

November 6, 1962

Ciphered Telegram from Anastas Mikoyan to CC CPSU

Citation:

"Ciphered Telegram from Anastas Mikoyan to CC CPSU", November 6, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (APRF), Special Declassification April 2002. Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya and Andrea Hendrickson. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/117334>

Summary:

Mikoyan reports to the CC CPSU regarding his conversations with the Cuban leadership. Fide Castrol had concerns about the possible withdraw of all Soviet weapons and all military specialists from Cuba and the possibility of UN inspections on Cuban territory.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

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CIPHERED TELEGRAM

CC CPSU

It seems to me that it is now possible to go over some conclusions from the conversations I have had here. In connection with this I would like to cite a few characteristic moments.

Several hours before my arrival in Havana the Cuban leadership had decided that two representatives of the leadership would meet me at the airport, [Che] Guevara and Raoul Castro. However, two hours before my arrival, upon receiving the text of my statement at the airport in New York in support of Cuba, their intentions changed and the entire leadership (except for the president) with Fidel Castro himself greeted me warmly and in a brotherly fashion. They all came with me to the residence and we conversed for about 15 minutes.

For the first conversation, Fidel received me in his private apartment. He went outside into the street and greeted me in front of the house where the car stopped and walked me to the upper floor. You received his statements, which he made in a calm, friendly tone, but in essence I could feel he acute dissatisfaction with our policy.

The next -- second -- meeting took place at the Presidential Palace. All six leaders participated in the conversation. Each time they met me in the corridors of the palace and accompanied me to the room where the discussions were held, and at the end of the discussions they all walked me to the car and we parted warmly. I was treated warmly everywhere.

During the conversations they acted calmly and listened attentively when I, in the course of several hours, tried to dispel their doubts, citing all possible arguments, one point after another, trying to prove that our policy was correct. They all listened to me with great attentiveness and took notes. I had the impression that I was speaking persuasively except for two moments, about which Fidel Castro posed questions during the conversation, expressing his dissatisfaction and his alarm.

1. The American radio and press have disseminated information that there is allegedly one section in the confidential letter from [Nikita] Khrushchev to [John F.] Kennedy from 26 October that cannot be published.

Apparently, that led him to entertain some suspicions.

Fidel asked whether there was another message from Khrushchev in addition to what had been given to him. I said that there was not. Fidel said: "If so, why would Kennedy, in his response from 27 October to Khrushchev's 26 October letter already be mentioning the Soviet proposal to dismantle, and other things, although that was not directly mentioned in the confidential letter from Khrushchev from 26 October?" Apparently he suspects that there is another message from Khrushchev that was hidden from him, or a section of Khrushchev's letter of 26 October that was not shown to him.

I explained that in his response from 27 October Kennedy formally responded only to the confidential letter of 26 October. However, in reality, he responded both to this

one [26 October] and, mainly, to Khrushchev's message from the 27th, which was openly transmitted on the radio, although Kennedy's letter did not cite it directly. I said that all of the letters from Khrushchev to Kennedy, and everything that was received from Kennedy confidentially, were given to Fidel. I participated in all the meetings and I know this very well, but if you want me to check again, then I will check all the documents I have with me and will add to my information tomorrow.

We checked everything carefully. After that, I said that actually there was one Kennedy letter, as we just found out, that did not make it to Fidel, but it does not have any serious meaning. It was his confidential letter from 25 October in response to the confidential letter of Khrushchev from the 23rd, the text of which he has. In that letter, Kennedy continues to insist that the Soviet people allegedly lied to the Americans by secretly delivering the missile systems to Cuba. We read the text of the second short letter.

All these explanations allayed their suspicions, and after that Fidel immediately spoke and one could see that he was satisfied and that this question no longer had significance for him.

2. I said further: we had our information that the Americans were on the verge of attacking Cuba, and we received a telegram from Fidel Castro with similar information from other sources that within the next 24 hours an attack was expected. Then we decided to tie Kennedy's hands before world public opinion, and to thwart the invasion of Cuba. Then comrade Khrushchev on 28 October made the open statement on the radio ordering the dismantling and removal of the missiles. Of course, under normal conditions the draft of Khrushchev's letter would have been coordinated with our Cuban friends, but that would have required encoding, decoding, and translating it -- and the same regarding the reply. That would have taken so much time that normal consultations would not have had a chance to be completed; the invasion of Cuba could have occurred and Cuba could have perished.

We had no other choice but to solve the main problem--prevent the attack against Cuba, hoping that our Cuban friends would understand the correctness of such actions, even though the normal procedures of consultation were not observed.

We only had 24 hours before the invasion of Cuba. One has to take into account that we had just hours left, and we could not act in any way differently than we did. And we have the results. The attack on Cuba was prevented, peace was preserved. Although you are right that not everything regarding procedures of consultation was followed that would have been possible under normal conditions.

It seems as though this got through to them and they understood me. When I finished all of these explanations, Fidel on his part responded and gave his assessment of all the previous discussions and his own analysis in the following words:

"I would like to respond to Comrade Mikoyan.

"We listened to Comrade Mikoyan's statement and explanation with great attention. Undoubtedly, these explanations, which help us to better understand the developments, were very valuable. We are thankful for your desire to explain all these developments to us and for all your efforts in this regard. We have no doubts about your arguments regarding the fact that strategic missiles, after they have been discovered by the enemy, as a practical matter lose all military significance -- or their significance becomes extremely small.

"We thank you for all these explanations and we understand that the intentions of the

Soviet government cannot be assessed only on the basis of an analysis of the most recent events, especially because circumstances change very quickly and new situations develop. In [our] analysis, we have to take into account all the decisions that have been made on the basis of which the strategic weapons were deployed to Cuba and the agreement was signed. We intended to publish the agreement after completion of the assembly of the strategic missiles and after the elections in the USA. These decisions are evidence of the firm decisiveness of the Soviet Union to defend Cuba. They allow one to understand the political line of the Soviet Union correctly. Therefore I repeat that the analysis of the Soviet position can be correct only if one takes account of all the events and decisions, both in the period preceding the crisis and during the crisis as well.

"We do not doubt that if all the work on the assembly of the strategic weapons had been completed under conditions of secrecy, then we would have had a powerful means of deterrence against the American plans to invade our country. In this way the goals which both the Soviet government and the government of the Republic of Cuba pursued would have been attained. We believe, however, that the deployment of the Soviet missiles on Cuba had significance for the interests of the entire Socialist camp. Even if one does not see this deployment as providing military superiority, it had political and psychological importance in the struggle to deter imperialism and to prevent it from carrying out its aggressive plans. Therefore the deployment of strategic missiles in Cuba was carried out not only in the interests of defending Cuba but of the Socialist camp. This was done with our full consent.

"We understood the importance of this step very well, and we believe that it was the right step.

"We fully agree that we should not allow the unleashing of war. We have nothing against [your statement] that the measures you undertook pursued two goals, namely not to permit an invasion of Cuba and to avoid unleashing a world war. We are in full agreement with these goals, which the Soviet Union pursued.

"A misunderstanding emerged regarding the form that discussion of this issue took. However we understand that circumstances demanded quick actions and the situation was not normal. Evaluating past occurrences, we came to the conclusion that we could have conducted consultations on these critical issues in another form. Here, for example, the issue we are now discussing. It relates to the effect my letter had on the Soviet government decision [to withdraw the missiles] and the making public of the Soviet government's letter of 28 October. It is true that my letter did not have any relation to the issues raised in the letters of 26 and 27 October exchanged between the Soviet government and the government of the USA. [My] letter pursued one goal -- to inform the Soviet government about the inevitability of an invasion of Cuba. In it we did not speak about the slightest vacillation on our part; we clearly announced our willingness to fight. In addition, we did not say that we expected an invasion. We wrote that although it was possible, it was less probable. More probable, in our opinion, was an air attack with the sole purpose of destroying the strategic weapons on Cuba. The basis of the Soviet government decision of 28 October was already laid out in the letter to Kennedy dated 26 October and was clearly outlined in the letter of N.S. Khrushchev to Kennedy from 27 October. Those two documents contain the real basis of the decision, which was stated in the letter of 28 October. Thus, Kennedy's letter from 27 October meant his acceptance of Khrushchev's proposal from 26 October regarding his [Khrushchev's] consent to remove not only the strategic arms, but all the weapons if the United States would stop threatening Cuba with invasion. After all, this threat from the United States was the only reason that forced Cuba to arm itself. When Kennedy accepted that proposal (we did not know that he had accepted it), conditions emerged for developing the Soviet proposals and preparing a declaration regarding the agreement of both sides. You could have told the United States that the USSR was prepared to dismantle the equipment but wanted to discuss it with the Cuban government. In our opinion, this

is how the question should have been resolved instead of immediately giving instructions on the withdrawal of the strategic weapons. This approach would have allowed us to weaken international tension and would have given us an opportunity to discuss the issues with the Americans under more favorable conditions. This way, we could have reached not only a lessening of international tensions, and not only discussed this issue under better conditions, but also attained a signed declaration.

"However, this is only simple analysis of preceding events, which do not have any special importance at the present time.

"Now it is important for us to know what to do in the new conditions. How are we going to try to attain our main goals and at the same time not permit the unleashing of aggression and fight for the preservation of peace? Of course, if with time we can ensure a really stable peace, then in light of these new facts we will be able better and more correctly to assess the importance of those steps that have already been taken. The results of our struggle in the future will speak about the importance of the events of today. Of course very little in this struggle will depend on us.

"We are very grateful for all the explanations that Comrade Mikoyan has given us, and for his efforts to make us understand the development of recent events. We take into account the special conditions under which it was necessary to act. We do not have any doubts about the friendly nature of our relations, which are based on common principles. Our respect for the Soviet Union is unshakable. We know that it respects our sovereignty and is prepared to defend us from aggression on the part of imperialism. Therefore at present it is most important for us to define our future joint steps.

"I would like to assure you, Comrade Mikoyan, of our complete trust."

Upon listening to this, it became clear that in general things were going well and that the mood was changing for the better compared to what it had been at the beginning.

However even this statement had moments that could not be left alone without new explanations. On my part, I expressed satisfaction with the progress of discussions and with the analysis of past events, and said that I have to make two comments, not with the purpose of prolonging the discussion about the past, but to bring some clarity.

First. It is not clear where our comrades got the understanding that the Soviet Union gave the Americans its consent to withdraw all weapons and all military specialists from Cuba, as if the Soviet Union gave its consent to that in Khrushchev's confidential letter of 26 October. If that were so, then the Americans would have stuck to that and it would have been mentioned both in Kennedy's statement published in the press and in the next letter from Khrushchev. But you know that both Kennedy and Khrushchev in all these statements spoke only about the so-called "offensive" weapons and the personnel supporting them. You simply misunderstood one phrase in Khrushchev's letter from 26 October where it speaks about the withdrawal of Soviet specialists. In this context Khrushchev had in mind not all specialists but, as it follows from the documents, only those who were involved with "offensive" weapons. And you know that not only in these letters but today also, we hold to the position that you will keep all the weapons with the exception of the "offensive" weapons and associated service personnel, which were promised to be withdrawn in Khrushchev's letter.

Fidel confirmed that this is correct.

Second. F. Castro's question about whether, instead of ordering the dismantling of strategic weapons we could have made a different decision—a legitimate question. However, we had information that an invasion on Cuba was to begin in the next several hours: it could be that they really intended to deliver an air strike against the positions of the strategic missiles first, but an invasion of Cuba would follow after that. We had to act decisively in order to thwart the plan of the invasion of Cuba. We understand that by doing that we had to sacrifice the opportunity for consultations with the Cuban government in order to save Cuba.

I did not think it necessary to comment again on Fidel's statement, in particular about the fact that the weapons deployed in Cuba had as their purpose the defense of the interests of the entire socialist camp. By that, he reiterated that he did not agree with my previous statement in response to his similar statement in which I said that these weapons were deployed not in the name of, and not for, the camp, and not for the Soviet Union. It was done only, exclusively, in the interests of defending revolutionary Cuba itself, which has international importance, great importance, for the entire socialist camp.

Then I turned to the issue of how necessary collaboration between the Soviet Union and Cuba, as between two socialist countries, is. But in this case, we were talking about something more than that. We have to have an especially close collaboration due to the fact that Soviet weapons and Soviet military personnel are located in Cuba. Therefore our actions need to be coordinated. Even if we have differences of opinion we should strive for unity in our actions. Therefore I propose to work out a plan of joint coordinated actions without touching upon the past. I would like to hear what proposals our Cuban comrades have in this respect because we need to act together. This is how the issue stands now because our victory in preventing a military attack on Cuba should be confirmed by a diplomatic victory. Here we should show the necessary skill in diplomacy and policy while firmly defending our main goals.

The Americans are interested in prolonging the Cuban crisis. We are interested in its speediest resolution through negotiations between the interested sides and then through the Security Council. We are interested in finalizing everything with an international document that defends the interests of Cuba, and removing the blockade and the dangerous situation in the Caribbean basin.

Interim Secretary General of the United Nations U Thant, who obviously sympathizes with Cuba, can play a great, positive role. It would be good if the Cuban comrades helped U Thant so that he could have at his disposal enough arguments and information to make a statement in the Security Council, which would have approximately the following content: that he is convinced that the "offensive" weapons were dismantled and removed, and that thus the conditions for lifting the blockade and normalizing the situation have been created.

Regarding the dismantling, U Thant could cite the Americans' own statement that according to their air reconnaissance the dismantling has been completed, and therefore the need for aerial inspections of the dismantling has disappeared. Only one fact remains unconfirmed, which could be raised by our enemies; it is the fact of the loading and dispatching of these weapons on Soviet ships. I think that you could allow U Thant's neutral representatives to arrive by ship at a Cuban port and, without setting foot on Cuban territory, to observe the fact of the loading and dispatching of these weapons on Soviet ships. That would require 3-4 days and all the work would be completed in that time.

I also said that the earlier we resolve the issue of the withdrawal of these "offensive" weapons and the inspection of the fact of their withdrawal, the sooner the quarantine can be lifted, which is in Cuban interests in the first place. The Soviet Union will bear

big losses because its ships are sitting at sea with shipments for Cuba, and they cannot proceed under the quarantine. We cannot tolerate these losses any longer, and we have to take joint measures to achieve the lifting of the quarantine; my proposal regarding inspection of ships in Cuban ports could facilitate matters. (I felt that we came to such an understanding that the Cubans would accept the proposal. Comrade Alekseev, who sat next to me, whispered in my ear that the Cubans will definitely accept it.)

I added: I am asking you not to give an answer to this question now. We could interrupt our conversation and you could discuss it without us, and then we could meet again, continue our work and listen to your opinion.

Then suddenly Fidel, in a calm tone, made the following unexpected statement:

"A unilateral inspection would have a monstrous effect on the morale of our people. We have made large concessions. The American imperialists freely carry out aerial photography, and we do not prevent them from doing so because of a request by the Soviet government. We need to search for some other formula. I want to say to Comrade Mikoyan, and what I am telling you reflects the decision of our entire people: We will not agree to an inspection. We do not want to compromise the Soviet troops and risk peace throughout the world. If our position puts peace throughout the world at risk, then we would think it more correct to consider the Soviet side free of its obligations and we will resist by ourselves. Come what may. We have the right to defend our dignity ourselves."

I was not worried about his refusal to allow the inspections at the ports. I was shocked by the final part of his statement. Everyone was quiet for several minutes. I thought: how do I proceed with this matter?

I decided not to comment on this shocking statement. I thought that maybe it was something they had not thought through, or maybe they had discussed that as a possibility among themselves, and then he just blurted it out unexpectedly. After some thought, [Osvaldo] Dorticos said that Fidel expressed their common opinion. The rest were silent.

I said I did not understand such a sharp reaction to my proposal. First of all, we were not talking about inspections of Cuba, either by air or land, which we had already discussed. We were talking about inspections on Soviet ships in Cuban waters, and ships are considered the territory of the state to which they belong. We were speaking about Soviet ships and therefore Soviet, not Cuban, territory. What this has to do with the infringement of Cuban sovereignty is impossible to understand. Finally, I do not have direct instructions from my government to present this proposal. I only did it hoping to make it easier for U Thant to support the Cuban cause in the UN and taking into account the favorable atmosphere that has developed in our conversations.

I repeated that our Central Committee instructed me to give thorough explanations of the Soviet position on all issues of interest to our Cuban comrades without imposing my opinion and without putting any pressure on you in order to obtain your consent for inspections of Cuban territory.

Fidel noted: why can we not carry out these inspections of the ships in neutral waters? I said that I believe, of course, it is possible, but that does not have any relationship to Cuba. He agreed.

Several hours later, in the meeting with Dorticos, Guevara, and [Carlos Rafael] Rodriguez, Dorticos stated: We have analyzed Comrade Mikoyan's latest proposal for

loading the strategic missiles on the decks of Soviet ships in Cuban ports. Our opinion is as follows: taking into account the need to keep up the morale of our people and, in addition, wishing not to allow legal disputes regarding the issues of the extraterritorial location of the ships, we would like to give a final response to Comrade Mikoyan. We believe that it is impossible [for us] to accept this proposal. We have to reject it because we do not accept in principle inspections on Cuban territory, in our air space, or in our ports.

The statement that F. Castro blurted out was so unexpected that this formulation of the issues caught not only us but all of his friends unawares. It appears that the awkwardness of the situation touched even Castro himself.

Dorticos came to his rescue, suggesting we take a break from our work. How could one explain F. Castro's statement? We had the impression that he had not planned on saying this, but that it had slipped out.

Moreover, F. Castro's friendly attitude toward us and his desire to find a commonality of opinion with us about cooperation in the future did not give any reason even to imagine that such thoughts were in his head. After all he had already accepted in full sincerity that the removal of missiles from a military point of view would not weaken the defense of Cuba, and he expressed his interest in keeping our other powerful defense weapons in Cuba, expressing concern lest we remove certain other types of weapons from Cuba under pressure of the Americans.

One would like to believe, and most likely it is truly so, that the phrase Castro used was a result of his passing mood and his desire to show how important the issue of not allowing any kind of inspections is for the Cuban revolution, and that in order to preserve this principle they are prepared for anything.

One should not forget the complicated personal qualities of Castro's character, his acute sensitivity. While in power, he made many thoughtless statements caused by a fleeting impressionability [vpechatlitel'nost'] which he later regretted.

The provocative buzzing [podzuzhivaniye] of the American press to the effect that Castro has lost his independence, and that the Soviet people are in command in Cuba undoubtedly has had an influence on him.

The Embassy knows that Castro takes it hard when he reads the statements of reactionary agencies in which he is called a "puppet of the USSR." The North American press especially blows out of proportion the issue of inspections, alleging that Castro would have to retreat under our pressure, notwithstanding his categorical statements about the impermissibility of any form of inspections.

Castro probably believes that after his militant statements against inspections, accepting them in any form means compromising his position as a leader of the people of Cuba and Latin America, and that he could begin to lose prestige. We should not exclude the possibility that Castro actually suspects us of intending to put pressure on him on this issue, and that he decided to make such a statement in order once and for all to cut off any possibility of our doing so, as a way of emphasizing the inviolability of the principles that he defends.

In my opinion, we should not yet draw any conclusions based on only this one statement.

I will be able to get a better feel for his real mood and understand the direction of his thinking on this issue better in my future talks with him.

One should not forget that in the evening, when the conversation continued with Dorticos, Guevara and Rodriguez, Dorticos mentioned at the very beginning of the conversation that Fidel Castro could not come because he felt unwell. It was clearly felt that they wanted to erase what had happened; they don't want us to take Fidel's outburst seriously. It is not a coincidence that the next day -- today, 6 November -- in the evening Guevara half-jokingly noted: "We Cubans are not Albanians, and we will not demand the liquidation of your military bases on Cuba." This was said after I responded to their question about what to do next with the known agreement about military aid by saying that as soon as we overcome the current crisis in the Caribbean we will discuss it in a calm atmosphere and hopefully will arrive at a decision coordinated in a brotherly fashion. All three confirmed their full agreement.

In addition, today in his conversation with [Aleksander] Alekseev, Rodriguez said that he had just met with F. Castro and told him about the most recent and, in his opinion, very warm and friendly conversations with me, about which Castro was very pleased.

Immediately after this Rodriguez expressed his regret regarding such an unpleasant end to our conversation of 5 November. Rodriguez did not say anything about F. Castro's opinion. However, the fact that he himself raised this issue speaks to the fact that the Cuban leaders, apparently, have discussed the situation that has been created and are now trying to repair it.

6.XI.62 A. Mikoyan
Printed 8.XI.24 Issued by Shiryanev Correct: (signature) Nikolaev Ezhov