

December 03, 1962

Hungarian Embassy in Havana (Beck), Report on Anastas Mikoyan's meeting with socialist ambassadors

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Summary:

Hungarian Ambassador to Cuba János Beck reports on a cocktail party at the Soviet embassy and his discussions with Anastas Mikoyan and other socialist ambassadors. The socialist ambassadors did not meet with Soviet leaders during the Cuban Missile Crisis and were not informed of developments. Beck adds that discussions at the reception did not elaborate beyond published news reports. In one instance, Beck notes that Mikoyan ignored questions about the Cuban public's criticism of the Soviet handling of the crisis.

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members of the Secretariat,

Comrade Árpád Pulai and

Imre Hollai

C o p y

of the report prepared by the embassy in Havana on 3 December 1962.

Subject: Comrade Mikoyan's meeting with socialist ambassadors.

Neither I nor the other socialist ambassadors had a chance to meet with the Soviet ambassador during the entire period of the crisis. We have not had a chance to meet with Comrade [Anastas] Mikoyan either since his arrival, except for the reception at the airport, which obviously did not give us an opportunity to speak with him. The first time we were able to meet with him was right before his departure.

On 20 November, before Comrade Mikoyan's departure, we were invited by phone to attend a cocktail party at the Soviet embassy together with our spouses. The event at the Soviet embassy hosted by the ambassador was attended by Comrade Mikoyan, the delegation led by him as well as several officials of the embassy and their spouses. The ambassadors who were invited to and attended the event included, apart from myself, the Czech, the Polish, the Romanian, the GDR, the [North] Korean and the [North] Vietnamese ambassadors as well as the Chinese, the Bulgarian, and the Mongolian ambassador's deputies.

This cocktail party conversation took place after a day earlier I had contacted Comrade Byelous, first envoy of the Soviet embassy—this being my third approach during the crisis—to ask him a few questions regarding the situation and discuss my view of it with him. At the same time, I complained to him that for several weeks we had been unable to meet either the Cuban or the Soviet leaders and we had not received any information from them. I added that several colleagues, at least the Czech, the Romanian, and the Polish ambassadors had expressed the same complaints. Comrade Byelous said he would try to convince Comrade Mikoyan that he should receive and inform all of us. This is how the cocktail party took place.

We spent at least one-and-a-half hours with Comrade Mikoyan. At the beginning of the conversation, during which we were all standing, Comrade Mikoyan informed us about the situation for about 15 minutes, which was immediately translated into Spanish by the interpreter. The essence of the information provided by him was that the Cuban and the Soviet governments, including Comrades Khrushchev and Fidel Castro in person as well, fully agreed with the evaluation of the situation and the tasks to be done. However, the information did not really cover more than what was published that day or in a few days later.

Comrade Mikoyan said that the Cuban government also agreed with the Soviet Union's view that president Kennedy's statement on Cuba's territorial integrity meant a great victory for Cuba and the Soviet Union as well as for the entire socialist camp. I need to note that the Cuban leaders had not publicly given any sign, either on that day or since then, whether they agreed with this view.

As for the tasks to do, Comrade Mikoyan did not go beyond what was made public in a few days after the discussion took place.

I asked Comrade Mikoyan on his view regarding the confusion that had emerged among the Cuban people and in the minds of a few Cuban leaders in connection with the situation. Drawing on his own experiences, Comrade Mikoyan told us in detail about the unprecedented confusion among the people, in the communist party, and the Central Committee at the time [March 1918] of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty in the young Soviet Republic, when for a time Lenin was in a minority and managed to get his position through only by threatening to resign from all of his functions in the party and the government. At that time Comrade Mikoyan was working in Baku as a party secretary. He said there was an awful lot of confusion in this party organization too, where most members of the party committee took the wrong position. He also mentioned that for a reason he could not recall now, he took the correct position and published an article on it in the local paper. At this point I took the opportunity to repeat my question in another way, and asked him when a similar article was going to be published in Cuba. However, Comrade Mikoyan pretended that he had not heard the question and went on explaining the Soviet–Russian situation during the time of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. He concluded by saying that the government and the party in Cuba were headed by excellent revolutionaries that were loyal to the people and were able to create and maintain a unity in this extremely complex situation which would certainly have been impossible in any other place. However big the confusion may have appeared to us, it was much smaller than it would have been among other leaders in another country. He was convinced that Cuba was going to see healthy development.

The first envoy of the Soviet embassy, Comrade Byelous, told Comrade Mikoyan that I had spent years in prison during the time of the personality cult in Hungary, which gave Comrade Mikoyan an opportunity to talk about personality cults in general, explaining his views and impressions on Mátyás Rákosi^[1] and several former or present leaders of the European socialist countries. He held, first and foremost, Stalin responsible for the personality cult in the European socialist countries, so I felt obliged to say that I could not fully agree with this statement. Although Stalin himself and the prevailing international situation undoubtedly had a significant impact on the socialist world and Hungary, there were no unlawful trials in the other socialist countries during the period of the personality cult that could be compared to what took place in Hungary and what consequences these trials had there, which demonstrates that Rákosi's responsibility cannot be seen as of secondary importance. Then Comrade Mikoyan talked at length and even provided some examples, saying that indeed, he himself had a chance to see that e.g. the Bulgarian or other leaders acted differently from Rákosi, and it was also obvious that in many cases the initiatives provided by Stalin were softened by them, while Rákosi tended to do more than what was expected from him.

During the entire conversation Comrade Mikoyan took every opportunity to give hints to and make remarks for the Chinese ambassador's deputy present regarding cooperation within the socialist camp, the coordination of actions, and real, comradely collaboration. So, for example, when he was talking about his experiences in Hungary before the counter-revolution and then about his stay in Hungary during the counter-revolution, he stressed how strong the contact had been between them and the Chinese comrades, mutually informing and directly cooperating with each other. The Chinese diplomat did not say a single word during the cocktail party, and when Comrade Mikoyan was talking with the guests surrounding him about the period of personality cults and his own experiences in the Soviet Union, as well as about Poland, Bulgaria, or Hungary, he retired further back and didn't even ask the interpreter to translate some of the conversation.

Although apart from some details Comrade Mikoyan didn't give us actual information, the way he talked about the already known facts and the way he evaluated the Cuban situation did help both me and the other socialist ambassadors to get a better picture of the situation.

János Beck

Ambassador

[1] Mátyás Rákosi—Head of the Hungarian Communist Party and the Hungarian Workers' Party from 1945 through

July 1956—CB and MK.