

December 5, 1962

Hungarian Legation in Washington (Radványi), Report on Mikoyan's Visit to Washington

Citation:

"Hungarian Legation in Washington (Radványi), Report on Mikoyan's Visit to Washington", December 5, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Hungarian National Archives (MOL), Budapest, Foreign Ministry, Top Secret Files, XIX-J-I-j-Kuba, 3. d. Translated for CWIHP by András Bocz
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/116840>

Summary:

Hungarian Chargé d'Affaires János Radványi reports on Anastas Mikoyan's visit to Washington, DC. After a brief description of Mikoyan's Washington itinerary, the report is divided into three sections: Mikoyan's impressions of his meetings with American officials, meetings in Cuba with Cuban officials, and meetings about different socialist countries (e.g. China, Hungary). Primary subjects discussed include the presence of missiles in Cuba, nuclear proliferation and Latin America as a nuclear free region, missile bases, and the Berlin issue.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Hungarian

Contents:

Translation - English

HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL!

Received by: members and substitute members of the Politburo,
members of the Secretariat,
Comrades Árpád Pullai, Imre Hollai, Ferenc Szücs and Sándor Sárközi

C o p y

of the report made by the embassy to Washington on 5 December 1962

Subject: □Comrade Mikoyan's visit to Washington

Comrade Mikoyan's four-day visit (from 29 November to 3 December) was made possible and necessary by the events that had taken place prior to it: negotiations between [Soviet deputy foreign minister Vasily V.] Kuznetzov and [US negotiator John J.] McCloy in New York, recent communication between Khrushchev and Kennedy, and Kennedy's already known press conference [on 20 November] in which he announced the lifting of the Cuban blockade.

The visit had aroused considerable interest, and the comments and news on it were treated by the press as a central issue. Before the visit, the comrades announced during talks conducted at the State Department that Comrade Mikoyan would be staying in Washington for a few days as Comrade [Soviet ambassador to the United States Anatoly F.] Dobrynin's guest and during this time he would be glad to meet with American officials. After consulting President Kennedy, the State Department answered that they were pleased with Comrade Mikoyan's visit to Washington and added that the American government officials were also ready to meet with him. They also raised the possibility of receiving Comrade Mikoyan as an official state guest. Comrade Mikoyan politely evaded this opportunity.

Then the program was worked out under which Comrade Mikoyan met with President Kennedy in the White House, State Secretary [Dean] Rusk at a lunch and Interior Secretary [Stewart] Udall at a dinner. He also met with [Attorney General] Robert Kennedy at this dinner.

This latter meeting was treated very cautiously. Although the Soviet comrades announced that the meeting would take place, they did not reveal any details about it.

The former American ambassador to Moscow, [Llewellyn E.] Thomson, was appointed by the American government as a permanent attendant during Comrade Mikoyan's visit to Washington. When he arrived and four days later left, the event at the airport was attended by the staff of the Soviet embassy as well as the ambassadors of the Socialist countries to Washington, and on behalf of the American party by Ambassador Thomson and chief of protocol Thonesk. Naturally, the representatives of the press were also present. Comrade Mikoyan had a one-and-a-half-hour unofficial meeting with them on the night before his departure.

On 29 November, Comrade Dobrynin invited the ambassadors of the Socialist countries to a dinner on the occasion of Comrade Mikoyan's visit to Washington. During this dinner, Comrade Mikoyan gave an account of his experiences gained at the meeting with President Kennedy, and made some comments on his visit to Cuba and also on China.

I. Comrade Mikoyan characterized his meeting with President Kennedy as open, honest, and objective. The main issue of the discussion was Cuba; the issue of disarmament was merely touched upon. The president wanted to talk about Laos, too, but Comrade Mikoyan evaded this issue by saying that he had not prepared to

discuss it.

In regard to the Cuban issue, Comrade Mikoyan strongly demanded that, since the Soviet Union had already performed its obligations stemming from the Khrushchev-Kennedy agreement, the American party should provide formal guarantees for not attacking Cuba. In his answer President Kennedy gave two arguments. On the one hand, he referred to Comrade Khrushchev's letter of 28 October in which Comrade Khrushchev promised to implement international monitoring on the territory of Cuba. On the other, he explained that given the internal situation (public opinion, the Senate), he was not able to give formal guarantees without international monitoring.

In his answer Comrade Mikoyan called Kennedy's attention to Comrade Khrushchev's letter of 26 November in which the Soviet leader expressly stated that the Soviet Union was ready to enable the international monitoring of dismantling the Soviet missiles provided that the Cuban government also agreed to it. As an explanation, Comrade Mikoyan noted that although the missiles were in the ownership of the Soviet state, jurisdiction over the Cuban territory was obviously exercised by the Cuban government.

Kennedy gave voice to the counterarguments provided by McCloy in New York, stressing that the United States also needed guarantees that Cuba would not receive new mid-range missiles either from the Soviet Union or, in a few year's time, from China.

Comrade Mikoyan left this latter comment by Kennedy unanswered. As an interesting piece of detail, Comrade Mikoyan mentioned at this point that on his way to Havana he met with McCloy in New York and agreed on the monitoring of the missiles on sea. Then Kennedy said that certain American newspapers, relying on information from Cuban émigré sources, were writing about Soviet missiles still being kept secretly in the territory of Cuba. Comrade Mikoyan called this allegation ridiculous; he said that to his knowledge the air and ground reconnaissance of the United States had already covered every square mile of Cuba. The president admitted that too and noted that he had given orders to the Pentagon not to violate, if possible, the Cuban air space and take photos only by flying in international air space.

Returning to the issue of the American guarantee, President Kennedy asked Comrade Mikoyan to let Comrade Khrushchev know that during his presidency the Soviet Union should not be concerned about any invasion of Cuba by the United States.

At this point Kennedy asked Comrade Mikoyan what position the Soviet Union would take if, for example, the United States decided to set up missile bases in Finland. Would people be able to sleep well in Leningrad in such a situation? Comrade Mikoyan noted that they would sleep just as well as the people in Armenia because of the bases in Turkey, since the United States is aware of the counter-strike they should expect in the case of an attack. Kennedy noted to this that by now the significance and value of the American missile bases deployed in Europe had changed a lot. The United States and the Soviet Union both have intercontinental missiles that can reach each other's territory. At the same time, the Polaris-type submarines make the bases in England, Italy, and Turkey redundant. The American party had already worked out a plan, he said, to eliminate these bases. Kennedy had already given orders to the Pentagon in this regard.

When Comrade Mikoyan told the ambassadors of the friendly countries about it, he also added that to his knowledge these missiles were outdated, and even if they were to be or had already been dismantled, they were still there.

Comrade Dobrynin said (at a later meeting) that to his knowledge the dismantling of the Thor missiles had already begun by the Americans because the Polaris submarines to replace them were already in place. The Turkish bases had Jupiter-type missiles which were also outdated.

I would like to note here that according to the information received from the Czechoslovakian ambassador to Washington [Karel Duda], one of the main reasons for replacing NATO commander-in-chief [Lauris] Norstadt was that he objected to Kennedy's plan to eliminate the missile bases in Europe. Another piece of relevant information that belongs here is what military attaché Varga obtained during a conversation from colonel Roberts, the newly appointed military air attaché to Budapest. The colonel said that the complete dismantling of the missile bases in Europe-because they were outdated-could be expected in the near future.

Kennedy and Comrade Mikoyan had a lengthy conversation on the issue of the Cuban revolution. Kennedy kept on saying that Castro was the enemy of the United States and therefore, his presence in the Caribbean region represented a danger to them.

Contrary to this, Comrade Mikoyan insisted that Castro had been made an enemy by the United States and the best course of action would be to make an agreement with him on the basis of the principle of peaceful coexistence. Kennedy did not accept this view and then asked Comrade Mikoyan in a humorous tone: after all, for how long has Castro been a Communist? Answering in the same tone, Comrade Mikoyan said Castro had been a Communist for about one-and-a-half years, adding that this course of development might be dangerous to Kennedy too. Kennedy evaded this by saying that he was immune to these kinds of dangers, although in his family [Edward] Kennedy, who had just been elected senator [from Massachusetts], also had some socialist views.

At the end of the meeting the two parties issued a mutually-agreed joint communiqué, stressing that the negotiations to settle the Cuban issue should be conducted in New York by Comrade Kuznetzov and McCloy and [US UN Ambassador Adlai E.] Stevenson. They also agreed that in addition to the Cuban issue Comrade Mikoyan would negotiate with Rusk on several major international issues and there would also be a confidential meeting between Comrade Mikoyan and Robert Kennedy.

II. During the conversation Comrade Mikoyan said that he had left for Cuba[1] with the task of not pushing Castro at any cost regarding the international monitoring.

On the basis of the information received it was clear, he said, that the main difficulty in the first few days would be to convince Castro. He made his well-known statement [when departing New York City for Havana] in order to achieve that, in which he supported Castro's five points [issued on 28 October] although it was clear to him that, for example, it was impossible to negotiate with the Americans on the evacuation of Guantanamo.

Castro, who originally did not wish to come to the airport, eventually came to meet Comrade Mikoyan after the communiqué mentioned above. During the first meeting Castro and Che Guevara stated openly to Comrade Mikoyan that they did not need the American guarantees. They did not have any confidence in such guarantees, so the Soviets should just leave the missiles where they were and the Cubans would defend themselves.

It took long discussion for Comrade Mikoyan to convince Castro and his companions that in the present situation Cuba could only be saved by political means. By the way, Castro and his companions received the Brazilian, Chilean, and Mexican rapprochement very well; especially [Brazilian President João] Goulart's special envoy

[Gen. Albino Silva] whose action was seen by the Soviet Union positively from the point of view that it could end Cuba's isolation.

Comrade Mikoyan characterized Brazilian president Goulart as a clever, smart and realistic politician who did not execute the American orders at one hundred percent, thereby getting ahead of Argentina and achieving a leading role in the South American region.

In regard to the internal situation in Cuba Comrade Mikoyan said that sentiment among the people was good, the leaders were honest and pure people but they had very little experience and were not shrewd enough. They often combined revolutionary enthusiasm with romantic elements. The petit-bourgeois layers of people living in the cities were worse off than before the revolution but the living conditions of the workers and peasants had improved. Some of the land had been collectivized and state farms had been set up on them; and there were plans to accelerate this process. Comrade Mikoyan advised the Cuban comrades that they should act cautiously and slowly as far as the about 50% of land still in private ownership was concerned.

As an example of the bellicose nature of the Cubans, Comrade Mikoyan mentioned that after the Americans repeatedly flew in the Cuban air space, Castro and his leaders, in accord with the Soviet comrades, set their air defense system in action. The Americans always avoided fighting in such a case. Comrade Mikoyan noted at this point that anybody who stated that the U-2 reconnaissance aircraft had been shot down by a Soviet missile-was not wrong.

III. Comrade Mikoyan spoke very negatively about China's activity in Cuba. He said that with their ultra-left-wing views the Chinese confused some of the [Cuban] leaders, especially mid-level leaders, but they practically failed to help upset the enemy. For instance, they could have occupied Quemoy [Jinmen] and Matsu [Mazu] or Macao without any real risk. Instead, they were sending hundreds of thousands of petitions and attacked India, whereby they managed to turn India, at least temporarily, into a country supporting the western camp, to disrupt the Indian Communist Party and give a chance to the Indian right-wing to gain ground, etc.

Finally, Comrade Mikoyan openly said to the Cuban leaders that the Chinese position regarding Cuba was totally wrong. Castro and his colleagues understood this view and in his message addressed to Comrade Khrushchev Castro especially emphasized that Cuba was fully on the Soviet Union's side. As an example, Comrade Mikoyan mentioned the Tibetan and the Hungarian issues. He pointed out that the Chinese, in alliance with the top-level aristocracy, created a situation in Tibet that led to an uprising and they failed to draw the necessary conclusions from it. On the other hand, the Hungarian leaders, together with the Soviet comrades, acted on the basis of self-criticism, admitting that Rákosi and the Communists were mainly responsible for the 1956 events.[2]

The Cuban issue was only briefly touched upon during the meeting between Comrade Mikoyan and Rusk. They exchanged ideas in more detail on general disarmament [and] the ban on nuclear explosions, as well as on Berlin and the German issue. Essentially, the parties confined themselves to repeating their already known position. As a new element, Comrade Mikoyan noted that the Soviet Union was ready to give permission to set up sealed instrument boxes in the territory of the Soviet Union. The Soviet government also agreed that the boxes should be delivered to, set up in, and then removed from the country by an international monitoring committee to be set up later.

As far as disarmament was concerned, the issues discussed included the Brazilian proposal submitted to the UN on making Latin America a nuclear-free region and the

measures to be taken in order to prevent an unexpected attack, which had already been discussed in Geneva.

As for the Berlin issue, Comrade Mikoyan raised the need for the withdrawal of troops stationed in West Berlin. Referring to their NATO obligations, Rusk said that it was not viable. Neither Comrade Mikoyan nor Rusk excluded the possibility of conducting further negotiations by representatives of the two parties on the issues mentioned above. Finally, Comrade Mikoyan suggested that the principle of progressivity, a "step-by-step" approach should be applied when discussing these issues.

[1] Mikoyan talked about his visit to Cuba in the first days of November 1962-CB and MK.

[2] This was a serious obfuscation. While the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party indeed placed Rákosi and his clique on top of their "four reasons of the counterrevolution" list in December 1956, in official Soviet propaganda the main instigators of the 1956 events were the "Western imperialists" -CB and MK.