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From the cable on the conversation between Gromyko and Kennedy

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Summary:

Gromyko reported on his meeting with Kennedy. The Soviet representative argued that Cuba was never a threat to the US and Washington should end its hostile activities against Havana. He also warned Kennedy of the possibility of nuclear war in the event of an invasion of Cuba. Gromyko reiterated the Moscow's intention of supporting Cuba only in economic and defensive issues. Kennedy, however, pointed out that it was difficult to explain the surge in Soviet military aid to Cuba. The US president reaffirmed that Washington did not have any plan to invade Cuba, at least after Bay of Pigs and Operation Mongoose. The US was only preventing actions that could have led to war. Gromyko reemphasized the peaceful rivalry of the two ideological systems and proposed a meeting between the two leaders.

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FROM THE CABLE ABOUT CONVERSATION BETWEEN A.A. GROMYKO AND PRESIDENT KENNEDY

October 18, 1962

During the meeting with President Kennedy at the White House on October 18 I transmitted to him, his spouse and other members of his family regards from the head of the Soviet government N. S. Khrushchev and from Nina Petrovna.

Kennedy expressed his gratitude to N.S. Khrushchev for the regards.

Further I said that I would like to give an account of the Soviet government policy on a number of important issues. / ... /

Now I would like to expound the Soviet government's position on the Cuban issue and the USSR's assessment of the US actions.

The Soviet government is standing for peaceful coexistence of states with different social systems, against interference of one state into internal affairs of others, against intervention of the large states into affairs of small countries. Literally, that is the core of the Soviet Union's foreign policy.

It is well known to you, Mr. President, the attitude of the Soviet government and personally of N. S. Khrushchev towards dangerous developments connected with the US administration position on the issue of Cuba. An unrestrained anti-Cuban campaign has been going on in the US for a long time and apparently there is a certain US administration policy behind it. Right now the US are making an attempt to blockade Cuban trade with other states. There is a talk about a possibility of actions of organized policy in this region under the US aegis. But all of it equals a way that can lead to grave consequences to a misfortune for the whole mankind and we are confident that such an outcome is not desired by any people, including the people of the US.

The US administration for some reasons considers that the Cubans must solve their domestic affairs not at their own discretion, but at the discretion of the US. But on what grounds?

Cuba belongs to the Cuban people, not to the US or any other state. And since it is so, then why the statements are made in the US calling for invasion to Cuba? What do the US need Cuba for?

Who can in earnest believe that Cuba represents a threat to the US? If we speak about dimensions and resources of the two countries - the US and Cuba - then it's clear that they are a giant and a baby.

The flagrant groundlessness of such charges against Cuba is obvious. Cuba does not represent, and can't represent any threat to the countries of Latin America. It's strange to think as if small Cuba can encroach on independence of either this or that country of Latin America. Cuban leaders and personally Fidel Castro have declared more than once in front of the whole world and in a most solemn manner that Cuba does not intend to impose their system, that they are firmly favoring the non-interference of states into internal affairs of each other.

The people who call for an aggression against Cuba allege that, they say, it's not sufficient to have those statements of the Cuban government, though those

statements are supported by deeds. But by that whatever aggressive action or adventure can be justified. Solutions of almost all the international issues are results, you know, of statements, dictums or negotiations between states, in the course of which corresponding governments give an account of their positions on either these or those questions, as for example it takes place now during the conversations that we have with the US administration. But why the US administration does not believe the statements of the Cuban government? Really, isn't it convincing when the Cuban government officially declares about their aspiration for settling all the disputable questions with the US administration by the means of negotiations? In this regard can be quoted the well known statement made by Mr. Dorticos, President of the Republic of Cuba, during the current session of the UN General Assembly, the statement which the US President is undoubtedly aware of. The Cubans want to make secure their own home, their independence. They appeal for reason, for conscience. The call on the US to drop fangs upon independence of Cuba, to establish normal relations with the Cuban state.

The question is: is it worth to whip up the campaign and organize different sort of hostile activity around Cuba and at the same time inimical actions against those states which maintain good relations with Cuba, respect its independence and lend Cuba a helping hand at a difficult moment? Is it not a destruction of international law, of the UN principles and purposes?

Is it possible, Mr. President, for the Soviet Union, taking into account all of it, to sit cross-handed and to be a detached onlooker? You say that you like frankness. Giving an account of the Soviet government position on this issue frankly as well, I would like to stress that nowadays is not the middle of the XIX century, is not the times of colonies' partition and not the times when a victim of aggression could give tongue only weeks and months after an assault. American statesmen frequently declare that the US is a great power. It's right, the US is a great power, a rich and strong one. And what power is the Soviet Union?

You know that N. S. Khrushchev was positively impressed by your realistic statement during the Vienna meeting about the equality of forces of the two powers - the USSR and U.S. But as far as it is so, as far the USSR is also a great and strong power it can't be a simple spectator while there is appearing a threat of unleashing a big war either in connection with the Cuban issue or situation in whatever else region of the world.

You are very well aware of the Soviet government attitude towards such an action of the US, as the decision about the draft of 150 thousands of reservists. The Soviet government is convinced that if both of our countries favor lessening of international tension and solution of unsettled international problems then such steps should be avoided because they are intended for sharpening the international situation.

If it came to the worst, if a war began, certainly, a mobilization of additional 150 thousands of reservists to the US armed forces would not have significance. And undoubtedly you are very well aware of it. Since nowadays is not the year of 1812 when Napoleon was setting all his hopes upon the number of soldiers, of sabers and cannons. Neither is it 1941, when Hitler was relying upon his mass armies, automatic rifles and tanks. Today the life and military equipment have made a large step forward. Nowadays the situation is quite different and it would be better not to rely on armaments while solving the disputable problems.

As far as the aid of the Soviet Union to Cuba is concerned, the Soviet government has declared and I have been instructed to reaffirm it once more, our aid pursues exclusively the object of rendering Cuba assistance to its defensive capacity and development of its peaceful economy. Neither industry nor agriculture in Cuba, neither land-improvement works nor training of the Cuban personnel carried out by the Soviet specialists to teach them use some defensive kinds of armaments can

represent a threat to anybody. If the case was somewhat different, the Soviet government would never be involved in such an aid. And such an approach applies to any country.

The example of Laos convincingly illustrates that. If the Soviet Union were conducting another policy, not the present one, then the situation in Laos would be different. Since the Soviet Union and its friends apparently have more possibilities to influence the situation in Laos than the US. But we were trying to achieve an agreement because we can't step aside from the main principles of our foreign policy designed for lessening of international tension, for undoing knots of still existing contradictions between powers, for peaceful solution of unsettled international problems. And such our policy is invariable.

Here is the position and views of the Soviet government on the Cuban issue. The Soviet government calls on you and the US administration not to permit whatever steps incompatible with the interests of peace and lessening of international tension, with the UN principles which have been solemnly signed both by the USSR and the US. We call on you to ensure so that in this issue too the policies of the two largest powers pursue the object of peace and only of the peace.

Having listened to our statement, Kennedy said that he was glad to hear the reference to the settlement of the Laotian problem. We consider, he continued, that the Soviet Union really acts precisely in the way, which you are describing, and just as the US the USSR is aspiring to comply with its commitments.

Regarding the Cuban issue I must say that really it became grave only this summer. Until that the Cuban question has been pushed by us to the background. True, Americans had a certain opinion about the present Cuban government and refugees from Cuba were exciting the public opinion against that government. But the US administration had no intentions to launch an aggression against Cuba. Suddenly, Mr. Khrushchev, without notifying me, began to increase at a brisk pace supplies of armaments to Cuba, though there was no threat on our side that could cause such a necessity. If Mr. Khrushchev addressed me on this issue, we could give him correspondent assurances on that score. Build-up of the Cuban military might has very badly impressed American people and the US Congress. As President I was trying to calm down the public opinion and I have declared that, taking into account the kind of aid rendered by the Soviet Union to Cuba, we must keep cool and self-control.

But I was not able to find a satisfactory explanation to those actions of the Soviet Union. Kennedy said later, that the Soviet Union is aware of the American opinion regarding present regime in Cuba. We consider that it would be better if there were another government. But we do not have any intentions to attack Cuba.

You are saying that we have established a blockade around Cuba, but that is not the case. We have only taken the decision that the ships, after bringing cargo to Cuba will be barred from entry to the American ports to pick up freight.

Actions of the Soviet Union create a very complicated situation and I don't know where the whole thing can bring us. The present situation is, perhaps, the most dangerous since the end of the Second World War. We, certainly, take on trust statements of the Soviet Union about the sort of armaments supplied by you to Cuba. As President I am trying to restrain those people in the US who are favoring invasion to Cuba. For example, last Sunday in one of my speeches I declared against one of the American senators, who had previously supported such an invasion.

I repeat, a very dangerous situation arose regarding this issue and I don't know what

can be the outcome.

I answered Kennedy that once there was an attempt of organizing an invasion to Cuba and it is known what was the end of the affair. From different official statements and your own statements, Mr. President, everybody knows what were the circumstances and how that invasion was arranged. Everybody also knows that the US administration needs only to move a finger and no Cuban exiles, nor those who support them in the US and some countries of the Caribbean would dare launch any adventure against Cuba.

At this moment Kennedy put in a remark that he had already had an exchange of opinions with N. S. Khrushchev on the issue of invasion to Cuba in 1961 and had said that it was a mistake. I should be glad, Kennedy stressed, to give assurances that an invasion would not repeat neither on the part of Cuban refugees, nor on the side of the US armed forces.

But the matter is that, Kennedy said, that as a result of the USSR government's action in July of the current year the situation suddenly has changed for the worst.

Proceeding with the previous idea, I said that for the Cuban government the vital issue is the question what is to be done next. The question comes to the following: or they will stay unprepared to repulse new attempts of invasion or they must undertake steps to ensure their country from attack, take care of their defense. We have already said that the Soviet government has responded to the call of Cuba for help only because that appeal had the aim of providing Cubans with bread and removing the threat pending over Cuba by strengthening its defensive capacity. Regarding help, rendered by the Soviet Union, in the use of some exclusively defensive armaments, by no means it can be seen as a threat to the U.S. If, I repeat, the situation were different the Soviet government never would go along with such an aid.

Kennedy said that, to make things completely clear on this issue, he would like to announce once more that the US do not have any intentions to invade Cuba. Nevertheless, intensified armaments supplies to Cuba on the part of the Soviet Union, which began in July of the current year, have complicated the situation a lot and made it more dangerous. My intention, Kennedy stressed, consists in preventing any actions that could lead to war, only if those actions would not be occasioned by some activity of the Soviet Union or Cuba. In order to confirm that the US administration believes the declarations of the Soviet government about defensive character of the armaments supplied to Cuba, Kennedy read the following passage from his statement on the Cuban issue of September, 4, 1962:

"During the last four days the administration has received information from different sources reporting without any doubt that the Soviets had supplied Cuban government several defensive antiaircraft missiles with 25 miles radius of action similar to earlier models of our missile "Nike".

At the same time the Soviets apparently are supplying different radars and other electronic equipment which is necessary for their use.

We can also confirm the presence of several torpedo boats of Soviet fabrication earring along missiles "vessel to vessel" with 15 miles radius of action.

The number of Soviet military specialists, who nowadays either are in Cuba or on their way over there (roughly 3500 persons), corresponds to the object of rendering help for the installation and training how to use those means.

As I declared last week we shall continue to publish information according its entry and proper verification.

There are no proofs of presence in Cuba of any regular combat forces from any country of the Soviet bloc neither proofs of conceding Russia a military base (on the island) in violation of 1934 treaty on Guantanamo, nor presence of offensive missiles "ground-ground" type or any other offensive potential either in the hands of Cubans or under surveillance of the Soviets.

If the situation were different, the most serious questions would raise".

That is our position on this issue, said Kennedy, and in this way it has been expounded by our Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, in his conversation with the Soviet Ambassador. From that position I was proceeding last Sunday when I was voicing the above mentioned statement. Thus, in all my actions I proceed with due regard for statements of the Soviet Union that the armaments supplied to Cuba have exclusively defensive character.

I said in conclusion that from the correspondent statements of the Soviet government, including the statement delivered to President today, the US administration has a clear view of policy of the Soviet Union on Cuban issue and also of our assessment of the US policy and actions regarding Cuba. I had the task of giving President an account of all of it. / ... /

Fourth. After the exchange of opinions on the issue of the tests I broached the subject of the main principles of foreign policy of the USSR and the necessity to proceed from the thesis that difference of ideologies has not to be an obstacle to peaceful cooperation between the USSR and the US. According to the instructions, received before departure, the question of a possible meeting of the heads of two powers has been touched.

The Soviet government, as before, is building its foreign policy on the recognition of that indisputable concept that difference of ideologies, to which our states adhere, has not to be a barrier for their peaceful coexistence and cooperation in interests of strengthening the peace. You and us, as it was underlined more than once by N. S. Khrushchev, are human beings and you have your own ideology, and you are well aware of our attitude towards it. The USSR is a socialist state, and is building communism. We are guided by communist ideology. Who will gain the victory in the end - this question must be solved not by the force of armaments, but by the way of peaceful competition and we, the communists, are urging it since the days of Lenin.

We resolutely condemn the calls to solve ideological disputes by the force of armaments. A competition in the economics, in satisfying material and spiritual requirements of the people -

that is the field where in a historic, peaceful "battle", without use of armaments, must be solved the question about which ideology would prevail and which one would quit the historic stage. On behalf of the Soviet government I would like to reaffirm that once more because it is one of the main principles of the foreign policy of the Soviet Union.

In conclusion I would like to say the following:

The Head of the Soviet government N. S. Khrushchev has entrusted me to convey to you that his opinion is that it would apparently be useful to have a meeting between the Head of the Soviet government and the US President in order to discuss the issues that separate us and first of all questions of the German peace treaty and West Berlin. If N. S. Khrushchev has the opportunity, he will arrive to New York in the

second half of November in order to attend the session of the UN General Assembly. Thus, we are speaking about a possibility of his arrival to the US after the elections to Congress. Kennedy said that in the case of N. S. Khrushchev coming to the US he would be glad to meet him once more. Nevertheless, he said, it would be erroneous to speak about the only point of the agenda of this meeting - to discuss "the Berlin problem and the signing of the German peace treaty", because there are others who are also interested in discussing those questions besides our two countries. If Mr. Khrushchev comes to the General Assembly I would be glad to discuss with him questions that we are interested in without any formal agenda and without picking out any concrete issue that must be discussed.

I thanked President for the conversation during which we have discussed questions that represent interest for both countries, concerning important aspects of the foreign policies of the USSR and the US. I also underlined the view of the Soviet government that it would be a great historic achievement if the USSR and the US come to terms over those questions that separate us.

Kennedy responded that he agrees with that remark. As I have already told Mr. Khrushchev, the US is a large and rich country. The Soviet Union's also a large and rich country. Each of our countries has a lot of things to do inside. As to the outcome of competition between them, which I hope will be a peaceful one, the history will decide it. On Mr. Khrushchev, as the head of the Soviet government, and on me, as the US President, rests enormous responsibility and we have no right to allow any actions that can lead to a collision.

During the last 9 months while I'm holding the post of President we were seeking by all means to settle relations between our two countries. We have reached some success on the Laotian issue. We were aspiring to reach agreements both on Berlin and German problems. Unfortunately we didn't manage to do it. As to Cuba I can't understand what has happened in July of this year particularly taking into account statements made by Mr. Khrushchev that he understands the basis of the US approach. In spite of success achieved on the Laotian question, the situation around Cuban issue is getting more and more complicated.

In conclusion Kennedy transmitted his regard to N. S. Khrushchev and expressed gratitude for receiving US Ambassador in Moscow Mr. Kohler and several American representatives who had visited the Soviet Union.

For my part I assured President once more that the policy of the Soviet Union always has been and stays directed at strengthening the peace and elimination of differences in the relations among all the countries, first of all in the relations between the USSR and the US, with whom the Soviet Union wants to live in peace and friendship.

It also regards to the Cuban issue, which has not been invented by Soviet Union, it regards to the question of signing the German peace treaty and normalization on its base of the situation in West Berlin and it regards to all the other issues that separate our two countries. Our policy is the policy of peace, friendship, policy of removing differences by peaceful means.

In conclusion I promised to convey the regards from President to the Head of the Soviet government N. S. Khrushchev and expressed confidence that he would accept it with pleasure.

The conversation lasted 2 hours and 20 minutes. There were present: on American side - Rusk, Thompson, Hillenbrandt and Akalovsky, on the Soviet side - Semenov, Dobrynin and Suhodrev.

A. GROMYKO

20/10/1962