

October 23, 1962

**Central Committee of the Communist Party of the
Soviet Union Presidium Protocol 60**

Citation:

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Summary:

Protocol 60 details the first meeting of the Communist Party during the crisis. As Khrushchev is awaiting the announcement by President Kennedy of the discovery of missiles in Cuba, he and some of his colleagues briefly considered using tactical nuclear weapons in the event of a US airborne assault. But, at the suggestion of Soviet defense minister Rodion Malinovsky, the Kremlin postponed its consideration of a nuclear response pending details of Kennedy's speech. The Kremlin wasted no time in taking steps to reduce the risks of confrontation. It ordered some ships that were still in the Mediterranean to turn around. The Aleksandrovsk, the ship carrying the nuclear warheads for the IRBMs (the R-14s), was ordered to keep sailing, however, because it was close enough to Cuban shores to dock before the blockade went into effect.

Credits:

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Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Present: Brezhnev, Kozlov, Kosygin, Mikoyan, Polyansky, Suslov, Khrushchev, Shvernik, Grishin, Demichev, Ilichev, Ponomarev, Shelepin.

I. On defining positions toward further steps in regard to Cuba and Berlin

Khrushchev, Malinovsky,
Ivanov, Mikoyan, Kozlov,
Brezhnev, Kosygin,
Ponomarev, Suslov

Cde. Malinovsky. I do not think that the USA right now could embark on blitzkrieg operations. It is not such a country (concerning Cuba). Apparently, the speech on the radio is a pre-election stunt. If an invasion of Cuba will be declared, this will be after another 24 hours has passed in order to get ready.

I think that we will not end up in a situation in which the missiles are placed on high alert.

Cde. Ivanov. Reports at what stage the delivery of property [weaponry and other military equipment] is to Cuba.

Cde. Khrushchev. I agree with Cde. Malinovsky's conclusions. Gromyko responded to Rusk for the most part from an ethical standpoint.

The point is that we do not want to unleash a war, we wanted to intimidate and restrain the USA vis-à-vis Cuba.

The difficult thing is that we did not concentrate everything that we wanted and did not publish the treaty.

The tragic thing — they can attack, and we will respond. This could escalate into a large-scale war.

One scenario: they will begin to act against Cuba.

One scenario: declare on the radio that there already is an agreement concerning Cuba.

They might declare a blockade, or they might take no action.

Another scenario: in case of an attack, all the equipment is Cuban, and the Cubans declare that they will respond. And another: not yet use the strategic weapons, but use the tactical.

Give Pliev instructions — bring the troops up to combat readiness.

All the forces initially should not use atomic [weaponry].

If there is an airborne assault — the tactical atomic weaponry, but the strategic [not] until orders are given (excluding use of the means in Stetsenko's[2] custody).

Conclusion (is being made):

An attack is being organized against Cuba.

Cde. Malinovsky says: wait until 1:00 a.m., or else they will be given grounds for using atomic weaponry.[3]

I. On the USSR government's draft statement concerning Cuba.

Kuznetsov, Khrushchev,

Mikoyan, Kosygin, Polyansky,

Ilichev, Grechko

The USSR gov't is appealing to the peoples of the USSR — and is informing them.

Work. Measures so that we are not caught unawares.

Accept.

I. On the instructions to Cde. [Soviet UN Ambassador Valerian] Zorin

Cde. Kuznetsov

Affirm.

Draft Security Council resolution.

Affirm.

I. On information to F. Castro about our further steps in events around Cuba.

We need to tell our friends where we are heading.

It was halfway successful, and half not.

It is positive that the whole world is focused on Cuba. Now.

It is not essential for Cuba but is essential for the USA.

Time will pass, and if needed, it [weaponry] will again be sent.

I. On the letter to Kennedy.

Regardless of the class of weaponry, it has been delivered.

It has been delivered with the aim of defending Cuba against aggression.

The ships that are moving in the Mediterranean Sea, return them to the Black Sea.

The armaments and military formations are not to be sent for now, return them from their voyage.

Keep the boats on their approaches.[4]

On the measures for increasing combat readiness. Through a gov't decision, an order has been given to the minister of defense.

The Min. of For. Aff. is to brief the ambassadors of the Warsaw Pact countries.

Invite the commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Pact and the representatives and exchange views with them.

On the treaty — do not announce it (unanimous opinion).

Issue a command for the return of ships (the ships that have not yet reached there)

(Everyone says that this is correct.)

Compose a statement by the USSR government — a protest.

The USA has set out on the path of preparing and unleashing a third world war.

American imperialism has taken upon itself the right to dictate its will to others — we protest.

All countries have the right to defense and to conclude alliances.

Warn the gov't it is taking upon itself great responsibility.

The USSR also possesses weapons, we protest the reckless actions.

This is lawlessness and unprecedented treachery — demand an account from the other gov't.

The directive to Zorin[5] — along these same lines.

The peoples of all countries must raise their voices.

For preservation of the UN.

The laws and Charter of the UN are being trampled on.

All issues in dispute — by means of negotiations.

The USSR gov't is bringing the matter to the Security Council.

Let the four submarines move ahead.[6] The “Aleksandrov[sk]” is to head to the nearest port.[7]

Send a telegram to Castro.

We received Kennedy’s letter.

Crude interference in Cuba’s affairs.

We are raising the matter in the Security Council against US treachery, and Cuba should come to the Security Council.

[. . . .]

[1] Translator’s Note: Because of the 7-hour time difference between Moscow and Washington, DC (a difference that increased to 8 hours on 28 October when the United States moved its clocks back an hour to Daylight Standard Time), this session of the CPSU Presidium necessarily began before President John F. Kennedy delivered his 18-minute address announcing the discovery of Soviet missile installations on Cuba. That address, broadcast over television and radio, started at 7 p.m. US east coast time on 22 October 1962, which in Moscow would have been 2 a.m. on 23 October 1962. According to Aleksei Serov’s notes of this Presidium session, the deliberations began at 10 p.m. Moscow time on 22 October 1962, some four hours before Kennedy delivered his address. By that time, Soviet intelligence officials and diplomats had learned that President Kennedy would be making a major announcement about Cuba later that day. The first part of the CPSU Presidium meeting occurred before Kennedy’s speech. Nikita Khrushchev received the text of Kennedy’s address from the US government roughly an hour before Kennedy went on the air. According to Serov’s notes, the Presidium session temporarily adjourned after the arrival of the text of Kennedy’s speech, and it resumed at 10 a.m. on 23 October, Moscow time. The first part of Vladimir Malin’s notes (through the statement by Defense Minister Rodion Malinovsky) covers the discussion that occurred before the arrival of the text of Kennedy’s address. The remaining part of the notes is from the deliberations that began at 10 a.m. on 23 October, Moscow time.

[2] Translator’s Note: The surname of Igor Dem’yanovich Statsenko (1918-1987), the major-general who oversaw the Soviet R-12 (SS-4) and R-14 (SS-5) missile regiments on Cuba, is mistakenly rendered as Stetsenko in the notes.

[3] Translator’s Note: This is the last recorded comment prior to the arrival of the text of Kennedy’s address. The remaining part of the meeting occurred at the resumed session on the morning of 23 October 1962.

[4] Translator’s Note: Khrushchev is referring here to the four Soviet Foxtrot-class diesel submarines that were in the region (B-4, B-36, B-59, and B-130), each of which was equipped with a nuclear-capable torpedo. In coming days, three of these submarines (B-36, B-59, and B-130) were forced to surface by U.S. naval vessels. Another Soviet submarine, the B-75 (which was of the earlier Zulu-class), had also been in the region since early October to protect Soviet transport ships. The B-75 was promptly recalled to the Soviet Union, its mission having been rendered moot.

[5] Translator’s Note: Valerian Aleksandrovich Zorin (1902-1986) was the Soviet ambassador to the United Nations from 1952 to 1953 and again from 1956 to 1965, when he also served as Soviet deputy foreign minister. He was involved in the celebrated confrontation with US ambassador Adlai E. Stevenson on 25 October 1962

regarding the Soviet missiles in Cuba.

[6] Translator's Note: Here again, Khrushchev is referring to the four Foxtrot-class submarines.

[7] Translator's Note: The Aleksandrovsk, a large, Swedish-built cargo ship, was carrying 24 1-megaton nuclear warheads for the R-14 (SS-5) missiles that were supposed to be deployed on Cuba and 44 14-kiloton warheads for Soviet tactical cruise missiles. The Aleksandrovsk was originally supposed to dock in the Cuban port of Mariel, but the outbreak of the crisis caused the ship to be diverted to the much closer Cuban port of La Isabela. Four other Soviet surface ships, including the Almat'evsk, which was escorting the Aleksandrovsk, were also allowed to proceed to the nearby Cuban port. But all Soviet surface ships that were further away, including those carrying the R-14 missiles themselves, were ordered to turn back.