

Interview with Oleg Troyanovsky [Foreign Policy Aid to Nikita Khrushchev]

Question: ... I'd like for you to give me some context, some feeling for the time and that sort of thing. During that period, the early '60s, what was Khrushchev's view of President Kennedy?

Well I recall that after the very first meeting in Vienna, we were all waiting for him to come back and I think the first, first meeting was more or less tete a tete. And he came back and we were around him saying, well, how did it go or something. And he was rather skeptical about Kennedy. Saying, well, you know, compared to Eisenhower doesn't measure to Ike. So my impression was rather negative. And furthermore, the Bay of Pigs thing also did not help Kennedy's stature in Khrushchev's eyes. So perhaps that was one of the reasons why he ventured to go through this Cuban thing. But certainly as the crisis unfolded and the way it ended, he changed his mind completely about Kennedy. And I recall also that when Kennedy was assassinated, this was really almost a personal blow to him; he felt it very deeply.

Question: And why do you think this? Tell me more about how he.....changed during and after the crisis.

Well the way Kennedy handled the crisis, I think Khrushchev appreciated it in that throughout there were channels left open for further negotiation and, in order to find a way, a political way out, a political settlement. That he certainly appreciated, I think. And as you know, after the crisis, there was quite a good rapport between the two of them. The Hotline telephone was established. This agreement on the cessation of testing in three spheres was signed and I think that had Kennedy not been assassinated and had Khrushchev not been deposed in '64, perhaps the détente which came about later would have come about much earlier. That's my impression, although this is guess work and....

Question: One of the things that actually has haunted me as I learn more and more about.....

Yes, so that's that my impression, that events unfolded Khrushchev's opinion of Kennedy went up.

Question: And do you think there was a shared, they had both faced the possibility of nuclear war, something that no other leader of either of our countries had...

Yes. Well I think that from the very beginning, as far as Khrushchev was concerned, war was the last thing he had in his mind. So if one were to take sort of a view from now back to those times, one could come to the conclusion that Khrushchev would have backed down because he would not, he might have gone to the very edge but not war. And I think that was Kennedy's view too. No?

Question: There; sa lot of argument about what would have happ, what Kennedy would have, how long he could have...

Yes, well that's true. He had great pressure on him and that's what Robert Kennedy told Dobrynin on a number of times.

Question: Tell me again, back before the crisis, did you ever.....Khrushchev.....

I did.

Question: What his.....

Well he was highly impressed, I think, by, by the, well it depends. The first visit, of course, was a very success, successful visit and he was highly impressed, although the first few cities he went through – New York and Los Angeles – there were speeches made at the various public meetings which he regarded as being derogatory and not up to the standards at which officials of that rank should be received. So when we got to Los Angeles, he was rather angry. I think there was a speech made by the mayor of Los Angeles which we, he thought was very crude and, how shall I put it? Well he didn't like it. And I think he was right in that respect. And so when we came back to the hotel, he invited Gromyko and said you better to to Amb, to Governor Lodge who accompanied us, he was governor, right? Well, Henry Cabot Lodge, and tell him that if this goes on this way, we will cut the visit short which Gromyko I think did and after that, the atmosphere improved. Probably the American side, the president, and Secretary Dulles realized that if the visit were to collapse, this wouldn't be to the advantage of either side.

Question: What was it that people were saying in the speeches that so angered him? Were they trying to.....

Attacks on the country, indirect attacks on him. In general derogatory things.

Question: The psychology of the Cold War, isn't it?

Right. Of course. It was within the framework of the Cold War.

Question: So people were rude.

Yes, I'd say so. Some of them, some of them.

Question: What about in Hollywood?

Oooh, what happened, well in Hollywood, I don't know. (LAUGH) He, he took it as a sort of an insult the fact that they showed the shooting of, I think, Can Can was the film with Sinatra and Shirley MacLaine. And the girls were dancing and then they turned and showed their bottoms toward the guest. Well he didn't think that was a very good idea. But, well, that was a minor thing. (LAUGH)

Question: You wrote that he lived under a constant kind of fear while he was in the United States. Tell me about that. What that fear was....

No, I wouldn't call it fear. But he was under the pressure that at that time the United States had a great preponderance of force as compared to the Soviet Union with American military bases practically surrounding the Soviet Union, with the United States having great number of nuclear missiles, more than the Soviet Union. At least the long-range ones. And in fact with the United States being practically immune from attack at that time, whether, whereas the Soviet Union was, well, they were there in front lines, so to speak. So of course this was a matter which was a constant reason for anxiety.

Question: Do you remember the specific conversations that you had with him...

No, not at the moment. But certainly it was the general atmosphere that something had to be done to achieve if not parity, at that stage, at least to make the balance less, how shall I put it, to redress the balance.

Question: He had some fairly colorful phrases that he used to address the United States.

Right.

Question: Do you remember what some of those were? One is, I don't know in Russian, one is about the hedgehog an....

Oh you sit on a hedgehog or something like that? Right. I recall that at one of the news conference in Washington, they asked him about the Hungarian question and he said, well, it was pretty rough I though. And I, in interpreting, I tried to smooth it over a little bit. But he said, you know, it's like a rat. You put it in your mouth, you can't swallow it and you don't want to spit it out. (LAUGH)

Question: Well how would you translate the phrase that we now found in a lot of the archival footage..."Kuskina mat." How, as the interpreter, would you translate that for the Americans?

Ah ha! Well I'm not as proficient now as I was then so perhaps I would have I have had difficulty even the. But now I'm at a loss, I'd say.

Question: ...general attitude is.

Well we will show you a thing or two. That's mild form of putting it.

Question: So tell me why you think he did make the decision to deploy the missiles....

Yes, right. Well actually to my mind, and I think there were two reasons. One reason obviously was to try to prevent a new invasion of Cuba after the Bay of Pigs. And I think he had a strong feeling that the Americans and Kennedy wouldn't stop at the debacle they suffered then, but would try to get some sort of revenge. And there was a mass of information coming through about the various sabotage activities in Cuba, that attempts to assassinate Castro, preparations for an invasion I think in Florida. There were several thousand anti, and it-Castro Cuban gathered. So there was a very strong feeling that a new attack on Cuba was imminent and therefore I think that perhaps the main reason, well it's diffic, difficult to measure which of the two was more important, but certainly, at least the official reason, was to protect Cuba. The second was, of course, to try to redress, in a way, the balance between the two countries as far as nuclear capability was concerned. And in fact at the meeting in Havana this January, Fidel Castro said that to him that was the main thing, that if it were only to protect Cuba, perhaps they wouldn't have agreed because, because they thought it was their own business to protect themselves. But since, as they saw it, it also, it was also a matter of trying to redress the balance between the two sides during the Cold War then they agree. Therefore I think that these two reasons are the main reasons, were the main reasons.

Question: Tell me about how, did he come up with the idea himself?

I think it was his idea. I have been asked that question on a number of times whether someone might have prompted him. No, but I think it was his own idea. And according to the Gromyko, and I think he is right, the first mention of that idea came up as we flew from Bulgaria where he was on an official visit, I think that was on the 20th of May, if I am not wrong, and he talked to Gromyko about it.

Question: How did he come up with these kind of ideas? Tell me more about him personally.

Well he was a, his mind was very inventive in all sorts of ways. Not only politically but agriculturally or industrially or what not. Sometimes, of course, some of these ideas were somewhat outlandish. Perhaps not so much outlandish as the fact that he tended to carry an idea which got hold of him to the extreme when it became counterproductive. It's like with the sowing of corn in our country. Of course the idea was very good because corn is a very good thing but when they started plowing up wheat and sowing corn in places in our country where corn actually cannot grow, that became absurd.

Question: And why was he so obsessed with growing corn?

To raise the capital....ting. Corn is a very good thing for, for capital, as I understand it. But my, my knowledge of agriculture is probably even less limited than yours. (LAUGH) Even more limited, sorry. (LAUGHTER)

Question: We probably could match each other.

Right.

Question: You made a, you made the comparison before to how he, to this corn idea and what then happened with the missile deployment. Talk a little bit more about that.

Well it's the same thing with this missile deployment, that oh perhaps the idea as such wasn't too bad or perhaps it had some reason behind it. But all the other factors around were not taken into consideration. And the main factor that was not taken into consideration which I think I tried to impress on him at one stage, was the reaction that would follow on the part of the United States and the risks that ensued. It's difficult, well I can say that some time after I learned of this, that a decision has been, had been taken to emplace the nuclear missiles, I had occasion to talk to him about it and I said, don't you think it's too big a risk or something of that sort? And he said, well we're not violating international law in any respect, why should we not do it when the Americans have been placing nuclear missiles all around our frontiers when there are military bases all around us? So this is a sort of quid pro quo, quid pro quo. And he said, well they're even violating the Monroe Doctrine in that the Monroe Doctrine provides for non-interference by the European powers in the Western hemisphere affairs and non-interference by the United States in European affairs. And as we know, the United States is deeply involved in European affairs now. So formally speaking, there was, it was difficult to say, to object to these arguments. But still I said they did not take into consideration the reaction that would ensue in Cuba. Or in the United States, sorry.

TAPE CHANGE

Question: You said, you know, the arguments that he made to you and then repeat that you said...

Yes. Well, these arguments, as such are difficult to, to object to, formally speaking. But still they, they're not taken into consideration, the realities of life in the United States and possible reaction that would, would ensue on the part of the United States.

Question: And so what, did you, did you give him some examples of what you thought might be the reaction in the United States?

No, I well perhaps I did, but actually it was a foregone conclusion that the decision had been taken and that it, it wouldn't be changed. So the fact that I raised the matter was more to quiet my own conscience than to try to achieve anything in practical terms. Then later, much later on in October it must have been, the middle of October, on another occasion he said to me, well, the crisis is approaching, or something to that affect. And I said, yes, and let's hope the boat doesn't overturn altogether. And he said well it's too late to change anything. SO I had a feeling that by that time he began to have second thoughts about the whole business.

Question: But?

Hmmm?

Question: But?

But, well it was too late. You couldn't start the film turning back again.

Question: How did you, how did you first find out that the missiles had been deployed? Or that the decision had been made to deploy them?

Well actually I was more or less aware of all the major things that were going on in the foreign policy field. But on this occasion, I didn't know the decision had been taken and my colleague, also Khrushchev's assistant at that time by the name of Lebedev, he called me up on the telephone, it must have been shortly, well towards the end of May, probably. And he said, look, if you're standing you better sit down because what I'm going to tell you is going to overwhelm you. And I said, yes, what it is? He said the decision has been taken to emplace nuclear missiles on Cuba. And I was shocked, I must say. Well my colleague was shocked too, as a matter of fact, although he didn't deal with foreign policy matters, he dealt with ideological matters.

Question: And you immediately knew how dangerous it was.

Well that was my first reaction, yes.

Question: And was it difficult to decide to go to Khrushchev and tell him that you were concerned?

In principle, no, because by that time we, I think he had confidence in me and our relations were more or less easy, easy-going. But my colleagues tried to dissuade me by saying, well, what's the point of doing it? The decision has already been taken and anything you say won't change it and perhaps this is

one of the crucial decision in Khrushchev's life and he might not take it well if you try to dissuade him, something to that effect. So there was some hesitation on my part.

Question: Were they arguing essentially you might lose your job?

No, no. There was no question of that. No, some, sometimes Khrushchev got angry at other people. But I can't remember a single instance when he got angry at his immediate personal staff which was a good thing. It would have been much worse if it were the other way around. (LAUGH) Mmmhmm.

Question: Did he like people, how did he react to people who argued with him? Or did people argue with him?

Not too much, not too much. Well, it depends what you mean by arguing. If you put forth your own arguments or, that's one thing; if you argue vehemently, of course, that might create a negative reaction, certainly. After all, he was the big boss. But if you were to put forth reasonable arguments, I think he would take it naturally as people should.

Question: And were you surprised that the military told him that the deployment could, in fact, be done in secret?

Yes, at least, well perhaps not at the beginning because I'm not sure that anyone realize the scope of the operation. But when it turned out that this would entail transporting 45, 45 thousand military people across the world and transporting not only intermediate range nuclear missiles, but also these anti-aircraft missiles and the tactical nuclear missiles and some Coast Guard vessels and what not, certainly an operation of that scope I don't see how it could have gone through without being, without being found out. In fact, I think it's very strange that the CIA didn't find out about it beforehand. It didn't doesn't speak well of the CIA, does it?

Question: I agree. Particularly after you talk to the Cubans about, you know, Cuban convoys were two kilometers long and...

Right.

Question: ...everything else.

And some told me that in Cuba everyone was speaking about it.

Question: I think I told you...

Yeah, perhaps you did.

Question: Open joke, absolutely. Open secret, not a joke at all. Why do you think the military told him it could be done secretly?

Well because he thought it would be done, it could be done secretly and military are supposed to follow orders and they also said, yes, of course, we can do anything. Camouflage the missiles as ponds or what not. But of course it's pretty absurd.

Question: Over the course of the summer you were them among a small group of people who knew what was going on. Did it worry you?

It did, it certainly did. Id, I'd say it spoiled my vacation that summer because there was no one to talk about it to and it was a source of great worry.

Question: Did you talk to your wife?

No, no. I did not.

Question: And what about to your colleagues?

Colleagues, yes, right. And I think some of them were worried too.

Question: But after your first conversation with him, it was of no use to raise, to raise the question again.

No, there was no point. I don't think there was any point.

Question: How did you know then that the, when the American discovered the missiles?

Well, on the 22nd of October we began to receive messages, information rather, from the United States that the president was going, well first of all that something was going on around the White House. People were coming and going and what not. And then on the 22nd of October, information came through that the president would be addressing the nation on a matter of crucial importance, or something to that effect. So there was no question in anyone's mind about that this would be the, the statement, the address about the missiles. And so when I said to Khrushchev about the fact that there would be an address about the missiles, which would be pretty late at night by Moscow time, very late, I think, at night, his first reaction was to sort of dismiss the matter, more or less. Then he called me back again and said that he would call for a meeting or the presidium of the Central Committee that evening at 10:00, which was done. And the people gathered, members of the presidium and the alternate members and the secretaries of the party, of the Central Committee, and some people from the foreign ministry. Gromyko had not yet returned from the United States so Vasily Kuznitzov was there as senior vice minister of foreign affairs, and some military people. And we were waiting for the, for the reports on the address to start coming in. But I think about an hour before that, the American, either it was the charge d'affaires of the embassy in Moscow or the minister counselor if the ambassador was there, I'm not sure about that, handed I think to the foreign ministry the text of Kennedy's letter to Khrushchev and probably, probably also the address, yes, I think so. But that was late at night. And the people at the foreign ministry dictated it by telephone to Kuznitzov and to myself and then we went in and reported on, on the text to the, to the meeting. And I'd say the first reaction was rather calm because Kennedy spoke about not doing a blockade but about a quarantine and what's a quarantine, I missed...

Question: Start again with the reaction was calm...

All right. The initial reaction was calm because Kennedy didn't speak about a strike, an air strike. He didn't speak about an invasion. He only spoke about a quarantine and it looked as if the reaction might not be as strong as could have been expected. So as I said, the initial reaction, we said, well, so what? Something like that. Not quite, but something like that. And I think that night at the meeting itself, Khrushchev dictated the text of a statement which the foreign ministry people were to polish up and get prepared and report back the next day. And also some statement, no he did not dictate it but instructions were given for the military to make some statement on military preparedness or something like that. And the Soviet government statement which was published the next day, was rather tough, I'd say. The reason for the toughness was, I think, the initial reaction of our side was, well it, they haven't taken extreme stand in Washington, something to that effect.

Question: Did it also have to do with, with Khrushchev's assessments of Kennedy?

Perhaps it did. It, yes, I think very likely did. I think you're right. Not that he said anything to that effect, but logically speaking it probably did. That perhaps he thought that Kennedy was not a strong personality and that he wouldn't take any extreme action and that they would more or less swallow the whole thing.

Question:at first

Yes.

Question: In your meeting, a the presidium gathered before you received the text of the letter and the speech, was there speculation about what the American response might be? Did people sit around and say, we're in trouble now or...

No, no, I think it was just a wait and see attitude. There was not much point in speculating. There had been plenty of time to speculate before that. So as far as I remember there wasn't much speculating before the actual information came through.

Question: The interesting thing about the reaction is that of course in the United States, the speech terrified the population.

Mmm, it did, yes? Even though the initial...

Question: Absolutely because besides the quarantine, there was the threat of nuclear retaliation.

Well, but that wasn't the first reaction on our side.

Question: So at some point I assume you began, he began and the government began to take this all more seriously. Tell me about that.

Yes. I think as, as the events unfolded and as the pressure kept mounting up, of course one very important, portant point in time was I think Wednesday, if I'm not wrong, when the decision was taken to halt the ships which were approaching the quarantine line to turn them back. That was very important and I think it was realized in Washington too, at that time, that well, they're backing off in a

way. But even after that, the pressure kept mounting up and particularly by Saturday the 27th, it was already very, very high. How shall I put it to use some other word except pressure? (LAUGH) Well in any case, we were approaching the high point, both sides, and I think there was a feeling in Washington and the White House too. As far as our side is concerned, well first of all I'd say that even before Saturday on Friday, perhaps even Thursday in a way, I think Khrushchev and perhaps some of the others who, well those who he talked to, would, began thinking about the need to find a political solution. And I think there are indications of that in his, in his messages which had been sent, which were sent on Thursday and Friday. But by Saturday, the pressure was really high and as I said, there are several reasons for that. First of all...

Question: When the Kennedy message and speech were dictated to you over the telephone, what was your reaction?

Well I would say that my personal reaction, strange as it may seem, was one of relief in a way. In that I thought that if the missiles were in place and operation before they were discovered, the situation would have been even worse than it actually was. And I had a feeling, as I think I said before, that we would perhaps not back down but at least start finding political ways to settle the mess. So it was more relief than, than anxiety.

Question: One of the people in Cuba had the same reaction...

Really?

Question: He was among those who knew and he spent the summer terrified that because of him...

Yes. There...

Question: ...be discovered. How was the decision made to turn the ships back?

Really that I cannot answer because I just don't remember. I'm sorry. But...(LAUGHTER) I'm sorry but I don't want to make anything up.

Question: No, I don't want you to...Do you remember if there were those among his closest advisers who were...

No.

Question:presidium members who began earlier than the others...

I cannot say for the reason that if there were any such people, perhaps Mikoyan, perhaps Gromyko, I don't know, but they would have done it in a very private conversation with Khrushchev rather than raising the matter with many people around. Right, in the larger group.

Question: You started spending the night at the Kremlin?

Not at the Kremlin, at the center, well, first of all I'd say that, I should say that the first night, night from the 22nd through the 23rd, at the end of the meeting with Khrushchev said my suggestion is that we all

spend the night here in Kremlin because I presume the foreign newspaperman would be snooping around to find out what our first reaction is and it wouldn't be good if it would show some nervousness perhaps on part, part if they found out that we had been meeting late in the night. So he suggested that everyone stay in the Kremlin but it didn't work out because half of the people there had no offices in the Kremlin and nowhere to spend the night there. But he did. He had the little back room where there was a couch. And he asked to be, yes he asked to be wakened up at 8:30 as I remember, the next morning. And I spent the night in my armchair in my office. But after that, now I spend the night in the Central Committee next to Khrushchev's office because as a rule all the information first came to the Central Committee secretariat, Khrushchev secretariat of Central Committee, and then was sent over to the Kremlin, although by that time, by 1962, he spent most of his time in the Kremlin and not in the Central Committee. But nevertheless, because the information came through first through the Central Committee, I established myself there.

Question: ...spent the week.

That's right. And lost some, some weight in the process. After the crisis, my wife discovered that I lost something like 2 or 2 and a half pounds, kilos, and she said, well, couldn't you find an easier, a safer way to reduce? (LAUGH) but yes, where are we? (LAUGHTER) We are on Saturday, aren't we?

Question: I.....Khrushchev write, or wrote, that there was a period of time when the danger was particularly acute and he's talking about earlier in the week. I think before the so-called first letter that went to the, what the Americans call the first letter...Talk to me about what you remember of the conversations, thewho decided that it was in fact, that the danger was acute and when the mood changed from one of calm to...

Well...

Question: ...one of tension.

...I don't think you can pinpoint the exact day or hour because the awareness of the danger mounted up from day to day, beginning, I don't know, Wednesday perhaps or something like that. And little by little or on some days more and more, the awareness of the danger, the pressures kept mounting up. So I would find it difficult to give any specific indications of that. But certainly by, by Saturday the realization of the danger was very, very acute and for several reasons. One reason, certainly, was the fact that the U2 was shot, shot down over Cuba and I think the reason that that was, that came as a sort of shock, perhaps even, in that there were no instruction to shoot down the U2. I think it was tak, the decision was taken by the military in Cuba. And as a result of that, the realization grew that something might happen by accident unforeseen from Moscow. And that if you shoot down a U2 whatyou may do anything, you know.

Question: What was theKhrushchev's reaction when he got the news that the U2 had been shot down?

Well I think he was very worried for that very reason. Then, in general I, throughout Saturday information kept coming in that in Washington in the White House, a decision might soon be taken about an air strike or an invasion or what not. And certainly there was information also from the intelligence about, about the concentration of forces around Cuba. And then late at night came a message from Fidel Castro to Khrushchev which was, I'd say, very dramatically couched. It spoke about the possibility of an invasion of Cuba within the next 24 to 72 hours, I think he said. And that if, he said something the effect that the, if the Americans decide to start a war perhaps the Soviet Union should be the first to use nuclear weapons. But I think, I think that part was more or less dismissed by Khrushchev. But what really worried him was the impression that Fidel Castro got that there would be an invasion perhaps within the next 24 hours. And he asked me, I read this over on the telephone late at night to him and he asked me to, to repeat that part. And coupled with all the other information, that create a sense of being in crisis. And therefore Khrushchev gave instructions to call a meeting of the presidium of the Central Committee the next morning. And since this was Sunday, it was, he decided to have it held at the governmental dacha outside of Moscow.

Question: Was there a reason besides the fact that it was Sunday that he decided to suddenly...

Well first of all because it was more convenient with people living in the countryside and it was more convenient for them to gather there than to go to Moscow. That's one reason. The other perhaps was to Moscow. That's one reason. The other perhaps was to avoid any, any, well I don't know, people because certainly people would be watching to see whether something was going on in the Kremlin at that time and to avoid that.

Question: When you read him Fidel Castro's letter over the phone, what was his state? Was he agitated? Could you tell?

Well it was difficult to, the only thing I could tell was that he asked me to repeat one or two or three sentences in the message. So perhaps that was a sign of agitation. But over the telephone it's not too easy to, to find out. But in general I would say that he held himself in check throughout the week. I cannot remember any instance when his agitation, which was probably inside him, came out in, in the form of any outbursts or what not. Well after all, he was a man who had been through the war and had been at the, in the front line during the war and he had been through the Stalin's times which were not very easy times. So he knew when to hold, hold himself in check, I'd say.

Question: Do you remember if there were conversations in which the possibility of nuclear war was actually talked about?

Well I don't think it required any talking about. It was there in the air, in the atmosphere of the whole thing. And certainly that was the big problem, to avoid a nuclear war. And the reason that, with both sides actually, were looking for a way out, a political way out, was in order to avoid a nuclear war.

Question: I guess, I wish that I could figure out when during that week, well let me put it this was, Kennedy, when the U2 was shot down, the standing orders were then that U.S. military would go in and take out that missile site.

Mmmhmm.

Question: And he countermanded those orders.

Right.

Question: That seems a moment when the reality of nuclear war, that it was going to start, hit him. Was there such a moment for Khrushchev?

Well you see, I think what was on Khrushchev's mind was that if we let matters reach the stage when the Americans would launch an air strike or an invasion, the point, the question would be: what should be the response? And that was the big question. I don't, well I doubt that we could have swallowed it and not react in any way, perhaps. But to take some counter action would start a process which might go unchecked, start developing unchecked. And I think I should tell you about one very small episode which took place, perhaps I don't remember the exact date, perhaps Friday, something like that, when, when Kuznetsov called and there was someone else from the foreign ministry with him, were in Khrushchev's office and Kuznetsov said something to the effect that since the Americans are putting pressure around Cuba, should we not put some counter pressure around Berlin, which was the obvious painful spot for, for the United States. And Khrushchev dismissed that idea in I'd say rather abrupt terms. Saying we have no need of advice of that sort, or something to the effect, perhaps even ruder. And which led me, for instance, to the realization that certainly we would not want to extend the framework of the conflict and would find some, would try to find some political solution.

Question: And so that's relatively early on...

That was, I can't say when that took place exactly, but perhaps Thursday or something like that, mmmhmm.

Question: Tell me about the first letter, I mean what we call the first letter, the letter that was written on Thursday.

Yes, you mean the day when there were two letters.

Question: Yes, The first, the handwritten one, the one that was handwritten and delivered to our embassy in handwritten form.

Was it?

Question: I think. (LAUGHTER) It looked like this. I mean it was partly typed by violent ink.

Corrections.

Question: ...corrections were made and, and his signature was in the same ink as the corrections were.

Hmm..(LAUGHTER) I don't think I can clarify that, I am sorry to say. And well one would have to check who's hand did the corrections. And I, I know that they have been trying to find this out. But I don't think they have. So I don't think I can throw any additional light. I think the main point of argument or

discussion, rather, is why were there two letters on the same day. One which in the White House they took to be a rather conciliatory letter, the first one. And then another one which they took to be a rather tough letter. But...

Question: And that was the one that was also broadcast publically.

Right. But my impression is different. It is not that the second one was tougher. I think they were, well this is a matter of conjecture, certainly, guess work I'd say. But my impression was that in the first letter, first of all, Khrushchev didn't spell out in exact terms the fact that we would be willing to withdraw the so-called offensive weapons from Cuba if a commitment were given not to attack Cuba. And the reason for the second letter was to, because perhaps he realized that the time was short and that a more precise wording was necessary. And these, in the second letter, I think, the willingness to withdraw their missiles from Turkey. And certainly it would have looked much better for our side if we would have at the same time not only a commitment to, not to attack Cuba, but also a commitment to withdraw the missiles from Turkey. And so that was put in. And that, I think, the reference to Turkey was the thing which bothered the White House particularly because they did not want to put Cuba and Turkey, the missiles there, here and there, on the same sort of plane. That was my impression of the whole thing. But I think there are other versions, other explanations. I think K...enko has a different explanation. Yes.

Question: One more...

...the reactions of the other side and then not taking enough account of the possible reaction and Congress and the public opinion was often the sore point I'd say.

Question: It kept escalating.

Yes. It wasn't so much so as far as the Americans were concerned because at that time our public opinion did not play a very important part, I'd say. But nowadays I think there is, the thing works both ways because very often in Washington they don't realize what the reaction here by the public would be and the public nowadays plays a rather important...

Question: Is very vociferous.

Yes, right. (LAUGHTER)

Question: Has found its democratic voice.

Right. (LAUGHTER) Right.

Question: Tell me something about, if you can, I mean partly you've been talking about this all along, but the atmosphere of that week. Were there constant meetings, were lights constantly burning in buildings around town?

No. I, I wouldn't saw so. Well first of all, the time difference was very helpful in that there was a 7 or 8 hour time difference and we would get a message in the morning. There would be a day to work on a

reply. We would send the message off towards the evening. The White House would get it the next morning and so there was not too much need for night work, which was rather convenient. We must thank the time difference. That's one thing. So I think, no, I wouldn't say that there was too much going to and fro. But certainly the meetings of the presidium of the Central Committee were rather frequent. I wouldn't go so far as to say that they took place every day because perhaps some of the messages to Kennedy were sent around to the people concerned without having them meet, if there was nothing in, in any particular message that was of prime importance or nothing particularly new, I would say.

Question: And were there arguments? Did people argue?

No, no. I wouldn't say so. I have a feeling that most of the, those who were present at the meetings, they preferred to keep quiet and see how Khrushchev got out of the hole he put himself in. But as I said before, there might have been some suggestions or ideas put forth in more private conversation without a bunch of people sitting around.

Question: Maybe at the residence.

At the residence, through on the telephone, well there were plenty of ways to do that.

Question: Back to the first letter which I don't, I didn't mean to focus on how it looked and that sort of thing, but much more on what it revealed about Khrushchev's state of mind. You know, it was viewed as a breakthrough letter in the United States. It was also viewed as a rather emotional...

Mmm...

Question: Was it one of those that he dictated without all these people around, as far as you know?

I don't remember.

Question: And the image, I asked you this before, the image that strikes me...

Yes.

Question: ...and has struck others is, is that very strong image where he says to Kennedy, you and I are tied up in a knot of...

Ah yes, and the more we pull it, the two sides, the, the stronger the knot becomes. Well that, he used that turn of phrase on a number of times, I must say, on different occasions. I think it was one of his favorites. So that in itself was nothing particular, I'd say/

Question: He was a man of proverbs.

Yes, he was yes, right.

Question: So tell me about the Sunday at the dacha. Again, you were the one who, you communicated something to that meeting that day.

Right. Yes. Well first of all, but the time the meeting started, Kennedy's new message came in wherein he spoke about the willingness to make a commitment not to attack Cuba and not to have any other allies attack Cuba. And in return, the Soviet Union would pull out all the offensive weapons out of Cuba. So that was, in itself was a breakthrough certainly. But at the same time, there was a feeling that there wasn't much time left and as the meeting started, I got a phone call from Gromyko's secretariat that they re, they had just received a cable from Dobrynin about his meeting with Robert Kennedy on Saturday evening and it was read over the telephone to me and I took some notes and then I went into the meeting place of the presidium and read out my, on the basis of my notes, and that added to the tension, certainly, the message.

Question: Because the gist was?

Because the gist was that there isn't any time left, that this was not a, an ultimatum, but that the Soviet Union should give more or less yes or no reply to Kennedy's message on, on Sunday and that the pressures on the president were mounting up and that things were getting out of control. Something....More or less these were the ideals.

Question: But the military was...

Right, were itching for a fight or something like that, yeah. And of course that, as I said, made the situation a little more acute. But, and more or less and by that time there was general view that a positive reply should be given to Kennedy's statement. But there was a small little thing which added to the feeling of urgency and that was that one of the generals who was there, I think he was the secretary fo the defense council of the Soviet Union, he came in and he said that he just got a message from his men that either there's talk in Washington or an announcement of some sort that Kennedy would be addressing the nation again at 5 p.m. Moscow time which would be in the morning, Washington time, and although ha cable, an urgent cable was sent to, to our embassy in Washington to check whether that was true or not, nevertheless, I think everyone took it for granted that this would be an address announcing either an air strike or an invasion or what not and that there was absolutely no time to lose. And for that reason, a reply was dictated in great urgency at the meeting itself and it was polished up by someone, by the foreign ministry people probably, and Leonid Ilych who was the secretary of the Central Committee for ideological matters, he was told to take this message and to drive as soon as he could to the broadcasting station so that it could be broadcast before 5 p.m. in the event that there would be a statement by, by Kennedy at that time to sort of, so that the Americans would receive itperhaps before the, before the statement and so to try to prevent any rash action, to put it mildly.

Question: To prevent the war from starting.

Right. (LAUGHTER) So he, he did drive there and he did, I think the message was broadcast at 5 p.m., actually. But later it turned out that there was no announcement, no, that all this information about Kennedy addressing the nation again was unfounded.

Question: Who cared at that point?

That's right. And the fact that this reply was done in such, in a state of such urgency and perhaps agitation, led to a couple of unfortunate misunderstandings. One, of course, was the fact that although, although later that evening, that afternoon rather, a message was sent to Fidel Castro saying that this was what has been decided now. Nevertheless, no consultations with him took place and, as you know, he naturally took it very hard. The other thing was that in hi, in Kennedy's message, the reference was to the withdrawal of all offensive weapons and this phrase was repeated in Khrushchev's message and whereas we had in mind the withdrawal of, of the nuclear missiles, Kennedy in mind, or rather perhaps later on that came up in his mind, to, to demand the withdrawal of the bombers, the IL 28 or whatever bombers.

Question: I mean essentially it gave the definition of offensive weapons...

Right, that's right. Yes. Which led to a lot of misunderstanding and further negotiations and what not.

Question: When you say when you walked into the room and delivered this Dobrynin ca, the text of the Dobrynin cable that the, the situation became even more acute. Visually can you describe that for me? I mean does everyone just stop and look at Khrushchev?

They looked at me. (LAUGHTER) To see what I was saying at, obviously.

Question: And when you had finished, then what did they do?

Well I suppose, I suppose they looked at Khrushchev to see what his reaction, his suggestion would be. But it was a foregone conclusion that we would be replying positively to Kennedy's statement because, after all, it gave a pretty good way out for us. There was this commitment to attack Cuba and also, although this was unannounced, but a certain circle of people knew that the Americans would be withdrawing their missiles from Turkey. So it was not as bad as it might have been, see?

Question: Did the crisis change Khrushchev?

Yes, I think it did, I think it did. I think it did in that he became, I wouldn't say he was bellicose, but he wasn't so willing to look for ways to pressurize the other side as he did. You see this was, this is a long story, but my theory is that throughout the '50s our leadership had been doing a great many things to ease the situation and to get out of the Cold War. But we had a feeling that there was not a sufficient positive response on, from the other side. And that, and by the end of the '50s I think Khrushchev came to the, to the conclusion that this doesn't lead us anywhere, that some pressures should also put, be put on and particularly the presson, pressure on Berlin, and later this Cuban thing. But after the Cuban crisis, I think he came back to the position that more could be achieved by reasonable negotiations than by trying to pressurize each other one way or another. Also I think what was of considerable importance that throughout he had over his head the Chinese problem and the Chinese at that time, Mao Tse Tung in particular, were looking for ways to attack Khrushchev personally, and the Soviet Union, for being revisionists and, and backing off, backing away under American pressures and what not. But by, by 1962, I think there was a realization that at this stage at least nothing could be done about the Chinese and that he'd just have to wait and see how the things would develop. So that consideration did not weigh

so heavily on the mind, on Khrushchev's mind and this coincided more or less with the time when the crisis, the Cuban crisis was resolved and that was another reason why he took a more leisurely line in foreign affairs.

Question: Throughout the week, what were your inner feelings?

Well as I said, my first reaction was one of some relief. Then, of course, with the thing mounting up, there was some considerable anxiety until the thing was resolved.

Question: Were you ever afraid?

Not basically, I would say, because I, I had a feeling, and I think that was the correct feeling, that our side would do everything possible to avoid a war because it would have been madness. Although there was the possibility that something might happen by accident, like the U2 incident which created such, some commotion on our side.

Question: Let me back up there's one, way back to the back. There's one question that I overlooked in terms of talking about Khrushchev, the kind of man he was, and American lack of understanding, perhaps. There was a point when the United States decided to go public to tell the world essentially how far ahead we were in nuclear missiles. Do you remember that, do you remember Khrushchev's reaction? Was he, I mean he was obviously a proud man. Do you remember that effect on him?

No, I can't say. When was that?

Question: It was about in, like August of '61...

Because actually during the, the electoral campaign, one of Kennedy's main planks was the missile gap that.....the United States were behind which was absurd. But it worked, I think. SO it might have been later on. Yes, perhaps so.

Question: They made a specific decision...

I see.

Question: Assistant Secretary Davis was saying the missile gap is a myth, we are way ahead and the Soviets are way behind.

Right.

Question: And every American I ask about was any consideration of Khrushchev and his reaction taken under advisement of they all look at me like I'm crazy.

Well I think Khrushchev and the others made a great play about our successes in the outer space. The fact that actually we were ahead as far as launching people into outer space and what not, and that propaganda-wise gave some sort of balance to the other statements.

Question: Okay.

(OFF-CAMERA CONVERSATION)

TAPE CHANGE

Question: What is the lesson of the missile crisis?

Well, the primary lesson is, well I would say this, that the fact that nuclear war would, would be a disaster was obvious to everyone, to both the leaders of both sides and to the public and to what not. But it was a sort of an academic realization, a theoretical realization. Whereas in this case people realized in practical terms that this might come about if you take another step forward. Of course Foster Dulles during the...

Question: ...

No, no, in, on other occasions I think, he, he said in the rhetoric of the Cold War that one, to conduct proper foreign policy, one should be willing to approach the brink, look into the abyss and not be afraid. Something to that effect. And this led to the coinage of the word brinkmanship. Well that's all very well as far as rhetoric is concerned, but when in this case the leaders of the two sides of the two countries, and not only they but the leaders in Europe and the public and everyone, did approach the abyss and look into it, they were horrified and sort of backed, backed away. That was, I think, the main lesson. The realization that nuclear war would be a disaster and not a theoretical realization, but a practical realization. And as a result of that comes the next lesson that if that is the case, the two sides should look for ways to settle their disputes or problems, or what not, through political means by negotiation. I'd say that these two aspects of the same problem are, is the main, was the main, and is the main lesson of the Cuban crisis, although you can perhaps think of other things.

Question: ...

Right.

Question: Now that we're rolling again, I have one other question that I forgot to ask you which is that you did say at some point that you couldn't imagine that there would not have been a Soviet response had there been an American invasion. There were advisers to President Kennedy who then were saying very loudly, and today still believe...

Yes.

Question: ...that had tens of thousands of Soviet soldiers lost their lives, Khrushchev would not have responded.

Yes. Well, I find it difficult to answer that question. I think our leadership of that time was doing everything possible, at least during the last days of the crisis, to avoid that quandary, to avoid having to take decision what the response would be. That's my feeling. And the fact that in his little conversation with Kuznetsov, Khrushchev brushed away the possibility of Berlin being involved showed that he did

not want to extend the field, so to speak. But it's hard to say what, if, if the invasion did take place, what would have been the Soviet response.

Question: And Soviet lives were lost.

Yes, right. Mmmhmm.

Question: Okay...