

March 31, 1963

Hungarian Embassy in Havana (Beck), Report on US-Cuban Talks

Citation:

"Hungarian Embassy in Havana (Beck), Report on US-Cuban Talks", March 31, 1963, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Hungarian National Archives (MOL), Budapest, Foreign Ministry, Top Secret Files, XIX-J-I-j-Kuba, 3.d. Translated by Attila Kolontári and Zsófia Zelnik <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/116847>

Summary:

Hungarian Ambassador to Cuba János Beck reports talks held between Cuba and the United States. US lawyer James Donovan has meet with Fidel Castro to discuss prisoner exchanges. Castro and Donovan also have discussed steps to normalize Cuban-American relations, without success. Beck repeats a claim that the Cubans are interacting with the US to have leverage over the Soviet Union.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Hungarian

Contents:

Translation - English

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

TOP SECRET!
144/1963/Top Secret
Written: in four copies
Three to Center
One to Embassy

Havana, 31 March 1963

Subject: Cuban-USA Talks

It is well known that from the American side, "lawyer" [James] Donovan participated in the talks concerning the release for compensation of the mercenaries taken captive at Playa Giron [the Bay of Pigs]. Since then, from the Cuban side, Fidel Castro himself has had talks with Donovan at the level of theory and politics, only the technicalities were discussed with Donovan at a lower level.

On "lawyer" Donovan himself, I would only like to make the comment that formally he acts as a private individual and as such did he lead the talks with the Soviet Union earlier concerning the release of [Francis Gary] Powers, the pilot of the shot [down] U-2 and his exchange for [Rudolf] Abel, the spy arrested and convicted in the USA, and it was also he who directed the exchange itself from the American side.

In connection with Donovan's frequent trips to Havana, the Western diplomats had the opinion that through him Fidel Castro carried on talks with the USA government and Kennedy himself, moreover behind the Soviet Union's back, without informing the Soviet Union. Yugoslavian ambassador Boško Vidaković, who appears such a friend of the Soviets before the socialist ambassadors that he looks more Catholic than the Pope, is saying directly that Fidel Castro is playing a double game and he is blackmailing or wants to blackmail the Soviet Union.

The public (abroad) knows only that Donovan's latest trips to Havana were aimed at getting American citizens released from Cuban prisons or their exchange for Cuban diplomats arrested in the USA.

During his conversation with the Czechoslovak ambassador [Vladimir Pavlíček] a few days ago, Prime Minister Fidel Castro, without mentioning the contents of his talks with Donovan, said the following:

He has got to know an intelligent and clever man in Donovan, who is a very hard-talking partner but, on the whole, not ill-willed. Seeing the Cuban reality, he acknowledged a lot of things, the USA would lead a different Cuban policy if it were he who directed politics or had a decisive say in it. During his talks with Donovan, he—that is, Fidel Castro—provided an opportunity for the US government, that is, Kennedy, twice to take relevant steps to normalize relations with Cuba, but Kennedy did not use these opportunities. Never mind, says Fidel Castro, if Kennedy does not consider the situation right for it.

Donovan's talks with others (e.g. a Cuban under-secretary of internal affairs) were extremely violent and pointed, but they have never hindered further connections.

All I would like to add to this is (although it is a repetition) that the Cuban press and Cuban leaders have recently been making distinctions—at last!—in connection with the USA, they do not put everything and everybody in the same category. (There are not only Yankees, but also Pentagon, extreme imperialist circles, “the raging,” etc., as well.) Raul Castro has mentioned to the Romanian ambassador in the past days, and it is not likely to be his private opinion, that for Cuba among the possible presidents at present Kennedy is the best.

János Beck
Ambassador