

November 29, 1962

Hungarian Embassy in Havana (Beck), Report on Soviet-Cuban Divergence

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Summary:

Hungarian Ambassador to Cuba János Beck reports on the Soviet-Cuban divergence after the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Provided with information by the Polish ambassador, Beck believes that the Cubans and Soviets had a strategic plan in placing missiles in Cuba, but the US reaction was more drastic than expected. Beck summarized facts about the crisis from 27-28 October and explains that the Cubans feel betrayed by the Soviet Union and their negotiations with the US.

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Embassy of the Hungarian People's Republic
To Comrade Foreign Minister János Péter
Budapest

TOP SECRET!
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Havana, 29 November 1962

Subject: The appearance of
a divergence of opinions
between Cuba and the
Soviet Union.

I still do not know what agreement between Cuba and the Soviet Union was the basis for sending the so-called "strategic arms" to Cuba in October. As a consequence, I have also no idea about what consequences the Soviet and Cuban sides reckoned with concerning the transportation of strategic arms to Cuba. But it is obvious that both sides were trying to calculate the expectable consequences and to determine in advance their position and tasks concerning them.

On the afternoon of 23 October, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez said during the visit paid to him that he, that is the Cuban leaders, thought that there was not only the possibility of war but the Cuban crisis might be solved in another way, too. As he said, there could be talks about reducing the Cuban army's armament to the defense weapons described in the well-known definition. By the well-known definition he meant the definition given by the President of the United States, the government of the United States. But the Cuban government could agree to this only if Cuba's territorial sanctity and possibility of normal life were not guaranteed only by the United States but in some form by the Soviet Union as well.

I have been informed by the Polish ambassador [Bolesław Jeleń] that there was an exact plan between the Soviet Union and Cuba concerning what they would do in case of an expectable and calculable reaction from the United States. The government of the United States reacted in such a way that was not on the list of foreseen possibilities. Consequently, such steps had to be taken by the Soviet Union and in such form that had not been calculated. Neither the Polish ambassador nor I could check the correctness of this information.

Neither I, nor the socialist ambassadors to Havana, have been able to form a clear picture of what happened from the morning of 27 to the morning of 28 October 1962. We are aware only of the following facts:

At around 10 o'clock on 27 October Saturday, a quite powerful American jet bomber formation flew over West-Cuba, Pinar del Rio county. I could not determine how many planes this quite powerful formation included, but according to some news, the number of American bombers was several hundred. At the same time from one point 600 anti-aircraft guns started firing at the formation, the bombers turned around at once and left for the USA at high speed. A quarter of an hour later a U-2. type plane flew in over West-Cuba at a great height and it was shot [down] with a missile. (In my

report sent earlier it was a mistake that the U-2 had been shot in Oriente near the Guantanamo base.) After these two incursions until Sunday dawn no air activity could be experienced from the American side over Cuba. Moreover, the radar devices in Cuba showed that in Florida all air activity ceased after these two incursions. On Saturday afternoon we could hear the ultimatum-like demand of American President Kennedy, which was followed by Comrade Khrushchev's letter on Saturday night [sic; actually Sunday morning, Washington and Havana time—ed.], in which as a reply to Kennedy's promise to guarantee non-aggression toward Cuba, he announced the disarmament of missiles and their removal from Cuba. While in Comrade Khrushchev's previous letter, in which against the removal of missiles he offset the removal of American missiles from Turkey, he mentioned Cuba as a country whose government should approve the control in order that it could be carried out, in this later letter of his the Cuban government and the necessity of the Cuban government's approval is not present. At least it is not included in the text the Cuban organs, the Cuban press, and I have received here in Cuba.

All of us here in Havana know that neither the Cuban government, nor the Soviet ambassador, Comrade [Aleksandr] Alekseyev, was notified in advance of this letter of Comrade Khrushchev, but all of them learnt it from the press and radio.

These two letters of Comrade Khrushchev to Kennedy, that is the letter of 27 October, in which he offset the removal of American weapons from Turkey against the removal of missiles, and the letter of 28 [October], in which he acknowledged Kennedy's promise and promised to dismantle and remove the missiles at once, had the effect of cold water on the Cuban masses. From reliable sources I learnt e.g. the following minor fact: Ernesto ["Che"] Guevara, the minister of industry, one of the most important Cuban leaders, was staying in Pinar del Rio county on Saturday 27 October and was reviewing the military units on the parade. In the meantime he received the news that the radio tower was transmitting Comrade Khrushchev's letter in which he undertook the removal of missiles if the USA withdrew her similar weapons from Turkey. Enraged, he dashed his cap to earth and repeated furiously that this was perjury as he, himself, had had talks in Moscow and they had talked about a different thing. I also consider credible the other information according to which Prime Minister Fidel Castro reacted more or less the same way too. He, completely broken, told President of the Republic [Osvaldo] Dorticos to take over the conduct of affairs for some time because he needed at least one month to recover from this great blow. He wanted to be a private individual for that time.

I share the opinion with others that maybe nowhere in the world did the wide masses have such love and enthusiastic respect for the Soviet Union and Comrade Khrushchev himself as could be experienced here in Cuba right until the 27 of last October. But from the 27th to the 28th, that is, in 24 hours, the mood of the masses changed from one extreme to the other. Out of the mass of phenomena I would like to mention only a few typical ones.

In some of the military units they expressed their opinion in the following way: It is all the same who comes, whether the Americans or Russians come, we will fire, we will defend ourselves even if all of us die. Many people turned to the Soviet Embassy on the phone and in letters and asked what would come now, whether the Soviet Union would leave them alone, whether they would be defenseless against the Americans and so on. The people in the streets, on the buses, the officials in the various ministries we talked to all expressed their feelings of despair, abandonment, and disappointment. We could hear all kinds of anti-Soviet positions, such as the Soviet Union is only a super power just like the USA and she leads power politics, or she used Cuba only as a means of solving her conflict with the United States, and so on. Many were upset by the fact that she connected the removal of missiles from Cuba with the withdrawal of American weapons from Turkey, that is, she put a sign of equality between Cuba and Turkey and used them as the objects or means of bargain between the Soviet Union and the United States. Several people protested that they

talked about Turkey and not the Guantanamo American base. These voices and remarks were not limited to passers-by or minor officials of different offices, I had the opportunity to witness that in the Cuban government itself, within the national leadership of the Cuban party there were many of one or other of the mentioned opinions and turned against the Soviet Union more or less.

From government members and the members of the party's national leadership and, of course, from lower-ranking people we could hear such disappointed remarks as the Soviet Union, with this step, undermined Cuba's international prestige once and for all, she made it impossible to continue the American policy, moreover, hindered the possibility of the victory of Latin American revolutions for a long time.

The feeling of disappointment in the Soviet Union had a demoralizing effect on the one hand, and demobilized the Cuban masses on the other hand. These days the Cuban press and radio reflected this mood of the masses, and as this mass feeling was present among the leaders as well, they could not stand up against it, but by taking no position, by publishing not well-selected news and information, by keeping important news a secret, they contributed to causing a chaos and an anti-Soviet nationalist mood.

Fidel Castro, seeing this more and more sharp atmosphere, decided to stand up against it in a radio and television speech. So the speech of 1 November took place. As far as this speech is concerned, I think that it was necessary, and the form Fidel Castro told it was correct and had due influence. But I do not want to say that I agree with what happened during the preceding days, that is, what made the speech necessary in this form, nor what happened after the speech from the Prime Minister's side. Several people in Cuba, the Cubans themselves, but most of all the foreigners doubt whether it was necessary and right that in his speech Fidel Castro announced to the whole world that there was a divergence of opinions between the Soviet Union and Cuba. I think this announcement was necessary, because the mood of the masses was such that denying these divergences of opinion would not have done away with this mood but would have intensified it. On 1 November, Fidel Castro could not say more and in a warmer voice about the Soviet Union and the Soviet people than he did say, because at that moment, the people would not have accepted any more and anything warmer. But we should add that we who watched Fidel Castro on television had the impression that the statement that he trusted the government of the Soviet Union, the party of the Soviet Union, and the political leadership of the Soviet Union was difficult to make even for him. We had the feeling that he was not completely convinced about it. This could be specially noticed in his case, because he was used to saying on the radio, on television, and in the different conversations and speeches what he thought, even if it was not always political and tactical.

János Beck
Ambassador