Record of a Dinner Conversation between CPSU CC Politburo Member A. I. Mikoyan, White House Envoy John McCloy, and U.S. Ambassador to the UN Adlai Stevenson

November 1, 1962

At the outset of the conversation, A. I. Mikoyan poses a question about the lifting of the American blockade on the surroundings of Cuba for the period of negotiations, as it was proposed by U Thant in his first missive to Comrade N. S. Khrushchev and to President Kennedy on October 24 this year.

A. I. Mikoyan says that the USSR accepted recommendation of the acting secretary-general of the United Nations, and the United States did not. On October 24, U Thant proposed that the Soviet Union would stop delivery of weapons to Cuba for the duration of talks (two to three weeks), and the United States during the same period would suspend the blockade. The Soviet Union fulfilled the recommendations of U Thant, but the United States did not.

McCloy remarks that U Thant seeks to start as soon as possible to check up Soviet vessels sailing to Cuba, by the forces of the International Red Cross.

Stevenson says that the United States hoped that by the end of next week observers of the International Red Cross would be able to begin their work in Cuba. Here apparently some sort of misunderstanding emerges. It was understood that the suspension of the "quarantine" would be conditioned on the simultaneous introduction of inspection.

A. I. Mikoyan objects that no such understanding took place.

McCloy remarks that perhaps U Thant did introduce the proposal mentioned by A. I. Mikoyan, but the United States accepted not his proposal, but the proposal of Chairman Khrushchev in his letter to President Kennedy.

Stevenson says that in fact the issue about immediate suspension of the "quarantine" is purely academic. Soviet ships will probably not reach Cuba until next week, and meanwhile he hopes that the inspection of the Red Cross will be already in force, and then, naturally, there will be no need for the "quarantine."

A. I. Mikoyan reiterates that N. S. Khrushchev accepted the proposal of U Thant and the Americans did not accept it.

Stevenson: We believe that a certain understanding was achieved in the letters of N. S. Khrushchev and J. Kennedy.

A. I. Mikoyan: This is correct. What was envisaged in the letters must be implemented and will be implemented. However, had the United States adopted the same reasonable approach, permeated with goodwill, as was adopted by the Soviet Union, then they would have accepted the proposal of U Thant and would have lifted the blockade immediately.

McCloy: Would you make a stop on the way back [from Cuba] in New York?

A. I. Mikoyan: I have no definite plans on this score, but I would not exclude such a stopover.

McCloy (in a jocular tone): But would Castro let you out?

A. I. Mikoyan: He and I are special friends and will work it out somehow.

Stevenson: Perhaps you will bring him along over here?

A. I. Mikoyan: You showed such poor hospitality to him, that he can hardly be convinced to come to New York again. Such a great power as the United States should be ashamed to mistreat such a small country. When Stevenson had not yet been the U.S. representative [in the United Nations —ed.], he had good understanding of everything, but now apparently his official position makes him speak and act in a different way.

Stevenson: We learn in government office, but we forget nothing. We immediately accepted the proposal on inspection by the Red Cross. I do not know how many Soviet ships are approaching Cuba, but I would prefer that there will be more of them, so that they would sooner take away your missiles. I must tell you that we were very favorably impressed by the speed with which Soviet officers dismantle the missiles.

McCloy: I am struck by the speed of assembling as well as disassembling [of the missiles —ed.].

A. I. Mikoyan: Those who can assemble fast, can also disassemble fast. Our military are men of discipline; they punctually fulfill the order of N. S. Khrushchev. But there are not enough ships around Cuba to carry away the equipment which is the subject of the understanding, so in addition other ships will be necessary. And your blockade stands in their way to Cuba and, consequently, hampers the withdrawal of missiles. In other words, the "quarantine" turns itself against your own interests.

McCloy: We would gladly let your ships pass in both directions, if they carry all your missiles away. I would like to be on the ship that would transport the last missiles from Cuba, added McCloy in jest.

A. I. Mikoyan (in a jocular tone): So lift the "quarantine" and then everything will be in order. Stevenson will become the one he had used to be before he was nominated [to his position] in the UN.

Stevenson: When do your ships arrive in Cuba?

A. I. Mikoyan: But you have not yet lifted the blockade. Our ships are now in the open sea, about four to five days away from Cuba. They should reach Cuba, disembark their load, then load themselves and leave. This would, of course, require a certain time, no less than ten to fifteen days.

Stevenson: We could agree on a schedule. Next week. one might agree on an inspection of the Red Cross; then the "quarantine" might be lifted.

A. I. Mikoyan: I would like to know if [the leadership of] the United States think[s] that we should work out an agreement that would seal what has been said in the exchange of letters between Kennedy and Khrushchev? Or you are interested only in the dismantling and withdrawal of missiles? Would you think that we should agree on other issues touched upon in the exchange of missives, and confirm the achieved understanding in a written document? Stevenson: First of all, we want to reach understanding on the withdrawal of missile equipment from Cuba and we do not want to tolerate that until the establishment of inspection by the Red Cross there would be an uncontrolled flow of armaments into Cuba.

McCloy: There is already too much armament there. We cannot tolerate its buildup.

A. I. Mikoyan: It is correct that there is sufficient amount of armament in Cuba, but we already stopped sending it there.

McCloy: Yes, but we cannot risk, when it may happen that some arms are being withdrawn and other arms are being shipped in. When the missile equipment will be shipped off, the political atmosphere will ameliorate and it will be easier to agree. You preferred UN inspections to an inspection of the Red Cross. We agreed to that. We are interested in your ships reaching Cuba soon, and we will not obstruct their way.

A. I. Mikoyan: Arms were not provided to Cuba to attack the United States, but as a means of containment [sderzhivaiyuchego], so that there was no aggression against Cuba. But since in his answer to the letter of N. S. Khrushchev, J. Kennedy gave the assurance that neither the United States, nor its Latin American allies would attack Cuba, we declared our readiness to pull out some types of armaments from Cuba.

Stevenson: I do not think there is any disagreement on the issue that Soviet ships should enter the ports of Cuba. It is only that the "quarantine" should be preserved until the establishment of the Red Cross inspection. We are interested to see that there will be no new shipments of arms, and we hope you will understand us.

A. I. Mikoyan: We agreed with the proposals of U Thant and declared that we would not bring armaments to Cuba pending the talks. Those ships that are now at sea carrying no weapons at all. I must say that Stevenson is a good diplomat: I am pushing him in one direction of the talk, but he veers off.

Then for some time, the conversation was focused on the issues of protocol nature. In the second half of the conversation, the discussion of business resumes.

- A. I. Mikoyan: Yet I would like to pose the following question. Would the U.S. government think to come to an agreement where all that was said in the exchange of well-known letters would be fixed? I have in mind the kind of document that would formulate the settlement of the crisis. We think it is preferable to work out such a document.
- V. V. Kuznetsov: The need in working out such a document stems from the understanding achieved between the sides about the settlement of the crisis.

Stevenson: In our opinion, the sole problem that confronts us is to work out conditions for inspection that should be carried out by representatives of the Red Circle. This is relatively easy task. One could set up two checkpoints at the approaches to Cuba's ports, in the South and in the North, where two ships of the Red Cross could be located. These might be ships of neutral countries or any other ships, perhaps even sailing hospitals. On board there could be Red Cross inspectors who could check on ships going for Cuba, so that the character of this checkup would be via radio—inquiring on the ship's origins, where it goes and with what cargo. Inspectors would not board ships. I think that such [a form of] inspection should not create problems. We would be glad to hear from you which ships, in your opinion, must be utilized for these aims. I would like to repeat that one could easily reach understanding on this issue.

There is, however, one problem: measures to check the fulfillment of obligations on dismantling and withdrawal of missile equipment from Cuba. As I understood from U Thant, Castro did not agree to UN inspections stipulated in the exchange of letters between J. Kennedy and N. S. Khrushchev. We hope that you will discuss this issue once again in Havana.

McCloy: I must emphasize that we do not accept the 5 conditions of Castro as the conditions for fulfillment of what had been said in the letter of Mr. Khrushchev.

Stevenson: The problem that concerns us most is that an inspection should be carried out before you report to the Security Council about the completion of withdrawal of missile equipment. Naturally, there should be a check-up of how this undertaking is implemented. I think that such a checkup need not be difficult to carry out.

In addition to that, of course, there is the issue of the form of the United States' assurance that Cuba will not be subjected to invasion. This also need not present any difficulties.

McCloy: And to a certain extent this is an answer to the question previously posed by Mr. Mikoyan.

A. I. Mikoyan: You keep focusing all attention only on the issue of withdrawal of armaments from Cuba and on inspection. However, the first-order question is to grant to Cuba guarantees of nonintervention against it on the part of other countries of the Western Hemisphere, recognition of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Cuban Republic, observation of its territorial inviolability, and noninterference into its domestic affairs. Castro demands it, and you apparently do not want to give such assurances.

Castro puts forward also a demand to liquidate the U.S. base in Guantánamo. Why are you refusing to discuss this issue? While pressing your demands, you do not want to hear the legitimate demands of the other side. Of course, this is an issue of American-Cuban relations, but in any case this issue must be discussed with Castro.

The exchange of letters between N. S. Khrushchev and Kennedy—this is in essence already an agreement. But by itself the exchange of letters cannot be considered as a final document. One must carry out negotiations to work out such a final document on the basis of the exchange of letters, since this issue has acquired a bilateral international character. We suggest to conduct negotiations on this basis and believe that the United States, the Soviet Union, and Cuba should sign a protocol, with participation of U Thant. Such a protocol might fix all the basic premises contained in the letters of N. S. Khrushchev and J. Kennedy.

I repeat, we think that you should consider the proposals advanced by Castro. They are legitimate ones. You should also consider the issue of the base in Guantánamo. I see that you disagree with Castro's demand, but it does not mean that you should turn down any discussion of his demands. One cannot turn such a discussion down, when one wants to normalize the situation.

I would touch on an interesting plan advanced by U Thant; after an agreement among the parties involved, which could be approved by the Security Council, one might agree on the presence of UN inspectors in the area of the Caribbean Sea, including Cuba, and on the southeast coast of the United States and the neighboring Latin American countries. These inspectors could watch over implementation of the understanding on mutual noninterference between the United States and Cuba. This is a very important proposal and its implementation would give a change to fully settle the conflict. One should take into account that Cuba is an independent state. It is impossible to demand that some kind of inspection would cover only its territory, if there were no analogous inspection covering the territory of the other side, on the basis of reciprocity. I must emphasize that if the letter of J. Kennedy had not told of guarantees of nonintervention against Cuba, we would not have agreed to dismantle and withdraw missile equipment from Cuba. But now it comes out as follows: we are withdrawing weapons, and you are backpedaling on your commitments. Castro does not have trust in your word and he has a right [not to], since the territory of Cuba has already been invaded. It would be a different matter if there would be an official document enforced, containing appropriate guarantees for Cuba and approved by the Security Council.

I would like to know your opinion about the guarantees. What can I tell Castro when I meet him? We stem from the fact that the letter from Kennedy already contains a basis for an agreement on granting to Cuba the guarantees of nonintervention. This is a bilateral problem and both sides must resolve it and fix it in an agreement.

McCloy: In our opinion, the most important [thing] is to withdraw appropriate [offensive —ed.] types of armaments from Cuba as soon as possible. If it is not done, the situation will worsen very much. One can speak about the assurances of Kennedy concerning nonintervention against Cuba, but Castro must not set new conditions on withdrawal of missile equipment. Meanwhile, Castro told U Thant that he would not tolerate UN inspections. The Soviet Union and Cuba must agree between each other on what would be the form of inspection. It is a matter of your relationship. We have only one interest: that the armaments on which we have achieved the understanding would be shipped away and that we would be convinced that they are really shipped away.

I do not think that there would be any problems on the question of the access of ships and on the withdrawal of missile equipment from Cuba. The main thing is to remove missile equipment.

As to the question on granting the guarantees of nonintervention to Cuba, if you think that what the president said is not enough, one could talk about some kind of appropriate commitment [obiazatelstve].

You are posing a question about the possible presence of UN observers on U.S. territory, so that there would be no invasion of Cuba. I must say that if you keep insisting on that, there will be additional complications.

A. I. Mikoyan: U Thant expressed this idea.

McCloy: No, he did not suggest it. I repeat: nothing will come out of it.

A. I. Mikoyan: Today in conversation with me U Thant reiterated this idea and said that this issue should be discussed at the Organization of American States.

Stevenson: We believe that the exchange of letters between Kennedy and Khrushchev contains concrete and clear formulas. I think that there is no need for any new understanding, except for resolution of the issue about the inspection method. If we fail to carry out ground inspection, let us seek other means which would assure us that the armaments are withdrawn. Otherwise, the danger of conflict will be reborn. I hope that, when the atmosphere will clear up and the missile equipment will be withdrawn from Cuba, it will be easier to agree on other issues. Kennedy has already given appropriate assurances concerning non-intervention against Cuba, and we can confirm it.

We would like to say clearly that any discussion of the issue about liquidation of our base in Guantánamo is out of question. It was given up [ustuplena] to us by the government of Cuba on a legal basis, and the American people will under no circumstances renounce it.

- A. I. Mikoyan: But the government of Cuba puts forward this question, so it should be discussed.
- V. V. Kuznetsov: The government of Cuba has put this question even earlier.

McCloy: We will not concede on this. The position of Castro represents an obstacle on the way to fulfilling commitments formulated in the letter of Mr. Khrushchev.

A. I. Mikoyan: Castro is not and will not be an obstacle to fulfillment of these commitments. The armaments we are talking about is Soviet weaponry and it will be evacuated. As for Castro, he has declared that he would assist the evacuation of these armaments.

McCloy: But he has 145,000 soldiers against 10,000 Russians. He can obstruct the dismantling [of missiles —ed.]. Moreover, I think he is already obstructing it.

A. I. Mikoyan: The government of Cuba has the right of sovereignty and one must seek its agreement on any kind of inspection on Cuban territory. It put forward five conditions, including the demand about liquidation of the American base in Guantánamo. However, beside the issue of the base, there are four more points in Castro's program, and these points are in full agreement with what Kennedy wrote in his letter to Khrushchev. Why don't you want to accept them?

Stevenson: There is only one issue between the Soviet Union and the United States: about full withdrawal from Cuba of certain types of armaments under conditions of inspection and in the presence of the understanding that the supplies of this weaponry will not be resumed. Under these conditions, the guarantees of Cuba's security on the part of the United States will be ensured.

Castro raised a number of other issues, but they have nothing to do with Soviet-American relations. In our negotiations, we should begin to consider the issues that are within the realm of

Soviet-American relations, in the framework of the understanding between Khrushchev and Kennedy.

A. I. Mikoyan: Speaking about the exchange of letters between N. S. Khrushchev and J. Kennedy, you blow up only one aspect and maintain silence on the other. You dodge such issues as lifting of the blockade, granting the guarantees of independence to Cuba. We believe that all this should be fixed [zafiksirovano] in the document where certain formulas should be reiterated and specified. We believe that our negotiations should result in a document registered in the United Nations and approved by the Security Council. Otherwise, what is happening? The ink has not yet dried up on the letter, but Rusk is already declaring that the United States has not guaranteed the independence of Cuba. It was published in your newspapers, and I read about it on my way to New York.

Stevenson: Rusk said nothing to disavow the guarantees that have been granted in Kennedy's letter. The press gave a wrong interpretation to his declaration.

A. I. Mikoyan: We are proposing to you to prepare jointly an appropriate document and introduce it jointly to the Security Council, then there will be no other interpretations.

Stevenson: I would like to say a few words about the procedure. U Thant believes that the operation could be finalized in two statements: the Soviet Union could make announcement about the end of withdrawal of the certain types of weapons from Cuba, and the United States would make an announcement that we made sure that these weapons are withdrawn from Cuba. Earlier, it was supposed that the appropriate checkup should be done by the forces of the UN, but after Castro's refusal to let UN representatives into Cuba, the question emerged about the method of inspection.

After the withdrawal of the certain types of weapons from Cuba will be confirmed, the United States will declare the abolition of the "quarantine" and that it guarantees nonintervention of Cuba. I see no reason for any other treaties and documents. If the Soviet side has some draft proposals, it is desirable to obtain them, and the American side then will do the same thing.

- A. I. Mikoyan: There is no time to consider this issue in detail. It seems to me we should think how to continue the talks.
- V. V. Kuznetsov: If the American side agrees, we will discuss this issue.
- A. I. Mikoyan: On our side, we prefer to have a protocol.

Stevenson: The Soviet Union can and must ensure the withdrawal of the certain types of armaments and a verification that would satisfy the United States and the Latin American countries.

The question, however, emerges on what form of inspection is feasible under current circumstances. Four days have already elapsed, and there is no inspection in sight. Therefore, now we should discuss possible forms of inspection. We do not want to constrain you by those formulas that were advanced concerning international inspection. If Castro does not want such an inspection, one can think of different forms of control.

McCloy: We should look at what is acceptable and feasible, but in any case the inspection should be introduced. Therefore we should adapt ourselves to the new situation. In the first order, of course, we should, as they say, remove the pistol from the negotiating table, in other words to dismantle and withdraw the missiles.

Stevenson: I do not think that some kind of protocol will be necessary, besides the declarations that will be made in the Security Council.

A. I. Mikoyan: Normalization would be complete if the Soviet Union, the United States, and Cuba signed a joint document together with the UN secretary-general on the basis of the exchange of letters between N. S. Khrushchev and J. Kennedy. In any case, this issue cannot be resolved without Cuba. A decision in which Cuba is not a party will not be binding for it. Cuba must have guarantees of nonintervention.

I would like to know: Do you have any ideas about forms of control? If you have them—discuss them in the next few days with V.V. Kuznetsov.

Stevenson: As to the territorial integrity of Cuba, the formulas in the letter of Kennedy are simple and clear: after certain types of weapons will be removed from Cuba, the United States will make an announcement about the guarantee against any kind of invasion of Cuba.

McCloy: As to the forms of verification, the ideal form in my mind would be regular overflights by planes doing aerial photo-reconnaissance, and ground inspection. I hope that the Soviet Union would bear on Castro so that he will agree to the conduct of such inspection as was stipulated in the letter of N. S. Khrushchev. However, if Castro refuses to accept such inspection, we should look for another form. The United States might continue overflights by its planes giving us confidence that one does not resume in Cuba assembly of types of weapons that represent danger for us. But in this case, we would like to have assurances that our plans will not be downed. One could also consider yet another possibility. Could you pass to us the lists of armament that is being withdrawn from Cuba? We know approximately how many missiles you now have in Cuba. If you could pass to us the lists of what you will transport on your ships (of course, I understand that these documents will not contain specifications of these armaments), then through comparison of these data with the data about the presence of armaments in Cuba, that are at our disposal, we would follow the process of evacuation of armaments that are dangerous for us. I believe that this would be enough. In this case we would get on along ground inspection. The system of passing of the lists of cargo removed from Cuba would not touch on your security interests. As to overflights, you, as we understand, cannot guarantee that the Cubans would not shoot at our planes. But we are glad that when today our plane flew over Cuba, it was not shot at. As far as we know, the antiaircraft missiles deployed in Cuba are not in the hands of the Cubans, but in the hands of your people. Today we intercepted radio commands and conversations of the antiaircraft units deployed in Cuba and that confirmed us again in our conclusion. I must say that we are glad that these antiaircraft missiles are in the hands of the Russians whose hands are not itching like the hands of the Cubans.

In passing, I would like to say that although we do not include antiaircraft missiles into the category of offensive weapons, we would very much like that you withdraw these missiles as well.

A. I. Mikoyan: As I see, your sense of humor has completely disappeared.

Stevenson: In your conversations in Havana, you could cite good arguments in favor of ground inspection: On one hand, it would assure us that you are fulfilling your obligations; on the other hand, Castro would obtain confidence that no invasion of Cuba would take place, since UN observers would be around.

A. I. Mikoyan: I believe that, in the course of today's conversation, we have laid the ground for upcoming negotiations. I think that we should not now go into detail. You should reflect on what we have spoken about here. We will prepare our drafts as well. It seems to me that until the election day it would be hard for you to take any decisions, but, on the other hand, one should not procrastinate with liquidation of the Cuban crisis.

Stevenson: We could agree even tomorrow in all details with a plan of inspection of ships by the forces of the Red Cross if both sides approve of the proposal of U Thant. We should not put off resolution of this issue. What flag would be on these two inspection ships is of no significance to us.

As to the oversight of the territory of Cuba, if Castro refuses to agree on ground inspection, we could limit ourselves to unilateral conduct of aerial reconnaissance. For this we would only need your assurance that our planes will not be shot at.

McCloy: It seems that it would take not ten or fifteen days, but probably a month for the removal of your missiles.

A. I. Mikoyan: All these are [mere] details. We brought with us military experts—a general and colonel—who could discuss all these technical issues with you. I would like to speak on another, more important question. It is out of question that we agree with you now on overflights of your plans over Cuba: It is sovereign Cuban territory. But if the United States agreed to the inspection over the area of Miami, it would be a good thing. Then, possibly the Cubans would agree to such inspection over their territory. One cannot not carry out unilateral inspection—no matter which, ground or aerial. The Cubans would have full reason to be offended, if you were granted the right of regular and permanent overflights over their territory, in a unilateral way. As for inspections that must ensure a verification of the dismantling and withdrawal of our missiles, here we stand on the same position that was expressed in the letters of N. S. Khrushchev.

Stevenson: As to ground inspection, it was U Thant, not us, who came up with a proposal about the presence of UN inspectors during the dismantling and withdrawal of the missiles. Incidentally, he had in mind permanent inspection till the end of dismantling of the missiles. This would serve the interests of both sides. I understand that Cuba is an independent country, but if it agrees with this, then there would be no need to seek other forms of checkup.

A. I. Mikoyan: We agree to conduct ground inspection, as the letter of N. S. Khrushchev stated, but it is necessary to have some kind of element of reciprocity so that this understanding does not affect the national feelings of the Cubans. This also flows from my conversation with U Thant. I would like to know if McCloy and Stevenson consider today's exchange of opinion useful?

Stevenson: The conversation was useful and I became persuaded that our positions stay not too far apart.

A. I. Mikoyan: There is misunderstanding [nedoponimaniie] as far as the issue of reciprocity of inspections is concerned. U Thant said that Castro is concerned with the presence in the United States of camps where Cuban émigrés prepare themselves for invasion similar to one that took place last year.

McCloy: I must assure you that these camps no longer exist, they are closed everywhere.

A. I. Mikoyan: You mean that they do not exist in Latin American countries as well?

McCloy: The camps are closed everywhere. Perhaps there is something somewhere, but in any case the United States does not support this business.

A. I. Mikoyan: But you count Cuban émigrés among your own military forces?

McCloy: We are not training them for invasion of Cuba. We allow volunteers of any nationality to be enlisted in our military forces; even Russians can do it. In any case, I assure you that there are no more camps in the United States where Cuban émigrés are trained, prepared for invasion of Cuba. However, I would like to tell you frankly, that any inspection on U.S. territory is out of question. You have to trust in our word.

Stevenson: I want to say that the United States is trying to normalize the situation in the area of the Caribbean Sea, but on condition of Castro's cooperation. We might work out some form of mutual guarantees acceptable for Castro and his neighbors. If Castro is afraid of them, they, too, are afraid of him. I believe that after the settlement of the Cuban crisis the situation in this region will become more relaxed.

A. I. Mikoyan: What you are saying is very important. Castro might ask me: Is the United States going to restore diplomatic and economic relations with Cuba, or is this question not on the agenda? Perhaps you have in mind not to do it right away, but after some time? I would like to know what I can tell Castro.

Stevenson: You understand that I cannot answer this question. It is within the competence of the Organization of American States. We cannot conduct business with Castro without its involvement. But one could think of certain regional arrangements providing confidence to the countries of the Caribbean Sea. I hope that we would be able gradually to liquidate the antagonism between Cuba and its neighbors. Now this antagonism is being heated by subversive activities which, perhaps, reciprocate each other in this region.

McCloy: I would say that Cuba is the source of infection, and the recent events in Venezuela provide an example. But I would not like to dwell now on this issue. I am satisfied with today's exchange of opinions. I would be glad to meet you and follow up on this conversation, on your way back from Cuba.

The conversation lasted for three hours and forty minutes. Those present were comrades V. V. Kuznetsov, A. F. Dobrynin, M. A. Menshikov, and G. A. Zhukov. From the American side, J. McCloy, A. Stevenson, and A. Akalovsky participated. The note takers were G. Zhukov and Yu. Vinogradov.

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