

November 13, 1962

Record of Conversation between Mikoyan and Fidel Castro, Havana

Citation:

"Record of Conversation between Mikoyan and Fidel Castro, Havana", November 13, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, From the personal papers of Dr. Sergo A. Mikoyan, donated to the National Security Archive. Translation by Anna Melyakova for the National Security Archive.

<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/115099>

Summary:

The conversation was recorded after the Cuban leader refused to see the Soviet envoy for three days in a reaction to the new demand. Castro starts by declaring his disagreement with the decision to remove the IL-28s but, assures Mikoyan that the revolutionary leadership discussed the issue and agreed to the removal. Mikoyan presents all his arguments to show that the withdrawal of the planes would end the crisis and make the US non-invasion pledge more credible. He acknowledges the "negative psychological effect" of the decision and reiterates that all the rest of the weapons would stay in Cuba so its security would be guaranteed without the obsolete planes. They also agree on the rules of verification of the withdrawal.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Record of a Conversation between A. I. Mikoyan and F. Castro

November 13, 1962

The conversation took place at A. I. Mikoyan's residence. After exchanging greetings, Mikoyan talked about his visit to the cattle farm located on Turiguano Island. He made this trip by plane on the same day, together with Carlos Rafael Rodriguez and head adviser F. R. Titov.

A. I. Mikoyan: Today's trip was very interesting. We were impressed with the work carried out by the revolutionary government in developing animal husbandry. The Santa Gertrudis cattle breed can take a high place at any exhibition.

F. Castro: The revolutionary government plans to export cattle from this farm in the future.

A. I. Mikoyan: Our minister of agriculture acquired a few animals of this breed in the United States. I saw them. It is a very promising breed. Speaking about the cattle farm in Turiguano, Mikoyan expressed his admiration for the scope and quality of the construction of buildings for cattle and pigs. Judging by the scope and quality of the ongoing work, one could say that this is not a socialist, but a Communist farm, Mikoyan joked. The cattle farm in Turiguano is very large. I would say that there few farms of this scale in the world. We have similar types of farms in Uzbekistan and Siberia, but I think the farm in Turiguano far exceeds them in size.

F. Castro: Have you read the article about the arrest of an American CIA agent who was sent to Cuba?

A. I. Mikoyan: Yes. I read these materials today. Here is the true face of the "free" Western world for you. Ambassador [Aleksandr] Alekseyev told me today that some time ago there was an assassination attempt on Comrade Carlos Rafael Rodriguez.

F. Castro (jokingly): This attempt, it seems, was due to the shortage of meat in Cuba.

C. R. Rodriguez (also jokingly): At the time, he did not yet hold a post at the National Institute of Agrarian Reform.

F. Castro: Comrade Mikoyan, please, let's talk about the issue raised in yesterday's conversation.

A. I. Mikoyan agrees with Fidel Castro's suggestion.

F. Castro: We basically did not agree with the removal of strategic missiles, just as we disagree with the removal of Il-28 bombers from Cuba. These measures create a difficult situation for us. They undermine our sovereign right to determine for ourselves what type of weapons we can have, and what agreements we can make.

With respect to the missiles, we are faced with a fait accompli, and we will not persist with regard to Il-28 bombers. We are aware of the Soviet government's intention to withdraw the Il-28 bombers from Cuba as a basis for negotiations with the Americans. The same thing happened with the missiles-first you made a commitment, then you started to remove them. Our position is as follows: tie the removal of the naval blockage and the cessation of the violation of Cuban airspace to the withdrawal of Il-28 bombers. Without these requirements, we cannot give our consent. I believe that it is a minimal, but also our firm requirement. Otherwise, the five points put

forward by the revolutionary government will become meaningless, and we consider them our guarantee. If the requirements I outlined to lift the naval blockade and cease violating Cuba's airspace are met, then the Il-28 bombers can be removed from Cuba.

We already spoke with Comrade Mikoyan about the need to send a letter to the acting UN Secretary General U Thant that, despite the removal of offensive weapons from Cuban territory, the Americans continue to violate our airspace.

We have taken a passive, permissive stance on violation of Cuban airspace. The Americans are insolent. They make shaving flights over Cuban territory, flying at 100 meters over our military bases and units. This is bad for the morale of our people and makes them resentful. Our position led to the point that now our enemy knows everything. The Americans' reconnaissance flights over Cuban territory led to the weakening of our country's defense.

It is difficult to explain to our people this concession to the enemy. It is difficult to explain why we let ourselves come to this state of affairs. All we need now is for American planes to land on our territory to refuel. And what are we doing? We are enabling them. In effect, we are allowing the enemy to violate our airspace.

The Soviet Union, the socialist countries, or any other sovereign nation would not allow it. Why do we? Such enabling on our part can be interpreted as a sign of cowardice, like we forgot the principles of morality. We think that after the strategic missiles are removed from Cuba, we can no longer allow this to go on. We decided to write to the acting Secretary General U Thant that all the planes making shaving flights over Cuba will be shot down.

Now I would like to speak about the Il-28 bombers. Since they are the property of the Soviet Union, we, despite the statement I just made, will agree with the Soviet government's decision to remove them, just as we agreed with the decision to remove the missiles. This is not just my personal opinion. We discussed the issue of Il-28 bombers at the secretariat of the ORI national leadership and unanimously came to this decision.

A. I. Mikoyan: I would like to respond to this question in several parts. First, I will talk about our position on the issue of violations of Cuba's airspace. At one time, we considered it necessary not to shoot down American planes. This issue was raised some time ago by Comrade Dorticós. After a conversation with Comrade Dorticós I informed the Soviet government of the Cuban position.

The day before yesterday, during a conversation with Comrade Fidel, I told him that our government came to an agreement with your position regarding contacting U Thant and demanding an end to these brazen flights. This protest could be motivated by the fact that the Soviet Union kept its promise, but the United States does not want to keep theirs. This kind of protest against the violation of Cuban airspace would serve as a warning from the revolutionary government of Cuba. It would be a serious warning to the Americans.

F. Castro: I agree with this formulation of the issue. We understand your concerns.

A. I. Mikoyan: We had to tolerate this lawlessness only to a certain point, not more.

F. Castro: We understand Comrade Mikoyan's considerations.

A. I. Mikoyan: We believe that the withdrawal of the Il-28 bombers has to be tied to

the removal of the naval blockade. It is to this end that we agreed to negotiate regarding the removal of Il-28s from Cuba. All our actions are directed toward achieving this goal-lifting the naval blockade. The CC CPSU adopted the following resolution: to agree to withdraw the Il-28 bombers from Cuba if the United States will fulfill its obligation; but if they do not remove the blockade, we leave the bombers in Cuba. You see that our position is quite clear. I do not want to come back to topics we already discussed, but it seems useful to note that after the strategic missiles were discovered, they ceased to be a deterring force. They already served their purpose. After they were discovered, they ceased to be a deterrent.

The Il-28 bomber is an old type of aircraft with a small ceiling. They are not very important for Cuba's defense. The fact that Cuba has weapons like high-speed fighter planes, missile-carrier boats, anti-assault landing and anti-aircraft means this covers all the losses that might be caused by the removal of the Il-28 bombers from Cuba. I will report your considerations to the CC CPSU. I want to reiterate that very powerful defensive weapons remain in Cuba. We will be able to transfer it to you when the Cuban military officials become familiar with it. This military equipment is incomparably more powerful than any equipment Cuba currently has. These are the most advanced weapons Comrade Pavlov currently has. The CC CPSU's resolution is to transfer these weapons to you over the course of time. I would like to emphasize that we are taking these measures in Cuba's interest, in order to ensure that the United States does not keep the blockade. We want to provide the best conditions for the comprehensive development of Cuba. The issue was discussed in the CC CPSU, together with our military. Both perspectives I described have been carefully studied. Our comrades have decided that the only correct way is to lift the blockade and withdraw the Il-28 bombers from Cuba.

Comrade N. S. Khrushchev wrote me with instructions to tell Fidel Castro and his comrades about our position and about our guiding motives. He again noted that the Soviet Union will always support Cuba.

We admire the courage of the Cuban people and their leader Fidel Castro and his comrades. I want to emphasize that we consider your difficulties to be our difficulties, and we regard your victory as our victory. Of course, one can criticize the government of imperialist countries and condemn their policies, but this does not help if there is no practical assistance. We offer you all kinds of fraternal assistance-military, economic, and diplomatic. I would like to add that we are planning to consider the possibility of providing additional weapons to Cuba. We are a fraternal nation, and we will do everything to protect Cuba. We fully supported the five points put forward by Comrade Fidel Castro. I received a telegram from Comrade Kuznetsov, in which he writes about the steps taken by our diplomats to support the five points of Cuba's revolutionary government. We understand that there will be many difficulties in the struggle to realize these five requirements, and that we will not immediately succeed in implementing them. This struggle will take place in practical terms in our negotiations with the Americans. We believe that your UN representative should join this struggle.

Our task is to use the UN and its secretary-general, U Thant, to the fullest extent to resolve questions that are important to us.

The Americans wanted to use Cuba's economic difficulties to strangle the revolution with the bony hand of hunger. But if there is no blockade, Cuba will have an opportunity to develop its economy. Our economic aid will increase, and Cuba will win.

F. Castro: I have a question related to the Il-28 bombers. What are the USSR's intentions? If the Americans fail to fulfill their promises and lift the blockade, then the bombers, as you said, will remain here. What does that mean? I do not understand in

what form you plan to announce the withdrawal of the Il-28 bombers.

A. I. Mikoyan: For now we are continuing to assert that the Il-28 bomber is not an offensive weapon. The Americans argue that any bomber is an offensive weapon. So far, we have not agreed to remove the Il-28s from Cuba.

If you agree to our proposal, we will state that as soon as Kennedy's promises will be fulfilled, we agree to remove the Il-28s from Cuba. Consequently, we are talking about the possibility to start negotiations. I want to stress that we will not remove the Il-28s, the personnel and equipment until we reach an agreement with the Americans.

F. Castro: Will this position include the requirement to cease the violation of our airspace?

A. I. Mikoyan: We consider such flights to be illegal. You are planning to send your protest to the UN. It will be a serious warning to the Americans.

F. Castro: I quite agree with you, Comrade Mikoyan.

A. I. Alekseyev: The Il-28 bombers are material for negotiations, so to speak.

A. I. Mikoyan: Yes. We want to have an agreed position with you when we conduct negotiations with Americans regarding the blockade. The anti-aircraft missiles will remain here. That is a modern weapon. We will leave them in Cuba. The Americans do not dare talk about them, although they are a dangerous weapon.

A. I. Alekseyev: I read today in a review of the foreign press a report that said the MiG-21 fighter planes can be used as offensive weapons.

A. I. Mikoyan: Yes, they can be used like that.

F. Castro (jokingly): If you fly the MiG-21 one way and jump off with a parachute, then the aircraft can be used at a distance of 600 kilometers.

E. Guevara: No. It would be a distance greater than 600 kilometers.

A. I. Mikoyan: More precisely, the range of the aircraft will be 600 to 700 kilometers one way and the same on the way back. The designer of the aircraft created a wonderful machine, which broke the record of height and speed for this class of aircraft. The record is registered by the International Aviation Federation.

F. Castro: Of course, from a military point of view, the Il-28 is not very important to us. The question of withdrawing the Il-28s can be used to make the Americans fulfill our demands.

A. I. Mikoyan: We understand the negative psychological effect of withdrawing this outdated bomber from Cuba.

F. Castro: It would be bad if this was a unilateral move. We have to demand concessions from the Americans.

A. I. Mikoyan: So we will turn the question of the withdrawal of Il-28s from Cuba into a

subject of diplomatic negotiations, we will win the support of the UN and neutral countries.

C. R. Rodriguez: And if the Americans will not remove the blockade and the Il-28s will remain here, what should we do in such a case?

A. I. Mikoyan: I already said that we cannot send warships to escort commercial ships in the Caribbean. Considering the correlation of forces in the Caribbean, the Americans could continue the blockade. We want to deprive them of the excuse they want to use. In this case, we can work through the UN. After all, this is not an issue worth starting a nuclear war.

If Cuba was located geographically closer to the Soviet Union, the issue would be resolved without difficulty. Cuba's geographical location is very disadvantageous for us. Is it worth firing nuclear missiles? That would not help to resolve the current crisis. It would be better to take this step, without decreasing Cuba's defense capabilities, to remove the Il-28 bombers in order to guarantee nonaggression. The guarantee will be valid-this is the general consensus-for a certain length of time. Two tendencies are clearly emerging in the United States. Kennedy is under harsh criticism. Militant circles are trying to use the fact that the Il-28 bombers are still in Cuba to delay and prolong the blockade.

Kennedy would like to strangle Cuba by the blockade. He needs to save his prestige, too. Kennedy is not any more positive toward Cuba than any other American reactionaries. But, he is smarter, he understands that he should not undermine the prestige of the United States by a military attack on Cuba. He thinks that the blockade can undermine your system, cause economic hardship and the fall of the revolutionary government. Kennedy hopes that the entire burden of economic aid will fall on the Soviet Union, and that the Soviet Union could not bear the economic difficulties associated with the need to help Cuba. He believes that Fidel Castro's government will not be able to cope with the situation, and the people of Cuba will overthrow the government. In other words, his whole calculation rests on the idea that Cuba will collapse economically.

Kennedy's plan is better than the plan put forward by the US military, because it is unrealistic. Cuba has great potential for the development of its economy. Our assistance will enable the growth of Cuba's economy, culture, and science. As a result, Cuba will become a model for Latin America; it will be a center of attraction for the people of Latin America.

If the blockade continues, the Cuban people's standard of living will fall, and difficulties will increase.

We have to secure the removal of the blockade and guarantees that the United States and other countries will not attack Cuba. These guarantees have to be reflected in UN documents. It is unlikely that this will be done in the form of a protocol, but it is still necessary to achieve UN control in the Caribbean.

Comrade Kuznetsov has been insisting on this plan at the UN. This plan is good because it does not allow for the possibility of a surprise attack on Cuba.

Americans cling to the OAS [Organization of American States], trying to extend the activities of this organization to Cuba. They are opposed to the UN addressing issues of the threat of sudden attack.

However, if U Thant's proposal on control is accepted, then the UN will act in the

Caribbean and the OAS will be on the sidelines. Of course, the Americans will oppose the adoption of this and other proposals. But we have to fight for the five points put forward by Comrade Fidel, as well as for all our requirements.

F. Castro: Perhaps my colleagues have more questions?

E. Guevara: I do not have a question. I would just like to comment on the issue at hand. We must pray to God that the Americans do not find out about our conversation. The Americans are tying the withdrawal of Il-28s to the inspections, referring to the letter from Comrade Khrushchev. From a diplomatic point of view, they can find fault with the fact that in Comrade Khrushchev's letter he mentions both the removal of offensive weapons and inspections on the ground. If the Americans know that the blockade will not lead to nuclear war, they will keep the blockade.

A. I. Mikoyan: I think they will not attack, but they very much want to maintain the blockade. Formally, they can say that there was no on-site inspection. However, the Americans themselves retreated on the question of inspections of strategic missiles. We believe that since they confirmed the removal of these missiles through aerial photography, it will suffice. Demands for on-site inspections are just nitpicking. If the Americans wanted to complicate the issue, they would say that they have no information as to whether or not the missiles were removed.

We agreed only on visual surveillance of the removal. It was used when strategic missiles were removed from Cuba. There was also visual surveillance from ships at close distances. Although there was one attempt to go aboard one of the Soviet ships with weapons, but Soviet sailors thwarted the attempt and did not allow the controllers aboard the ship. They also put up a protest regarding this attempt to breach the agreement. After all, we agreed only to allow controlling ships to come within a small distance. Therefore, when the captain of the control ship tried to get on board our ship, he was not allowed. It should be noted that for the entire time of the blockade, controllers did not go on board Soviet ships, they feared conflict.

I emphasize once again that different forces are at play in the United States. Kennedy does not want conflict. The American press is shouting that there is no certainty as to whether all missiles were removed or a part of them was hidden. It is important that we reached an agreement on control precisely in this form. Kuznetsov was asked about the whereabouts of the warheads intended for the missiles that were removed. He replied that warheads cannot function without missiles. Even with ground inspections, it is practically impossible to find the warheads. With the withdrawal of the Il-28s from Cuba we want to alleviate the conditions of the struggle. Of course, there is no guarantee that the Americans will accept all our demands, but we will fight hard to achieve our goals.

F. Castro: All right. We agree with this.

Ambassador A. I. Alekseyev was present at the conversation, which lasted an hour and a half.

Recorded by V. Tikhmenev.

Verified: [signature]

Ed. note. The conversation took place at A. I. Mikoyan's residence. After exchanging greetings, Mikoyan talked about his visit to the cattle farm located on Turiguano Island. He made this trip by plane on the same day, together with Carlos Rafael Rodriguez and head adviser F. R. Titov.