our country has to fulfill its obligations so that the other country can fulfill its obligation. The US president accepted this in principle in his letter. (But you should not cite this last confidential letter in your conversation with the Cubans.)

In our letter to Comrade Fidel Castro, we have already given an explanation [in response] to his statement that we allegedly have not consulted with him. We have no other alternatives except to repeat what we have already said: We believe that there was consultation when we received a telegram from Havana, which said that an attack on Cuba was almost inevitable, and that the alternative to this was to preempt and to deliver a nuclear strike.

We understood that you wanted us to undertake measures that would preempt the enemy, and preclude the possibility of an air strike or an invasion of Cuba. You believed that this could have been achieved by our delivering a nuclear strike on the United States. According to your information about the timing of attacks on Cuba, we did not have time for formal consultations, which we wanted to conduct before doing what we did.

Therefore, we hope that you will understand that we acted in the interests of Cuba, in the interests of the Soviet people, and in the interest of the people of the entire world. And in our opinion, we achieved those ends.

When you are prepared, choose a moment for conversation. As you can see from Kennedy's confidential letter, we need to give him an answer. We have been delaying this answer for some time, and we would like to receive your opinion, which would be passed to us after having already incorporated the reaction of our friends. Then we would be able to give Kennedy an answer that we would not have to change later—an answer that would ideally express a coordinated position and would satisfy ours and Cuba's mutual interests.

We know that a hard task has befallen you. But we decided, and the military for their part quite firmly said, that in the interests of normalizing the situation the Il-28s should be removed from Cuba in order not to make the Il-28 into some kind of fetish—either the Il-28s or nothing. This would be foolish because this is not the kind of weapon for which it would be worth breaking off negotiations and thus jeopardizing all the achievements we have reached in our correspondence with the president. We should not provide an opportunity for the aggressive forces to undermine what was already achieved and place the responsibility for the breakup on us. This would be unforgivable from our side; it would show a lack of understanding of simple things.

From the materials we have obtained (and we sent these to you), you can see that among the responsible leading circles of the United States they allegedly allow for the possibility that in order not to create a crisis out of the dispute over the Il-28s, the Americans could even agree to leave the planes there; however, we must give assurances that their numbers will not increase in the future.

This, of course, would be the best option for us. But it would not be completely correct to start from this assumption in elaborating our steps. Therefore, we should exhibit caution. We are using this, but only in the course of bargaining. If we can get this bargain, then of course we would not refuse it, but we have to determine our ultimate decision, and our ultimate decision is the agreement to withdraw the Il-28s, which will not affect the defensive measures that have been taken in Cuba. On the contrary, the moral strengthening of our position in the negotiations is worth the withdrawal of these airplanes since then the United States will be faced with the necessity of affirming, even more firmly before the entire world, the obligation

undertaken in the president's letter, and to register it at the United Nations. This act warrants the withdrawal, the removal of the Il-28s from Cuba.

N. Khrushchev

[1] Comrade A. I. Mikoyan received the following telegram from N. S. Khrushchev on Sunday morning, 11 November 1962.