

November 15, 1962

**Roger Robert du Gardier, French Ambassador in
Havana, to Maurice Couve de Murville, French
Foreign Minister, Telegram number 610-611**

Citation:

"Roger Robert du Gardier, French Ambassador in Havana, to Maurice Couve de Murville, French Foreign Minister, Telegram number 610-611", November 15, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1962, Tome II (1er Juillet-31 Décembre), (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1999), pp. 424-27. Translation by Garret J. Martin. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/115419>

Summary:

Roger Robert du Gardier discusses his impressions of the effects of the Cuban Missile Crisis (on military activities, public sentiments, etc.).

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

French

Contents:

Translation - English

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Since I have the unexpected opportunity of using a diplomatic pouch, which is heading to Mexico and then on to France, I want to put to good use the few hours that remain before the departure of the diplomatic pouch to give the Department a general impression on the Cuban crisis up to now.

I am purposefully using the word "impression." My European colleagues and I, indeed, are facing imprecision and uncertainty regardless of our efforts to get clear and verifiable information. The meetings of M. Mikoyan¹ are taking place in great secrecy - if there are any more meetings at all: some feel, indeed, that in the last few days, the Soviet first Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers has run out of arguments and topics of conversation, and that he is only kept here as a sort of "shield" against an eventual American invasion. Once again, they are announcing his departure for the end of the week - tomorrow even, for the most convinced of the rumor spreaders - but there is no apparent reason for this to be true, as there is no apparent reason for this to be false either.

As I signaled in several of my previous messages, the great majority of the population is more apathetic than ever, despite the kicks given periodically by the professional agitators of the regime. It seems that the sudden discovery of medium range Russian launchers stunned most Cubans, be they revolutionaries or not, and that they are still in shock. It is a fact that for a country that has claimed to be, in the last four years, completely free, sovereign and independent, admitting that foreigners organized, on their own, important strategic bases on their soil must be particularly painful. This, combined with a nearly general mobilization and the vigor of the political police, can easily explain the state of stupor of the island's population.

While in the last few days, the trenches built along the coast are quite bare, the military transports are very active: not only do we constantly see them in the city, but they are spotted in all parts of the countryside. From various sources, we are also hearing that soldiers and militias are continuing to hide, with great caution, very large cement containers in natural caves, or alternatively in man-made excavations that are then covered with earth, sand, and vegetation. It does not seem that they are trying to hide light infantry weapons, or even coastal defense and anti-air canons, since such weapons are absolutely normal for the defense of any country; unless these are part of an "excess" supply of weapons that is put in reserve for the day where the Americans would have imposed a new regime in Cuba, and Fidel's supporters would need to reclaim power.

Among the many rumors that are circulating, there is one, in my view, that presents a certain interest even though it cannot be verified: when the medium range missiles and their accessories were unloaded, the Russians or Eastern Europeans who led the operation did so with great precautions, with some of them wearing asbestos masks and suits, while for the reloading of these same missiles, no such precaution was shown by those leading the operation, who were all simply wearing shorts and short sleeve shirts. We can speculate, obviously, that the key elements of the missiles - combustible liquids and launching devices - or even nuclear warheads - have remained on the island, and only frames have left. This would explain why, according to the same sources, the Russians so easily agreed to withdraw their famous missiles.

Maybe there is in this case, on the part of certain Cubans who are tired of the regime, a more or less tacit desire to see a serious international inspection of the island's territory. It does seem, for many of my colleagues and myself, that the rumors in question are too diverse and too numerous for us to ignore. It is a fact, in any case, that we can hear, throughout the island, muted explosions that seem to be part of underground works. This is the case, in particular, near my residence which is on the

north flank of a hill that is supposedly full of labyrinths like those in the rock of Gibraltar.

The authorities, for their part, are very worried. The visit of the General Secretary of the United Nations [U Thant], and then the one of M. Mikoyan, did not lessen this obvious feeling of concern, nor does the news from the United States incline one to believe that an agreement is now possible between the main opponents: Dr. Fidel Castro and his team do not seem to have a clear conscience, nor are they ready to trick either their enemies or their allies.

Once more, these are only speculations and hypotheses, more or less supported by pieces of information of irregular value, but from which we feel we must draw a "median" that is as reasonable and logical as possible: the activity of the political police and the constant suspicion that we face, us, the "Westerners" and our last free Cuban friends, does not allow us, indeed, to become exposed to accusations of spying which are quite recurrent here.

Even though, since the start of the week, M. Mikoyan and Fidel Castro have been shown side by side several times, public opinion continues to believe that discord persists between both men, as it does between their governments. It is a fact that Dr. Fidel Castro appears constantly worried and even irritated while M. Mikoyan, once he has finished smiling for the photographers, adopts the look of the severe mentor that he wants to project here.

The old guard or the strictly loyal communists - noticeably the Dr. Carlos Rafael Rodriguez - do laud and praise the Soviet first Deputy Chairman, but the public, including the revolutionaries, is far more reticent than they are, when it is not hostile.

The sympathies of the "Fidelistas" are far more with the Chinese, but since the latter cannot do anything for them in practical terms, be it by providing supplies or even more by providing fuel, they have to accept Russia's tutelage, and we can sense that this tutelage is becoming unbearable for the "men of the Sierra" - those, at least, who have not joined the opposition since their leader officially declared last December that he was a "Marxist-Leninist".

In terms of the relations between the government and the Western embassies, the situation remains tense and my European colleagues and I have the feeling that the regime is ready, at any moment, to accuse us of the worst crimes and, of course, of spying... That said, the population, even when "engaged" - excluding the "wholehearted" supporters of the regime and the professional agitators - is not normally hostile: I would even mention cases of members of the famous "Committees for the Defense of the Revolution" who were friendly or helpful towards certain Westerners who were labeled as particularly pro-Americans: these are likely some simple "counter-insurance plans" in case a still possible American invasion is successful, but it still remains that such an attitude is not compatible with the spirit of hatred that the official propaganda is trying to instill with the "masses" against all that is "Western," "capitalist," "colonialist," or "imperialist." If one day we have to face a crowd that is animated by hostile intentions towards us, it will only be, and I am convinced of this, on the basis of precise orders from authorities...

Lacking any serious information on the evolution of M. Mikoyan's mission or on the eventual removal of the 42 Illyushin 28 that are claimed to be here, I am giving these indications to the Department, through this 'summary of the general atmosphere,' in response to the request that was made by its message on 2nd November.²

[1] Mikoyan arrived in Havana from New York on 2 November. He would have several meetings with Fidel Castro.

[2] Referring to the telegram number 183 sent to Havana, where the Department requested information on the destination planned by the Cubans for the missiles and military material that came from the bases that were being currently dismantled.