

November 1, 1962

**Hervé Alphand, French Ambassador in Washington,
to Maurice Couve de Murville, French Foreign
Minister, Telegram 6179-6185**

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Summary:

Hervé Alphand, the French Ambassador in Washington, writes to Maurice Couve de Murville, the French Foreign Minister, that the United States (and President Kennedy in particular) does not believe the Cuban crisis is over, that Khrushchev was pushed to build nuclear bases in Cuba by his generals and that Cuba's behavior in this crisis represents a fundamental shift on the international stage of diplomatic relations.

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Telegram number 6179-6185[1]

1 November 1962

The long meeting I had on 1 November with M. McGeorge Bundy inspired in me the following thoughts:

1. Before examining in detail the possible consequences of a Cuban settlement, M. Kennedy wants first to focus on ending the current crisis, which in his view is not over yet. It is likely that the Russians want to fulfill the promises made in M. Khrushchev's letter. A Soviet general in Havana gave guarantees to M. Thant's Indian military adviser [Gen. Indarjit Rikhye] that the missiles would be dismantled on Friday 2 November. But until now, the aerial photographs have not been able to prove these statements. We do not know yet whether the pictures made today will provide any decisive indications on this subject. Moreover, if Castro remains intransigent, it will be very difficult to organize an inspection that could both allow to check the departure of the missiles and the absence of offensive nuclear weapons on the island. The administration is considering what methods it could implement (international inspection at sea, aerial surveillance, etc...). No decision has been taken yet, and this problem presents political and technical challenges.

2. It is clear that Castro is furious and he is very bitter with his Russian friends for having abandoned him without consultation. M. McGeorge Bundy thinks that M. [Anastas] Mikoyan is coming to Havana[2] to try to make Castro understand the situation. The Russians have their "Phoumi" [a right-wing Laotian military and political figure allied to the United States] and the current episode will maybe show them that some satellites, be it in the East or West, are not always docile.

3. M. Bundy described Khrushchev's behavior in the Cuban affair in line with the explanations that I have already reported (in my telegram 6106-611110). He added that maybe the military leaders, especially [Soviet Defense Minister] Marshal [Rodion] Malinovsky, pushed him to build nuclear bases in Cuba so as to try to catch up in the arms race. Thus M. Khrushchev would, to a certain extent, have been victim of the carelessness of his generals.

Since we ignore the state of Khrushchev's relations with the other members of the Presidium, it is important not only to not compromise him by making him appear as a friend of the West, but to also to not humiliate him in front of his colleagues. The President is very conscious of this psychological problem

4. Does Soviet behavior in Cuba already amount, as some commentators claim, to an important turning point on the international stage? A drop in the prestige of the USSR and its leader could, of course, have very important consequences not only for East-West relations, but also vis-à-vis the peoples of developing states and within the communist bloc itself. But it is very difficult to predict how events will unfold. It is possible that tomorrow the Soviet leaders will once again launch into their usual themes about the "free city of Berlin," general and complete disarmament, a moratorium on nuclear tests, etc... It is also possible that an era of real negotiation in a spirit of détente will emerge.

5. In this case, the gap that separates Russia from China will widen further. China will try to present itself even more as the leader of the communist world, determined not to seek any compromises with the Western imperialists. It could provide further evidence of its intransigence by pursuing its invasion of India, and by supporting throughout the world, in Cuba as in South-East Asia or Africa, the demands of the extremists. The evolution of the situation in India will be the main test for the evolution of Sino-Soviet relations.

6. The Cuban adventure highlights the strategic concepts of the nuclear era. It

appears to M. McGeorge Bundy that it has underlined the necessity of conventional weapons to avoid a thermonuclear conflict. It proves also that, despite what [NATO Commander] General [Lauris] Norstad claims, medium range missiles placed on the ground and easily detectable are of little use when facing an invulnerable nuclear deterrence carried by planes and placed in submarines.

[1] This telegram was sent to New York, and via the department to Bonn and London.

[2] Mikoyan would arrive in the Cuban capital on 2 November.

[3] In this telegram on 30 October, Alphand agreed with the French Ambassador in Moscow as to the likely causes of the Soviet attitude in the outbreak of the Cuban crisis: an attempt to suddenly change the balance of power in order to gain compensation from Washington. M. Alphand then gave his opinion on the mistakes committed by Khrushchev and the resulting failure: underestimating president Kennedy's character, the United States' determination to maintain bases in the world in the absence of a general disarmament agreement, and of the essentially bilateral nature of Soviet-American confrontation in Cuba. From this, what had been the impact of all this on the authority of the head of the party and the head of the Soviet government?