

October 22, 1962

Manlio Brosio Diaries (excerpts)

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Summary:

Diary entries from Manlio Brosio, an Italian foreign service diplomat, from his time as Ambassador to Paris during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Credits:

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Contents:

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Monday, 22 October

An eventful evening intrudes upon a colorless day. While [Director General for Economic Affairs at the Foreign Ministry, Egidio] Ortona arrives around 11 p.m., [Diplomatic Counselor to the Prime Minister Carlo] Marchiori calls me on the phone to have more news about what is going on in Cuba. The news [reports] are more and more dramatic. In Rome they are nervous. I get in touch with [General Secretary of the French Foreign Ministry Eric] De Carbonnel who informs me about the NATO meeting which is going on and tells me "Il ne fait pas de doute que la notre sera une attitude de solidarité." I phone this message to Marchiori and in the meantime I get in touch with [Italian Ambassador Corrado] Orlandi [Contucci]; later I get a call from [Italian Ambassador to the North Atlantic Council Adolfo] Alessandrini and I also inform [Italian Ambassador in Brussels Antonio] Casardi in Brussels where Piccioni wants to be informed too. After the NATO meeting Alessandrini tells me that Dean Acheson has arrived, and that the French have been the only ones to issue a strong declaration of solidarity. Alessandrini behaved "as a friend who asks some clarifications on a matter of common concern." I tell this to Marchiori and [Director General of Political Affairs at the Italian Foreign Ministry Giovanni] Fornari who is also in Brussels. I speak again with Carbonnel. He refrains from giving any assessment about the measures adopted by Kennedy. In the meantime Ortona has listened to Kennedy's speech, intense and grave. My impression, as well as Ortona's, is that these are half-measures, an empty show of energy which will not produce any result. It will allow the Soviets to react with an offensive - once again with words - against the American bases. Kennedy looks to me more and more like the kid who wants to keep everybody happy: you do not resort to force by asking for the presence of the carabinieri and the assent of the timid ones. First you use it and then consent will come.

Before going to bed Ortona discusses with me his serious preoccupations about the Italian political and economic situation. There is a lack of confidence, nobody is investing, people fear a major crisis in six months. In the meantime, everyone is criticizing Fanfani and no one dares to challenge him. Ortona says this reminds him of the campaign against Greece: everybody was saying that we were running towards disaster but all hurried behind the Duce.

Tuesday, 23 October

The Cuban crisis dominates the day, but so far nothing particularly serious has happened. We wait for the meeting between the Soviet ships and the American fleet. The French are in favor of solidarity but they are critical of the lack of consultation. On the other hand, we once more witness the close interdependence among the different parts of the world as well as the impossibility for a great power to base its decisions - in an area that interests it directly - upon the consultation and the doubts of all the other ones. Among the others I have at lunch [...] the Norwegian Ambassador, who sees the whole situation exclusively from the viewpoint of the commercial fleet of his country. Thus it is necessary that, in its own sectors of interest, a great power decides by itself, and then she must take part in the decisions concerning those distant areas to which she has committed her own responsibility. This is what de facto happens: one grumbles about the principle, but then one toes the line. [...]

Wednesday, 24 October

Talk with [Secretary General of the Italian Foreign Ministry Attilio] Cattani and Alessandrini. Cattani is happy about the [EEC] meeting in Brussels. [...] As for Cuba, there was a clear French position of understanding more than of solidarity for the American initiative: understanding because the initiative does not regard the NATO zone, solidarity for the repercussions which it could have in Europe. Alessandrini has

reassured Cattani and he has asked for instructions. These will come, if possible. Cattani does not exclude a government crisis in Italy if the international crisis will get worse. Alessandrini has once again mentioned the issue of the Italian bases and of their transformation into mobile naval bases: Cattani believes that we cannot discuss the issue in Italy on a bilateral basis with Americans. We will have to wait for a multilateral solution. Cattani is concerned by Piccioni's absences. He goes into his office 15 minutes each day, and it is almost impossible to speak to him. It took a lot of effort to make him chair the meeting of the Six - after which, instead of rushing down to Rome (in light of the Cuban crisis) he wasted an afternoon in a carefree walk through the Waterloo battlefield. An excellent idea, if it hadn't been the symptom of a systemic crisis.

[...] At eleven p.m. the last news [bulletin] announces that part of the Soviet ships had turned back. Shortly before that, I had explained to [Italian Consul General in Paris Nicolò] Di Bernardo [...] that there would be no war, but that the Kennedy operation had been badly conceived as it raised to the level of the missile bases an issue which should have remained at the level of Cuba and Castro. After the news of the ships' withdrawal, we analyze the situation: my thesis is confirmed, there is a tactical success for Kennedy, a check for the Communists, but Khrushchev will not fail to get his payback with the European bases.

Thursday, 25 October

In fact this morning [US columnist Walter] Lippmann is already proposing to obtain the dismantling of the bases in Cuba by renouncing those in Turkey. It's the usual [...] I talk about it with [Italian Defense Minister Giulio] Andreotti who arrives during the morning. Then I have lunch with Andreotti and [French Minister of Armies Pierre] Messmer.

Messmer's evaluation is clear and it matches mine: "Kennedy has had a success for the time being, but we will pay for it later in Europe, in Berlin, or in the other bases in Turkey, etc." Before that, at 8:30, I met [FIAT CEO Vittorio] Valletta: he said that Fanfani's speech was "most beautiful," yet he was worried about the government's position for its weakness towards the Socialists and the Communists, and about the economic situation [...] Andreotti later tells me that he has spoken with Messmer about the [French] force de frappe (which will not be discussed at the December NATO Council, it's too early) and of the nuclear submarine which we want to produce and for which we ask for support from both the Americans and the French [...]

Friday, 26 October

The Cuban accident is in a waiting phase, which however does not exclude tension. Kennedy does not seem inclined to accept the mediation terms proposed by U Thant. What does he want? In the evening at the Opéra I see [Head of Treaty Service and of Atomic and Space Affairs at the French Foreign Ministry, Jean] De La Granville who tells me that the Americans talk too much about the necessity to dismantle the Cuban bases. De La Granville is afraid that they want to invade Cuba, and this is clearly the impression at the Quai d'Orsay. He fears this solution, he does not want it: I reply that Kennedy is now emboldened by the Russian prudence, and that if the operation is not carried through to the very end it will not be a success.

□[...]

Saturday, 27 October

I wake up early and I finish my report: basically I state that [French President Charles] De Gaulle is worried for the effects that Kennedy's action will have on Europe (bases

in Turkey, etc.) and for the influence that the unilateral American decisions may have on his interests. There may be a tacit compromise between the two colossi, in the sense of tolerating reciprocal interferences. The respect for the spheres of influence is relative, since for Russia all of Europe is a sphere of influence. De Gaulle, therefore, is strengthened in his belief that Europe must be united and reinforced: with nuclear weapons, he means.

In the meantime the newspapers are writing that Kennedy wants to dismantle the bases and may as well invade Cuba. All the Italian left of course rises as one man in defense of Cuba, including the intellectuals.

Khrushchev tries to prevent Kennedy's action by offering him an exchange between the Cuban bases and the Turkish ones - QED. But Kennedy politely declines the offer contained in Khrushchev's message. He is now stronger than ever and it would be a disaster if he does not use it.

Sunday, 28 October

The referendum day. Three major events: Khrushchev unconditionally gives up the bases in Cuba, Mattei dies in a plane crash, De Gaulle wins the referendum [...] Why did Khrushchev, after demanding the dismantling of the Turkish bases, precipitously abandon his request unconditionally, while he could have still gained some time and kept the US under pressure? The answer is one and one only: because for him it was important to prevent an American landing in Cuba and the elimination of the Communist outpost in America. Why, on the other hand, did Castro shout and demand conditions? Because he understood that Kennedy did not intend to attack him, and he started shouting like a child who is not scared any longer. Thus it's a success for Kennedy, but only a half one; and a subsequent trade-off for the bases cannot be excluded, as it may happen through the disarmament negotiations, as Kennedy promised. Why did Kennedy feel it necessary to grant Khrushchev a certificate of pacifism, after the latter had attacked him, insulted him, and was now withdrawing? Because the Americans keep aiming at a direct agreement with the Russians and they do not want to interrupt it. Only consideration: Kennedy condescended to hint to its allies. [...]

Tuesday, 30 October

[Italian journalist from the Corriere della Sera] Domenico Bartoli dropped by, he is all happy about the Kennedy victory. He is not worried by the fact that Castro is still in power: but he is wrong. I go to see [Charles] Lucet [Director of Political Affairs, French Foreign Ministry] in the afternoon. [...] We also talk about Cuba. The French are generally satisfied, uncertain about the reasons for Khrushchev's oscillations (they talk about the domestic opposition too) and still worried, even if less than before, by the development of a direct Russo-American dialogue. They too fail to understand that Kennedy has half-lost his battle by leaving Castro in power. There are already demonstrations in support of Castro in Uruguay and Argentina. Khrushchev preferred to lose face rather than losing Castro: here one must agree with [French Socialist intellectual] Suzanne Labin when she complains that the Americans underrate the cold war. [...]

Thursday, 1 November

[...] The Cuban crisis is fading into quibbles: Castro is posing his conditions, U Thant's mission is failed, [First Deputy Premier of the USSR Anastas Ivanovich] Mikoyan is arriving, the Republicans in Washington are asking Kennedy some embarrassing questions. Nothing can come out of this other than a bad compromise, or a new crisis without tragedies, in which Kennedy will yield a little more and will receive a little

less...

Sunday, 13 January 1963

[Ambassador Mario] Toscano passes through Paris and he tells me that the Americans will withdraw their atomic bases from Italy and Turkey. It's a unilateral decision which Reinhardt has communicated to Piccioni on Wednesday January 9. The invitation from Kennedy to Fanfani had already been made: Fenoaltea had informed about it from Washington [...] Toscano believes there is already an agreement between the Soviets and the Americans. I do not exclude it any longer: at the very least, the gesture is a development of an American foreign policy of decoupling from their nuclear commitments in Europe, but it may also be the sign of an agreement, of which I am not entirely persuaded yet. Nenni must know about it and probably is referring to it when he talks about serious foreign policy reasons which advise against a government crisis: he wants the merit of the closing down of the bases to be attributed to himself and to the center-left. Fanfani, in turn, by going to Washington will try to sell to the Italians the American gesture as the result of his own initiative and as his own success. Finally the Communists must know about it as well - through Nenni - because they are starting their demonstrations in Italy against the bases, to take credit for the initiative. Everyone wants to assume the sad merit of a foreign policy that does not exist. [...]

Monday, 14 January 1963

I go to see [French Foreign Minister Maurice] Couve [de Murville] to inform him about the American decision on the bases in Italy and Turkey. He does not believe it to be a Russo-American agreement; he believes in technical-military reasons, the obsolescence of the Thor and Jupiter missiles. I point out that the decision also shows a policy of concentrating nuclear weapons in American hands. He admits it. Couve is happy about the information: he will inform immediately Lucet and [Jean] Laloy [Minister of European Affairs, French Foreign Ministry], and the latter will remember immediately that on 27 October 1962, during the Cuban days, Kennedy asked [Supreme Allied Commander, Europe Lieut.-Gen. Lauris] Norstad (according to the latter's testimony) if abandoning the bases in Turkey would have been catastrophic from a military point of view. Norstad answered yes, both from a military and above all a psychological point of view. Thus he thought about it, but this does not mean that he negotiated with the Soviets, then or afterwards. Those were the days when one talked about it. In general, the withdrawal of the bases has made a strong and bad impression to the Quai d'Orsay. [...]