



**August 03, 1960**  
**Note from USSR Embassy to the USA Relayed by  
Gromyko to Khrushchev, 'John Fitzgerald Kennedy -  
Political Character Sketch'**

**Citation:**

"Note from USSR Embassy to the USA Relayed by Gromyko to Khrushchev, 'John Fitzgerald Kennedy - Political Character Sketch'," August 03, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsKhSD, F. 5, Op. 30, D. 335, Ll. 92-108.

<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115978>

**Summary:**

Andrei Gromyko forwards to Premier Khrushchev a political profile, prepared by the USSR Embassy in Washington, of the recently-nominated Democratic presidential candidate, Senator John F. Kennedy.

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from the Leon Levy Foundation.

**Original Language:**

Russian

**Contents:**

- English Translation

To Comrade N.S. Khrushchev

I send an analysis on Kennedy which is of interest, sent by the USSR Embassy in the USA (by charge d'affaires Comrade Smirnovsky)

A. Gromyko

3 August 1960

\* \* \* \* \*

### **JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY**

(John Fitzgerald Kennedy) [English in original—ed.]

*/Political character sketch/*

John F. Kennedy was born on 29 May 1917 in Brookline, a suburb of Boston, Massachusetts, in a rich family of Irish extraction.

Kennedy received his secondary education in private schools. After finishing high school in 1935 he spent a semester studying in England in the London School of Economics, then studied for some time at Princeton University /USA/, from which he transferred to Harvard University /USA/, which he completed with honors in 1940 with a degree in political science. In 1940 Kennedy attended a course of lectures in the trade-and-commerce department of Stanford University.

Not long before the Second World War Kennedy visited a series of countries in Latin America, the Near East, and Europe, including the Soviet Union.

In 1941, Kennedy voluntarily entered the Navy, where he served until 1945, commanding a motor torpedo-boat in the Pacific military theater. In 1943 he was injured. [He was] Awarded a medal for displaying heroism in saving the lives of the members of his crew.

After demobilization Kennedy got involved in journalism; he was present in 1945 at the first conference of the UN in San Francisco and at the Potsdam conference in the capacity of a special correspondent of the agency "International News Service."

In November of 1946, Kennedy was elected United States Congressman from the Democratic party in one of the districts of the state of Massachusetts; in 1948 and in 1950 he was re-elected to Congress from this same district.

In 1952, Kennedy was elected to the USA Senate from Massachusetts, having beaten his Republican opponent, Senator Henry Lodge, by a wide margin. In 1958 Kennedy is elected Senator for another term. He is a member of two important committees in the Senate — the Committee on Foreign Affairs, where he chairs the Subcommittee on International Organizations, and the Committee on Labor Affairs and Social Welfare, in which he chairs the Subcommittee on Labor Affairs, as well as being a member of the Joint Economic Committee in Congress.

At the convention of the Democratic Party in 1956, Kennedy was a candidate amongst the contenders for the post of USA vice-president, although he was defeated.

Immediately after this, that is in 1956, Kennedy began actively preparing to declare his candidacy for the Presidency of the US in the 1960 elections, having composed in past years a branching and well-organized personal political machine. (According to the press, Kennedy at this time had already expended more than two million dollars on his election campaign.)

In the end, despite initial serious doubts in Democratic Party circles about his candidacy, doubts which stemmed from Kennedy's belonging to the Catholic Church and his relative youth, at the Democratic Party convention which took place in Los Angeles from 11 - 15 July, Kennedy prevailed, having amassed on the

first ballot 806 votes with a minimum of 761 votes, after which his candidacy was confirmed unanimously.

### **Kennedy's position regarding domestic policy in the USA**

In his general philosophical views Kennedy is a typical pragmatist. Accordingly, in his political activity he is not governed by any firm convictions, but by purely pragmatic considerations, defining his positions on any given concrete circumstances and, most importantly, on his own interests.

During the years that he was in Congress, Kennedy's positions on a given matter, or on analogical matters was not seldom inconsistent and contradictory, and in especially controversial political situations Kennedy generally preferred to avoid revealing his position; an example is his behavior concerning the McCarthyist-fascist tendency in USA political life in the beginning of the 1950s. While not attaching himself personally to this tendency, Kennedy simultaneously avoided condemning the movement, even when the majority of his colleagues in the Senate expressed opposition to McCarthy's actions in 1954.

All this deprives Kennedy of a clearly expressed political persona, and although in the past few years he has acquired the label of a "liberal," in fact his "liberalism" is rather relative, as is evidenced in particular by his present political alliance with the representative of the reactionary southern wing of the Democratic party, Lyndon Johnson.

In general and in view of the aforementioned facts, Kennedy's position regarding the most important aspects of domestic life in the USA can be characterized in the following way.

Like the majority of other Democrats, Kennedy advocates greater governmental intervention in the economic life of the country with the goal of artificially stimulating it by large governmental expenditures on both military needs and on all sorts of programs in the social sphere.

He advocates abolishing the present Republican policy of "hard money" with its high interest rates, which, he believes, is leading to a worsening of the economic situation.

Another method of economic stimulation, believes Kennedy, is the expansion of consumer demand with the aid of a certain income tax cut for definite categories of people: in particular, persons with low incomes. But at the same time he openly announced that he will not hesitate to raise taxes if he considers it economically justified and indispensable for attaining serious political goals.

In the area of agriculture, Kennedy before 1956 spoke out in support of the current Republican policy of variable process for agricultural produce. However, over the past few years, clearly considering the upcoming elections, he switched to the position of advocates of prices supports for agricultural produce at a high level and the reduction of percentage rates on farm credit. On the whole, Kennedy advocates strict control of agricultural production through the limits on the size of the harvest and cultivated land. Kennedy stands for a program of wider distribution of agricultural surplus within the country and abroad.

In the area of work legislation Kennedy came out against the adoption of the famous Taft-Hartley law, not, however, because of its anti-labor character, but because he considered it too inflexible. Along these lines he now advocates revoking this law, proposing to offer the President "maximum freedom to choose the means" in the struggle with strikes instead of the harsh system of measures established by the Taft-Hartley law.

Kennedy himself is the author of a series of bills impinging on workers' rights, in particular, their right to picket, and leading to the establishment of governmental control over trade union activity.

At the same time, Kennedy advocates an increase of unemployment benefits and federal government aid to regions especially burdened with unemployment, as well as a hike in the legal minimum wage and a widening of the group falling under the minimum wage law.

In the issue of civil rights Kennedy quite logically advocates granting Negroes rights equal with Whites' in all areas of life, observing, however, "proper procedure," i.e. to be implemented by administrative power in compliance with the relevant laws.

In keeping with the general Democratic emphasis on implementing different social programs, Kennedy supports federal allocations for the construction of homes with low rents and slum liquidation; he stands for federal aid to construct school buildings and increase salaries for school teachers and instructors in higher education; for increasing pension sizes; for medical aid to the elderly along the lines of a social service.

### **Kennedy's position on USA**

#### **foreign policy issues**

On issues of USA foreign policy and, above all, on the aspect of chief importance in foreign policy—relations between the USA and the USSR, Kennedy's position, like his position on domestic policy in the USA is quite contradictory.

Kennedy views relations between the USA and USSR as relations of constant struggle and rivalry, which, on different levels can, however, in his opinion, take on different concrete forms.

Considering that in the world there is a conflict of "basic national interests" of the USA and USSR and that because of this one cannot expect fundamental change in their relations, Kennedy nevertheless grants the possibility of a mutually acceptable settlement of these relations on the basis of a mutual effort to avoid nuclear war. For this reason Kennedy, in principle, advocates talks with the Soviet Union, rejecting as "too fatalistic" the opinion that "you can't trust" the Soviet Union, that it "doesn't observe treaties," etc.

In connection with this Kennedy openly criticizes the position of the USA government and the West as a whole on the question of disarmament, pointing out the West's lack of a concrete plan in this area. For his part, he proposed to create in the USA a single government organ which would develop a "viable program of disarmament" as well as plans for the transition of the American economy from a military to a peaceful orientation and different programs of international cooperation in the socio-economic sphere. However, in speaking about the need for the United States to develop a realistic plan for disarmament, Kennedy has in mind not some far-reaching program of full liquidation of armaments and military forces of the two states, but instead, again some plan to control existing armaments and military forces with just some reductions.

Kennedy quite logically argues for attaining an agreement on halting nuclear weapons testing, believing that the renewal of these tests could compromise the military position of the USA in view of the threat of widening the circle of countries possessing nuclear weapons. In his letter of 30 April 1960 Kennedy informed Eisenhower that if he, Kennedy, were elected president he would renew the moratorium on all underground nuclear tests, if an agreement about such a moratorium were to be attained between interested countries during Eisenhower's administration.

During the course of events connected with the provocative flights of American U-2 airplanes and the ensuing disruption of the summit conference, from Kennedy came the announcement that in the President's place he would not have allowed such flights on the eve of the summit, and in the situation developing in Paris would have considered it possible to apologize to the USSR for the flights /but not to punish the guilty parties, since in this situation he himself was guilty/.

While placing blame for the fact of the disruption of the summit with the Soviet Union, nevertheless Kennedy sees the fundamental reason for what happened in the fact that the Soviet Union, in his opinion, actually found it more advantageous to use the incident with the U-2 plane for the maximum political effect, rather than going to a summit under conditions when the USA, as Kennedy admits, came to the summit completely unprepared for serious and wide-ranging bilateral talks.

However, Kennedy sees the main reason for the USA's inability, given present conditions, to conduct such talks with the USSR in the USA's loss of a "position of strength" over the past 7-8 years. Kennedy considers the restoration of this "position of strength" the main task facing the USA and a necessary precondition for renewing high-level talks with the USSR. "Until this task is completed," states Kennedy, "there is no sense in returning to a summit meeting." And further: "Above all we must make sure that henceforward we conduct talks from a position of strength—of military strength, economic strength, strength of ideas, and strength of purpose."

In keeping with this conception, Kennedy, having earlier been a supporter of big defense spending "until the

attainment of an agreement on disarmament,” now in all his public statements emphasizes the absolute necessity of strengthening the USA military capability, not shying away from a significant increase on defense spending. With the goal of liquidating the present gap in USA-USSR “nuclear strike capability,” Kennedy proposes implementing a program of “constant vigilance” for USA strategic aircraft, reorganizing the system of USA bases, inside the country and abroad, and simultaneously accelerating the development and expanding production of different missiles. At the same time, Kennedy proposes modernizing conventional forces once having made them maximally mobile and able to fight “lesser wars” at any point on the globe.

In this way, while in principle advocating a search for a *modus vivendi* in USA-USSR relations in order to avoid worldwide military conflict, Kennedy at the same time stands for such paths to a *modus vivendi* which in practice signify a speeding-up of the arms race and, therefore, a further straining of the international situation with all the consequences that result from this.

On such issues as the Berlin question, Kennedy’s position is outright bellicose: he openly announces that the USA should sooner start a nuclear war than leave Berlin, since “being squeezed out of Germany, and being squeezed out of Europe, which means being squeezed out of Asia and Africa, and then we’re /the USA/ next.” He sees the possibility of involving the UN in some capacity in the Berlin question only as a means of strengthening the position of the Western powers in West Berlin, not as a way of replacing them there.

Kennedy considers the policy of the former Republican administration of “liberating” the countries of people’s democracy [i.e. East European Soviet Satellites—ed.] as unrealistic and having suffered complete failure. However, he is not inclined to admit on this basis the irreversibility of the changes in those countries. He proposes simply to conduct a more flexible policy in relation to countries of people’s democracy, trying gradually to weaken their economic and ideological ties with the Soviet Union by granting them America “aid,” widened trade, tourism, student and professorial exchanges, by creating American information centers in those countries, and so on. Kennedy was, in particular, the initiator of a Senate amendment to the famous “Battle bill” in order to grant the President wide discretion in granting economic “aid” to European countries of people’s democracy. Kennedy reserves a special place for Poland in the plan to detach countries from the socialist camp, considering it the weakest link in the group.

Kennedy also considers the USA policy toward the People’s Republic of China to be a failure, insofar as it was unable to achieve its basic goal—the subversion of the country’s new order. While admitting the necessity of “re-evaluating” USA policy toward the PRC, Kennedy doesn’t propose, however, that the USA quickly recognize the PRC *de jure* and lift its opposition to the PRC’s admission to the UN, raising in this connection the usual provisos about the PRC’s “aggression” and so on. At this point he only advocates drawing in the PRC to talks about the cessation of nuclear weapons tests, insofar as this is dictated by practical necessity, and, following this, also about the establishment of cultural and economic contracts between the USA and PRC. In regards to this Kennedy does not conceal the fact that he sees such contacts above all as a means of penetrating the PRC and collecting information about its internal condition. While advocating a “reduction in tensions in the region of Taiwan” and a refusal to “defend” the Chinese coastal islands of Matsu and Quemoy, Kennedy supports continued USA occupation of Taiwan itself and readiness to “defend” the island.

In keeping with his general stand on strengthening the position of the USA in the world, Kennedy lends great importance to strengthening NATO and in general to the issue of USA allies. In connection with this Kennedy holds to the opinion that NATO should be, on one hand, “a vital, united, military force,” and on the other, an organ for overcoming political and economic differences between participating nations and for coordinating their policy towards weakly developed countries.

Kennedy considers the issue of policy toward weakly developed countries, along with that of the renewal of US military strength, to be of the utmost importance in terms of the outcome of the struggle between the socialist and capitalist worlds. In order to prevent a further increase in the influence of the USSR and other socialist countries in the weakly developed countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Kennedy proposes that the USA, in conjunction with its Western European allies and Japan, work out broad long-term programmes of economic aid to these countries along the lines of the “Marshall plan.” Kennedy gives India especial attention in plans for aid to weakly developed countries, considering the economic competition between India and the PRC to be of decisive importance in the struggle for Asia. At the same time

Kennedy is quite critical of the practice of bringing weakly developed countries into military blocks such as SEATO and CENTO, which, in his opinion, unlike NATO, are “paper alliances,” concluded moreover “with reactionary governments that do not have the support of their peoples,” and which for this reason do not strengthen, but, on the contrary, weaken the position of the USA in these countries and regions.

### **Kennedy as a person**

Kennedy himself and his supporters now are trying however possible to create the impression that he is a strong personality of the caliber of Franklin D. Roosevelt, a leader of the new generation able to lead the country to “new heights.”

Judging, however, on the strength of the available evidence about him, Kennedy, while not a mediocrity, is unlikely to possess the qualities of an outstanding person.

He has, by all accounts, an acute, penetrating mind capable of quickly assimilating and analyzing the essence of a given phenomenon, but at the same time he lacks a certain breadth of perception, the ability to think over a matter philosophically and make appropriate generalizations. By the make-up of his mind he is more of a good catalyst and consumer of others' ideas and thoughts, not a creator of independent and original ideas.

In keeping with this Kennedy is very attached to the institution of advisors called upon to suggest interesting ideas and to work up detailed reports on various problems, but makes the final decision on serious problems himself, not entrusting this function to his underlings.

Kennedy understands people well and in general is a good organizer, as is evidenced, in particular, by the harmonious and efficiently-running apparatus he has put together for his election campaign.

Temperamentally, Kennedy is a rather restrained, dispassionate, and reserved person, although he knows how to be sociable and even “charming”—it is this latter quality in particular which explains the popularity Kennedy gained in the primary elections in a series of states throughout the nation.

Kennedy is very cautious and avoids taking hasty, precipitous decisions, but does not display excessive indecision. Kennedy is the author of three books: *Why England Slept*/1940/, *Profiles in Courage* /1956/ and *Strategy of Peace* - a collection of his speeches /1960/, as well as a significant number of magazine articles.

During the post-war years Kennedy has received honorary doctorates from many American universities and colleges.

He is a member of the organizations: “American Legion,” “Veterans of Foreign Wars,” and “Knights of Columbus.”

x x x

Kennedy's family is among the 75 richest in the USA. It is worth, by different accounts, between 200 and 400 million dollars. John F. Kennedy's personal income at present is about 100,000 dollars a year.

However, in his electoral campaign he has the broad financial support of his father and other members of the family; many of whom—his brother and sister—are taking part personally in the campaign.

Kennedy's father - Joseph P. Kennedy, now 71 years old, first acquired the family fortune by various forms of speculation on the stock market and by commerce in alcoholic beverages. At present he is one of the leading figures in the Boston financial group. In the first years of Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency, Joseph P. Kennedy supported his political program; he was the first head of a committee on securities and of the marine committee. From 1937 to 1940 he was the US ambassador to England; however he was forced to resign because of differences with Roosevelt's foreign policy: he spoke out against USA military aid to England, was a supporter of Chamberlain's Munich policy and in general sympathized with Hitler. (This fact is now being used by John F. Kennedy's opponents in order to compromise him in the eyes of the voters.)

John F. Kennedy was married in 1953 to Jacqueline Bouvier, the daughter of a rich New York banker. He has one daughter, Caroline, born in 1957.