

Mikoyan Telegram to Khrushchev, Special No. 1848
November 18, 1962 (Sunday)

[10 o'clock trip to the coast. Work and leisure at the beach house in Santa Maria with Cdes. Alekseyev, Titov, Bazykin, and other comrades. In particular, Cde. Mikoyan dictated and signed telegrams to the CC CPSU and Cde. N.S. Khrushchev (special Nos. 1848 and 1849).]

CC CPSU, Cde. Khrushchev, N.S.

Needless to say, I completely share your considerations and thought process.

However, before I meet with our Cuban friends for more talks, I want to express my preliminary views about the questions raised in your [telegram] No. 2507. The Cuban comrades understand and of course do not want to pick a fight – that would be madness. They know that such a fight would result in their heroic death, but not victory.

When they gave the order to fire the anti-aircraft guns, they did so under the influence of the emotions, to which they are often susceptible. The immediate impetus for this decision on Friday for Fidel Castro was this: he visited the airport where the anti-aircraft battery is stationed. The Cuban commanders told him how the Americans are mocking them by flying at very low altitudes, and that they can't take this kind of abuse anymore.

On the spot, he gave an order to shoot starting on Sunday. When I talked to him that same evening and suggested that he postpone the time of opening fire, he told me openly that he just could not bear to go back to the anti-aircraft gunners and reverse his order. He told me directly – we know that the imperialists will continue their flights; let them fly above the range of our anti-aircraft fire; this will not irritate our people and cause resentment. He never even hinted about the anti-aircraft artillery and Pavlov's missiles being used.

Yesterday when Guevara was visiting me, on this subject he said that in the situation with the American overflights they are in the position of a deceived husband, in the sense that he knows that his wife is cheating on him, but pretends that he doesn't notice. Their army's anti-aircraft weapons are only effective for low-level flights, with the exception of the three 100-mm batteries near Havana.

Cuba has a MiG-17, which, however, cannot intercept the U-2 because of insufficient altitude. American reconnaissance does not need to fly so low, unless it intends to provoke. For the third day now this has happened: until then, the Americans needlessly made 20-30 flights per day, flying at very low altitudes. Now, for three days after Castro's announcement to U Thant, they make several flights a day at high altitudes, i.e. exactly the number of flights they need for intelligence purposes.

This is why I don't think that this will lead to a military confrontation, unless of course the Americans want to continue the low-level flights for provocation purposes.

The Americans are also constrained by the fact that the most powerful anti-aircraft systems are in Soviet hands, and cannot be operated without an order from Moscow. In these circumstances they are unlikely to make a provocation, in order to avoid facing our forces.

I would like to emphasize that from all the information we have, we can surmise that the Cubans are willing to tacitly tolerate high-altitude flights, but they will fire at low-flying aircraft.

The aim of this telegram is to facilitate the matter, so I am replying only to this question. The rest will follow in the next telegram.

11.18.62, A.I. Mikoyan

Reference: No. 2507 – 2521 (outgoing No. 31387) from 11.17.62. Cde. Khrushchev forwarded to Cde. Mikoyan the confidential response from Kennedy to our verbal message, and also explained the CC CPSU Presidium's opinion about our position in Cuba.

[Source: Sergo Mikoyan personal archive, donated to the National Security Archive.
Translated by Anna Melyakova for the National Security Archive]