

Sergo Mikoyan Interview

Q: Tell me, do you remember how you yourself first knew that there was something that we now refer to as the crisis?

MIKOYAN: I knew about it only after a speech which Kennedy made October 22nd because my father did not tell me anything before that.

Q: How did you know about the speech itself?

MIKOYAN: Well, we heard, the same evening we heard comments on radio and in the evening I talked, talked with, with my father who, only beginning at this moment began to tell me the whole story.

Q: And what did he tell you that night?

MIKOYAN: That night, not very much. That yes, we had missiles there for the defense of Cuba and we, I think we even more talked about the so-called quarantine of ships. Because the biggest question for us either to continue and to have a clash with, with American fleet or to stop.

Q: And was your father concerned?

MIKOYAN : Yes , yes.

Q: Can you tell me more about that?

MIKOYAN: Well, told me either on this evening or maybe the next evening, he , he told me that back in May he did not support that idea of deploying missiles in Cuba.

Q: So tell me that story, about how he first knew about the idea that Khrushchev had and what his reaction was and that sort of thing.

MIKOYAN: Well, Khrushchev told about this idea not the whole Politburo, which was called at that time presidium, but he discussed only with four or five people. And he usually likes at first to discuss delicate matters with my father because they lived in adjacent houses and they in the evenings they liked to walk and he tested his ideas on my father . But I, and so he, he said that he was sure that the future attack of American forces against Cuba was imminent . So what we could do? And thinking being, on the Black Sea and looking at Turkey which was a member of NATO, he decided that this is what we could also do - they have American missiles so if we have American, if we have our missiles in Cuba then the Americans would not dare to attack Cuba. And then he had the meeting with, with four or five people including Gromyko who was then not a member of the Politburo but a minister. Grechko who was now a defense, excuse me, of course not Grechko. Our defense minister was Malinovsky. And Kozlov and, and some other people and Biryuzov who was the commander of the strategic missile forces.

Q: And what did your father think of this idea?

MIKOYAN: he thought that the idea was dangerous, that it was very dangerous and actually he did not believe that we can do it in a way that Americans would not know about, about it. And also he thought that you know Castro would say no.

Q: He was right on some of it and wrong on some of it.

MIKOYAN: Yes and so when they discussed it and everybody was, well, people did not like to argue with Khrushchev. Khrushchev was a dictator. SO a dictator, a dictatorship has a, has been a long tradition in our country, so if the first leader says you should either keep silent or maybe ask questions but not to say something against him. But my father have intimate friendship with Khrushchev so he was the only one who could do it. So, so he said first of all, Fidel would not agree and then we cannot do it without the Americans knowing about it. Khrushchev answered, well, well, decided very easily yes, and my father added that the island is not like our Siberia or Urals where you can always find a place to build it underground or somewhere in the mountains. And Khrushchev said well if we are right or wrong we shall easily find out. We'll send there a delegation, first of all to talk with Fidel and find out his opinion, yes or no, and then let them have a couple of specialists on the missile deployment to see the landscape of Cuba. And to tell us, can they do it secretly or no. And surprisingly Fidel said yes, and of course those specialists, they were officers and when the commander of strategic missiles told them that they should discover that the landscape was excellent for secretly installing missiles, of course they said yes. SO when they came, my father told me that when they came and gave all of that information, he said I had no more argument.

Q: He never warned against it to Khrushchev...

MIKOYAN: No, the decision was taken and the operation began I think in August. By September they were already doing so, so it was no use to talk about it.

Q: Why was the military and why was Biryuzov giving Khrushchev such wrong information?

MIKOYAN: Well, for our defense military this idea was excellent because at that time the, the strategic balance was in favor of the United States, so it was imbalanced, 13 to 1 and we still did not have those submarines with the multiple warheads so to have missiles in Cuba mean to make the balance more or less or balanced.

Q: So the military had its own reasons.

MIKOYAN: Yes, yes of course yes. But still the military who was stationed in Cuba, they were, they understood the order as to defend Cuba to the last soldier.

Q: Talk more about just in general the relationship between your father and Khrushchev. You told me when we had lunch that it was a complicated on.

MIKOYAN: Yes, well they were the only two people at that time who had served under Stalin and so they were intimate friends since 30s but also during the attempt to oust Khrushchev in 1957 my father was the only one who immediately defended him so made the relationship even closer. And before that, before

the 20th Congress of the Party in 1956 which exposed the crimes committed by Stalin and began the liberating people who were in the camps, in the gulag, also my father was the only one who was as decisive as Khrushchev was. So that made them friends and all other people who came to the presidium, they were much younger and Khrushchev did not consider them very wise. You will ask me why he appointed them. Some dictators like to feel a distance between them their subordinates. So he talked with my father before to put officially his ideas in the Kremlin. He talked with him and very often my father argued and quarreled and managed to convince him not to put his question. And why complicated? Because Khrushchev had some kind of jealousy toward my father because my father came to the leadership of the party and of the state earlier than Khrushchev did. My father became the minister in 1926. At that time Khrushchev was still a worker in Ukraine.

Q: When your father had these private talks and argued, if then Khrushchev made a decision, would your father feel like he could make the same arguments when the presidium met or no?

MIKOYAN: Yes, sometimes but he, he tried to talk with him before that. Because in that totalitarian system, to argue very often officially with Khrushchev meant to undermine his leadership and to quarrel with him. But he told me that three times he thought of resigning because he said I couldn't continue to be responsible for his irresponsible actions. And one of such cases was invasion of Hungary in 1956.

Q: Was one of them anything to do with the Caribbean crisis?

MIKOYAN: No. No, in this case no.

Q: Talk more about Khrushchev's personality and how he made decisions. I mean, how would he have come up, how would he have thought up this idea.

MILOYAN: Well, this is a, this is a very difficult to tell in an interview. If I were novelist, I would like to write a novel. This was a very interesting individual, so emotional, so strange, so unpredictable that nobody could know. Even he, himself, beginning a speech for instance, he didn't know what he will, would have say . Not always but sometimes when he was agitated . And his decisions appeared quite unexpectedly. Often, he even did not have time to discuss that . For instance in November of '58, being together with the DDR leader, Walter Ulbricht he said that we must take the West Berlin to the DDR and we must finish with the Potsdam agreement which divided Berlin. This was done absolutely without any consultations. And he did the same not only in foreign affairs but also in domestic affairs. Some information which he could get during the dinner or lunch or during some talk, suddenly he'd begin to develop a concept basing only on one phrase or individual. This is, this can be done only in totalitarian state of course.

Q: So it's no surprise that he came up with this idea to deploy the missiles and to try to deploy them secretly.

MIKOYAN: Yeah.

Q: It just appeared.

MIKOYAN: Yes and of course also typical for the totalitarian structure of power that after the decision was taken and the deployment is going on, nobody argues that we must think what we shall do if Americans learn about it. Nobody even thought about it.

Q: What about people besides your father. I mean I would think that for example Gromyko ...

MIKOYAN: Yes, he was skeptical toward this idea but Gromyko all his life was a man of the system. He never argued with the leader, never. He could be evasive. He could express some doubts in the form of a question but not say, comrade Khrushchev this is impossible because so and so. This was not in his character.

Q: And he was a person who would have understood, probably would have understood the American reaction to the secrecy.

MIKOYAN: Yes, of course. He was the ambassador here since the war so of course he, he understood.

Q: Why do you think, did your father ever tell you why Khrushchev was determined that it be a secret instead of open. Why didn't he just declare, you have missiles in Turkey and we're putting missiles in Cuba.

MIKOYAN: Well, in this question I would, I would agree with Khrushchev because for instance Ted Sorenson told us during one of our conferences that if you did it openly we couldn't have actually do anything but I think that legally or illegally but the United States declared the quarantine before that so we wouldn't be able just to bring the missiles to Cuba.

Q: So people didn't, well your father didn't argue that trying to make it secret wouldn't work. He didn't argue against the idea of it being a secret.

MIKOYAN: Yes, yes, his approach was either not to do it at all or if you do it, secretly of course. Otherwise it will not be permitted by the United States because of the American fleet and the geographical conditions for Cuba.

Q: OK.

(Tape change – reel 14)

MIKOYAN: because again it's the rule, I think in any totalitarian state but in our system this was a rule. That if the first man in the country orders it to be secret, then it will be. Nobody doubts it because the orders are implemented and obeyed and implemented and so they were supposed to be secret but the engineers and the technicians who did it just on the spot, they were very far from the Kremlin so they did it just in the way they would have done it in the Urals. The same plans, the same site, actually. Instead of changing the site to deceive Americans, they didn't do it. But in the Kremlin they were sure since we told them to make it secret, it will be secret.

QUESTION: And so that's also why the Americans recog--once they the photographs .

MIKOYAN: Yes, compared with other photographs which they had, and it was clear -and only the missiles themselves were camouflaged. And Fidel told after that if you ask me I will tell, advise you, to make it different, look different. For instance we could make an appearance of a chicken farm for this site and a cattle farm for another site. I don't know if it was actually compatible with the goals of engineer, but this was his idea.

Q: Talk a little bit about Cuba and Fidel. Your father made an early trip to Cuba, a while before this period we're talking about, that quite alarmed the U.S. Tell me about your father's trip to Cuba, that first trip from his perspective, and what he thought of Cuba, what he thought of Castro, Che...

MIKOYAN: Well I can tell you this very easily because I was with him. We came to Cuba at the beginning of February 1960 when nobody in Moscow has any idea what kind of regime was in Cuba. There was some information, people came to there, but actually Khrushchev did not know and my father did not know. So we came there and we were met by Fidel at the airport and we saw that – and my father told me at that time – this was just very much like 1917 and '18 where our revolution was young and enthusiastic and so on, so I think it moved him from the very beginning. And then Fidel offered us to make a 4 or 5 day tour of over the island on the, on one of the copters who were arrived from Moscow to the exhibition. So I had a rare opportunity to see him at a very, from early in the morning until late at night. And he was very open, very friendly, very friendly with people and he did not behave like big leader, with soldiers with peasants. Relations were just friendly. Any soldier or peasant could come up to Fidel and shake, his not only hands, but can all that Cuban way and like American way, embrace. So the impression was of course that this was a leader of people, this was not a dictator. Of course he turned to be a dictator because of absence of real democracy in Western understanding, but at that moment if he had elections he would have 95 % of votes. So then they began to talk about international affairs, and Fidel told him that we want to be independent, but living so close to the United States we understand that they would not permit us to be independent. So our task now, our goal is to fight again American intervention and American economic control of the country. This led to talks about the Soviet-Cuban cooperation.

Q: And you said that your father was moved because Cuba then reminded him of the early days of your Revolution. Did he develop an emotional attachment to Cuba?

MIKOYAN: Yes. I think so, especially because by these years, I think that my father had lost many of his illusions about our Revolution, so perhaps he hoped that this kind of a revolution and under new conditions and without Stalin, and so it would be maybe the realization of his old ideals.

Q: Did he like the Cubans?

MIKOYAN: Yes, well you cannot but like them, they are very open, they are friendly, they begin to say "tu" instead of "usted" just in one minute and they are very easy, and by the way people are very democratic in their behavior. In Russia we have got used to the consciousness, the relations between people depend upon their position. In Cube you do not feel it at all.

Q: When you and your father returned, what did he tell Khrushchev about Cuba and about Castro and Che?

MIKOYAN: Well, he told Khrushchev that this is not just a new dictator, this is a real revolution, he's honest, his ideas are to not to get something to the elite or to himself, but to the people, to society, that he is busy with construction of hospitals, schools and homes and so on, so we must help. And Khrushchev was also very, became also very enthusiastic, then –

Q: Why?

MIKOYAN: Well, he listened to everything my father told him and then when they met, Khrushchev and Fidel met in New York, September 1960, he could see that was correct, and they also became friends.

Q: You remember the Bay of Pigs, how you found out about it?

MIKOYAN: yes, of course, I even remember that when a group of journalists was formed to be sent immediately to Cuba, I was among those who were in that group. I came then, maybe I used to come to the embassy of Cuba two or three times a day to find out about news, and with the Ambassador of Cuba to Moscow Pablo Chamon (?) we looked at the map and we guessed what would be the future invasions, because we did not believe that this was only one point where they could – Bay of Pigs was only one point. And Pablo Chamon and me, he told me that on the northern shore, Cuba was also a kind of small invasion and we were very afraid that they will --the aim will be to cut the island by two parts, and in the mountains of Escambría there were still some guerrillas, anti-Castro guerrillas, so there was danger. And by the way when I came back home and I told my father that I am in the list of journalists who would go tomorrow or the day after tomorrow to Cuba, for the first time I saw that he was troubled for me. Before that I never saw it. But we didn't go because whole thing was finished then.

Q: Was there any surprise in Moscow that the US, or US-backed people had tried to invade Cuba?

MIKOYAN: No, this was not a surprise. Surprise was that it was so badly organized we couldn't understand what for, just to be beaten, to be defeated or what. Only then we understood that the CIA gave the Kennedy administration the impression that Cubans were just eager to oust Fidel and the uprising was imminent.

Q: A lot of people died from that misinformation.

MIKOYAN: Yes.

Q: Tell me about...What did Khrushchev think of President Kennedy before...

MIKOYAN: Well I am afraid to contradict Sergei Khrushchev, but I agree with those American scholars and historians and members of the Kennedy administration who believe that when they met in Vienna Khrushchev demonstrated that he underestimated Kennedy, he thought that it was a young man, inexperienced in foreign affairs and that he, Khrushchev, was much more smart than Kennedy and much more dynamic and decisive. So my conclusion is that Khrushchev underestimated Kennedy.

Q: And that had something to do with his thinking that he could these missiles in...

MIKOYAN: yes, well he said that after we do it and after the November elections in 1962, he will communicate with Krushchev, with Kennedy, and offer him to decide what kind, what method to choose for the public information, for the announcement. So his idea was that his attitude towards Kennedy was friendly.

Q: ...And he thought he could get past the elections.

MIKOYAN: The elections, the election, then after that Krushchev did not intend to announce, just say – he did not want to make Kennedy look like a fool, so he intended to talk with him secretly, ask for his opinion and after that to announce it.

Q: So he thought this would actually somehow help the relations between the two countries.

MIKOYAN: Yes. Incredible, isn't it?

Q: ...And you must know this also from your father, so he had told your father this plan of his, Khrushchev?

MIKOYAN: yes, of course I had opportunity to talk with my father because I went with him on the first of November we came to New York, I was with him so on the plane and of course during these days we would talk much. Of course I did not participate during his talks with Stevenson and McCloy, but every evening he told about...

Q: Excuse me, go ahead.

MIKOYAN: And especially after, when we came back to Moscow.

Q: ...just tell me what your father told you about Khrushchev's reaction to Kennedy's speech and then whatever you remember about the decision to, about the days leading up to, when the ships were still heading toward the line, and then the decision to stop them.

MIKOYAN: Well, according to his words, first Krushchev's reaction was very emotional, why they can demand us to stop our ships, why they think that they have any right to declare that quarantine. It's free seas and open seas and Cuba is an independent country and so they do not have any right to do it. So he was very emotional and he did not order these ships to stop.

Q: Did they have orders to go through...

MIKOYAN: Yes, they could continue to go, but then at some moment he began to understand what kind of a risk he was confronted with, and if we come to the last day, to Sunday 28th I think that Krushchev he even, as one of the Americans said, he blinked. But actually at the moment he was afraid that the war was imminent so he had to make some urgent step.

Q: And you said that at some moment...Did your father tell you about that moment – did he know when it happened?

MIKOYAN: well, I cannot say on what day exactly this change took place. It's difficult to recall it now.

Q: Was your father from the beginning trying to talk to him about the danger?

MIKOYAN: In May?

Q: No, no. This week, after Kennedy's speech.

MIKOYAN: Well they discuss it there, but on these days he did not tell me about the nature of discussions. Afterwards.

Q: Well then tell me, I don't care when he told you, I just want to know what happened.

MIKOYAN: For him to say it's important because this was a secret...END OF REEL 14

BEGIN SIDE TWO

Q: You were starting to say that on the plane he told you.

MIKOYAN: Yeah, on the plane and when we were in New York and Cuba he told more. That of course the question of the quarantine was very important. I think that Kennedy also understood it and the administration made everything also to eliminate the conflict and they, in the Kremlin they also discussed it. The moment came when Khrushchev agreed to stop the ships.

Q: So there were people who were urging him to stop the ships?

MIKOYAN: yes. And then of course the correlation of forces in the Caribbean Sea was absolutely clear that we had several submarines there, but of course they could not be compared with the American fleet in the Caribbean.

Q: Did your father tell you how much they discussed the fact that the United States had overall nuclear superiority? Was that a part of their decision-making during that week?

MIKOYAN: During the final week?

Q: Yes.

MIKOYAN: Well, they were clever enough – I think all of them the White House and in the Kremlin to understand that actually this imbalance was not so important, because if we could destroy the United States once and the United States could destroy us 13 times, it didn't matter much. So the main thing was not to have this war, not to permit it to begin.

And I don't think that this correlation of forces in strategic missiles was the most important idea. The most important idea was always in Russia, after the Second World War, not to have a new war. And I do not want to create the impression that we did not have any responsibility for the Cold War. Of course we had our part of responsibility. I cannot agree with Yeltsin that all the blame was ours. But this

was only to the extent of opportunity to push Americans and get some expansion. But not to have a war, never. Even Stalin was afraid of the war.

Q: Describe for me, because this is important--describe for me the way the world looked from Khrushchev's point of view, before--you know, in the years 1961 and 62, I mean from the --

MIKOYAN: Well, first of all in 1955, when there was a--some meeting in Geneva, I think this was the first attempt of both sides to have détente. And maybe even it could have been done if not the uprising in Hungary and the war in Egypt. Then Khrushchev discovered the third world. He traveled to India, Indonesia, then my father went to Africa. So, Khrushchev discovered that in that confrontation with the United States, he had the advantage of having the third world behind him. And I'm afraid this was very bad actually. Because after that, Khrushchev forgot about the detente and decided to push Americans.

Again, there was a possibility after 1959, when Khrushchev came here to the United States, in spite of his well known phrase, "We shall bury you," still he did not mean that with the war. He meant the peaceful competition. Then he invited Eisenhower, and I think this was also an opportunity for the détente, but as I told you Khrushchev very emotional and unpredictable. So, I'm ashamed to tell you that our leader, only because of that episode with the U2 plane over the Urals was able to break his own strategy of the détente.

After that he was thinking that we were developing faster than the United States, especially in the military industrial complex. And he seriously believed that in some 20 years we would have reached the stage of development which he called communism. So his illusions were absolutely unimaginable and even we did not believe it, but he did.

Q: So they were unimaginable then, not just now looking back?

MIKOYAN: Even then. Even then. And I remember my father asking him to exclude those phrases about communism in 20 years and so on, and figures of the development, and he tried to make it not so optimistic, because the country--exactly in those years, we began to feel economic difficulties. But he did not see it. He was full of illusions.

Q: So when he said you were turning out missiles like sausages, did he believe it, or was he just trying to fool the United States?

MIKOYAN: Well, he was looking forward that we will have it. We will do them like--but at that time we had them, well very few.

Q: So in the context of all of this, when the United States, decided as you know John Kennedy in 1960 had said--told the American people that there was a huge missile gap and that the Soviet union was way ahead of us and used that, as you know, as an election ploy.

MIKOYAN: An election ploy.

Q: To scare us.

MIKOYAN: Well, I respected John Kennedy very much, but perhaps the electoral campaign dictates its own laws. So this was a lie. And McNamara discovered it as soon as he came to the Pentagon.

Q: But after Kennedy was elected and McNamara discovered this, the Americans also then made a decision to tell the world that the Soviet Union and Khrushchev were far, far behind. What was the effect of that on a man like Khrushchev?

MIKOYAN: Well, unfortunately the conclusions which Khrushchev made from these statements and after the Cuban crisis was to develop the military sector and to catch up with the Americans in missiles. That's why I would like to say that Kennedy made much more clever conclusions from the missile crisis. So I think that his speech at the American University in 1963 was his summing up of these events. But Khrushchev decided that his was because we were weak. So, we must catch up. We must make the balance not 13 to one, but equal.

Q: So the Americans trying to push him, thinking they would push him in a corner, they did and humiliated him.

MIKOYAN: Yes. This is always done by those who think that menaces and force can intimidate an enemy. Even Saddam Hussein is a very, very good example that it doesn't work.

Q: Back to the week of the crisis. What was it like on the streets of Moscow? Did people know about the crisis? Were people afraid?

MIKOYAN: Well, this was absolutely incomparable with what you had here in the states. Because you had all the information. The people knew about that danger of this third World War, but our people were not informed actually. Khrushchev, in the beginning even did not confirm that we had missiles here. He said the armaments which you call offensive, so people in our country were not informed and because of that not very much frightened. Except the elite part of the apparatus who knew more.

Q: Were frightened?

MIKOYAN: Yes. But very few people who were informed.

Q: Were you frightened?

MIKOYAN: Well, I was young and an optimist. So, do not remember that I was frightened.

Q: Do you remember if your father ever said anything when he came home at night that suggested that he was frightened, that he knew how close we were?

MIKOYAN: Well, he was very serious and thoughtful, but actually--well, maybe it's not for me to tell such things, but he was a brave man. So, maybe at the moment he thought not about his death, or his family, but about the future of our world.

Q: Do you know of any preparations were made for a nuclear strike from the United States?

MIKOYAN: From the United States, or from the USSR?

Q: Were there any preparations made in Moscow?

MIKOYAN: In Moscow, no. They were careful not to make such kinds of preparations, in order not to make the war closer. So they were intentionally not making such preparations, in order to show Kennedy that we did not want the war.

Q: But do you know if there were secret preparations to protect the leadership, for example?

MIKOYAN: Well, of course they had an opportunity during 20 minutes, or 40 minutes to be absolutely safe. So perhaps that's why they did not do that. But they knew that Kennedy could only strike Cuba and the further escalation depended on us. Either we just swallow it or we do something, so we had time for mobilization--the mobilization of troops or any kinds of actions.

Q: Let's talk about that. What might have happened. Members of the presidium presumably knew that you already had nuclear warheads in Cuba.

MIKOYAN: Yes, of course, yes.

Q: The Americans did not know that.

MIKOYAN: Yes.

Q: And they also knew presumably that you had tactical nuclear warheads in Cuba.

MIKOYAN: This I don't know exactly. Of course Khrushchev knew about it, but maybe it was part of defense of the main missiles, so this was not very important for us at the moment, the tactical warheads.

Q: Well, let's talk about if the United States had made the decision to--for an air strike and invasion, which is what was being pressed by many in our military. What would have happened then?

MIKOYAN: I think that our troops, and there were 42,000 of them, and Cubans who were armed to the teeth, think that they would have fought to the last soldier, so this would be a very bloody war. And they would have used those tactical warheads, which would not have been destroyed at that time, and I think that, well, it's easy to tell that they could eliminate everything, but they did not have five months, as they had in Iraq, in the Gulf. They had one or two days.

So I'm afraid that one of our generals was correct when he told me that by his calculations, their calculations at that time, that Americans would have lost more than they lost during the whole World War II. And of course, our losses in Cuba would be all those 42,000 people and missiles. And I cannot imagine Khrushchev not making some kind of response which would be regarded as an escalation. And then there would be a kind of response from the West, also an escalation. And so that escalation could have developed without effective control of the leaders on both sides.

Q: What do you mean?

MIKOYAN: I mean that, as Kennedy put it very wisely, he said to the ExComm that you are thinking about the first stage of escalation, second and the third; I am thinking about the sixth stage, where there will--nobody to decide.

You see. And when the escalation is going up, and there are actions of world significance, then the war machine begins to work and it is almost impossible to stop it. That's why Kennedy asked members of the ExComm to read that notorious book, "The Guns of August," when actually nobody expected the first world war to start.

Q: Okay. I want to ask you, following up on specifically what you were just talking about, if there had been an American invasion and a huge loss of life on both sides, the people who were urging President Kennedy to strike Cuba and to invade were absolutely convinced and tried to convince Kennedy. Their argument was that Khrushchev would not respond, period, that he would not respond even in the face of a huge loss of life of Soviet soldiers.

MIKOYAN: Yes. I know that there are some people now who say the same. For instance, Garthoff believes so. But I cannot imagine a leader of our even totalitarian state losing 42,000 people during a battle which could have continued, for instance, a week, and not doing anything anywhere. It is just--it would be impossible.

Q: Because?

MIKOYAN: Because such kind of damage, of killing of our people and humiliation, this would be absolutely impossible for the country to live with, and also for the leader, because even a totalitarian leader, after that would feel very uncomfortable, so to say. So he just had to do something.

Q: He would lose his job?

MIKOYAN: Oh, yes. And maybe he would decide to do the minimum kind of escalation, not--of course, not war, but something against Turkey, against Berlin or somewhere. But it's a chain reaction.

Q: That's what leads to it, going out of control?

MIKOYAN: Yes, yes.

Q: Tell me about--you told me a bit at lunch. You told me that your father had told you during your plane trip to New York and then Havana your father told you that final Sunday when about the presidium met at the dacha. Tell me what he told you about what that was like and what the discussions were and what the atmosphere was, etcetera.

MIKOYAN: Well, the atmosphere was described by him as full or (inaudible) or feeling by Khrushchev, that an American strike against Cuba was imminent. This was clear from actually from Fidel's letter and from our own intelligence and actually all the concentration of American forces in Florida gave all the grounds for such thinking.

But then there was a kind of misunderstanding because it was announced in the states that Kennedy would pronounce an important speech and Khrushchev came to the conclusion that that speech will be made at I think 5:00 or 3:00--something. So he thought that Kennedy would start that speech five minutes after the strike against Cuba had been launched. So he was, at the moment, he was afraid, afraid for the future of the development.

And so he decided--he was in a hurry to send his message to Kennedy before that hour and the impression of my father was that Khrushchev blinked very seriously.

Q: But what was your father's reaction to that blink?

MIKOYAN: Well, he agreed that everything could have been done in order to stop the Americans.

Q: Because they understood what was happening?

MIKOYAN: Yes.

Q: And was everyone in the presidium at that point? The group that was making the decisions that week--were they all in agreement at that point or were there still arguments about whether or not to remove the missiles?

MIKOYAN: No. As far as I knew from my father there was no discussions. So this was the general agreement. Maybe some generals did not think so but they either did not participate or they did not say.

Q: I And during the week, who was making the decisions?

MIKOYAN: Khrushchev with that group who was with him.

Q: Khrushchev by himself as usual or –

MIKOYAN: Well, he talked about it. He discussed it. As a man he was very talkative. He talked all the time. He didn't just stand by himself and then declare – he talked and talked. So this was kind of a continuous discussion, only with the difference that people could ask him what he meant and expressed their opinions and so on. But this was a kind of discussion, when the final decisions were taken by him, as a totalitarian leader always does.

Q: It sounded like for just a moment there there was a little more democratic discussion going on.

MIKOYAN: Yes, yes. Of course, the moments of danger--it's a little more democratic. Even Stalin in 1941, when the war began, for four or five days it was democratic.

Q: I want to ask you – a little bit about going to Cuba and then I want to stop to see if I've missed anything that I wanted to talk to you about – so then you and your father went to Cuba once again for the sort of unpleasant task of trying to explain to Fidel. What was that like?

MIKOYAN: Well, my father knew Fidel's character very well so in New York when he found out that Fidel had announced his five points--five conditions of withdrawing of the missiles--he understood that those

five points were not feasible. For instance, the liquidation of the American bases in Guantanamo and others. But still he decided to support those five points. So he made a statement at the airport of New York and he said that I fully support the five points of Fidel Castro. So he did it to make future talks more agreeable.

Q: Did it work?

MIKOYAN: Well, to some extent, yes. And also what was very helpful, his talks with McCoy. Stevenson also participated but I think that McCoy was the main figure who talked with him and my father told him that we actually could not allow an American officer to go--well, be onboard of our ship in order to count the missiles. This was the kind of intimidation which we could not afford. And McCoy understood it and Kennedy understood it.

So McCoy was the man who offered, we shall count them from our ships. You put them on the board, we shall come up to some close distance and we shall count them that way. And also they talked about Cuba, because Fidel Castro told everybody, including U Thant, the secretary general of the United Nations, that nobody would be allowed to inspect the Cuban land.

And so the idea was discussed that McCoy and my father about the air inspection instead of ground inspection. So my father came to Havana to Fidel with these agreements, which I think helped to reach the final agreement.

Q: But Fidel was still pretty angry at Khrushchev, at least at that point?

MIKOYAN: Of course, yes, yes. Yes, of course Fidel told my father that you do not know those Americans. As soon as you give one concession, they begin immediately to demand more and more.

And my father said no, this is final. Because two days ago, in New York he refused even to discuss the question of bombers, (inaudible). And of the torpedo boats. And he thought that the question was closed.

Then the American side began to talk about it with Khrushchev. And used that expression, that those armaments which you believe offensive, which had been used Khrushchev. So they say we believe that not only missiles are offensive, but also torpedoes and torpedo boats.

And Khrushchev was maybe still fearing the strike, or thinking that this was not very important, that he gave a cable to my father to include torpedoes and torpedo boats. And this was just a shock. Because my father had just convinced Fidel Castro to agree to the withdrawal of the missiles, saying that this will be the last concession. And then he had to come to Fidel and say, unfortunately we also would ask you to agree to withdrawal of torpedoes and the torpedo boats.

And when he did it, Fidel was furious. He stopped the talks and he left the town, and for three or four days my father was alone, not isolated of course, he went to our troops, he went to those areas where the troops were deployed, and so he did not waste the time for himself.

But he felt that Fidel was not willing to continue the talks. Because of this story with his additional demands. And Fidel said I am right, you see, and you are making a mistake.

And then my father went to see a friend of his who was a close associate of Fidel, Antonio Lunas Jimenez. And told him that I am going home. The man asked why, did you finish your talks with Fidel. He said no, I did not finish, but I have an impression that Fidel does not want to talk with me anymore.

And maybe I go home and I'll ask Khrushchev to send somebody else. Maybe I am not the right man to conduct these talks. This was in the night. But the next morning, he was informed that Fidel was expecting him. So they continued talks.

Q: During this period of time when the Americans made the additional demand and Khrushchev had agreed, is that the period of time when Fidel had kept the Cuban troops surrounding the Soviet missile sites? There was a lot of military tension still on the island?

MIKOYAN: Yes and no. There was a potential. But not between Cubans and the Soviets. Absolutely there was no tension between them. They were united, and they thought that if there is a strike they would fight together. But the tense--the tension was there of course, I could see it. The potential--or the expectation of a potential American strike.

Q: So when the rest of the world had been told that the crisis was over, it was not?

MIKOYAN: They did not view it like that.

Q: Did you father ever ask Fidel why he had said yes?

MIKOYAN: Yes. He asked him that on the first day when Fidel was furious that you asked me to put the missiles here , I said yes, and then now you even did not ask me, and declared that you take them out. And my father, the first question of my father was but why you said yes. He was astonished. He said, but I did it for you, I thought that the U.S.S.R., as a leader of--in the confrontation against imperialism.

And then my father asked him, but did you think at the moment about your own country. He said yes, but we were determined to play our role in that world wide confrontation with the mortal risk for our country.

Q: So they understood when they said yes that they were putting—

MIKOYAN: Yes, yes, yes, they did.

Q: Okay.

Q: First of all, back to when the Soviet ships turned back, on the 24th. There were a lot of people – still are some people – who think that at that moment the crisis was over . Was that the feeling in the Kremlin, was that the feeling among Khrushchev, with your father, etcetera?

MIKOYAN: No, I don't think so. This was the first sign that the Kremlin did not want a war, did not want a confrontation, did not want its ships to be sunk .

Q: But the crisis...

MIKOYAN: The crisis was not finished. I do not agree.

QUESTION: And why not?

MIKOYAN: Because just to let the Americans to sink those ships would be foolish. And this would have meant just the starting of some kind of escalation. But the missiles were still on the island.

QUESTION: And they were still nuclear.

MIKOYAN: Nuclear. And the works were being continued. They stopped those works I think only one day before the statement, the Sunday statement by Khrushchev.

Q: So what you're saying is all during this week, no matter what was going on the Kremlin, the order to the Soviet engineers and troops on the ground was to finish the missiles.

MIKOYAN: Yes, yes. And they were doing it very fast. They made some of them quite operational.

Q: Did your father talk to about when they heard about the fact that an American U-2 had been shot down?

MIKOYAN: You mean on Sunday?

Q: In Cuba. Saturday.

MIKOYAN: On Saturday. Afterwards, yes, not at the...

Q: No, I know, but do you remember what he said about his reaction, or how he felt when he heard the news?

MIKOYAN: Well, of course they were very much surprised by this action, but they did not have information about who ordered it and who did it actually. Afterwards it was easy to calculate that the U-2 could only be downed by our missiles, but at the moment it was not clear. But they understood that this was bad, but this couldn't understand how dangerous it was. They did not think that the ExComm here would have think that this is actually a declaration of war. This was not considered like that in the Kremlin.

Q: At the time it wasn't.

MIKOYAN: At the time they didn't. Afterwards they learned about it. And at the moment Khrushchev only asked Malinovsky about that episode, then Malinovsky sent a cable to Cuba that next time, do not do it. Without any serious conclusions.

Q: And some of the generals I've talked to say that they had been sending, asking permission of Malinovsky and Khrushchev for several days because they knew that the U-2's could see what they were doing, and knew how close they were getting to finishing the missiles.

MIKOYAN: Yes, but there was no answer.

Q: That's their complaint.

MIKOYAN: Yes, but this is also typical for a totalitarian state, when the leader thinks about bigger things. So he does not give any orders, and so there is no answer.

Q: In that situation the U-2 then is finally show down.

MIKOYAN: Yes. Because the order was to defend Cuba.

Q: After the announcement on Sunday, after the agreement that the missiles would be taken out of Cuba, what then was the mood? Do you remember how your father reacted? Did he later say anything about the Khrushchev's mood was, was he still talking or not talking so much?

MIKOYAN: To what moment?

Q: After essentially the Sunday announcement that the missiles would be removed.

MIKOYAN: Well, after that I remember my father telling me that he was asked by Khrushchev to go to Cuba. And the answer was, the answer of my father was that you did it, so you go. And Khrushchev said, well, you understand that I cannot go. And who else can go? Only you. And so they decided to fly as early as they could, and as far as I remember my father was informed that there was no agreement on the part of Canada to land in Gandar, which was at that time necessary for our airliners, and the decision of my father was to fly and just to inform the Canadians about that flights, not waiting until they give the permission.

QUESTION: So he knew that it was still a dangerous situation.

MIKOYAN: Yes. Those two days, actually, after the 28th there was only two days -29th, on the 30th we were, I think in the night -30 to 31 -two or three days of talks about the future talks with Stevenson and McCoy and with Castro. All these three days were full of discussions about that.

Q: So there was no sense of relief that it was over yet.

MIKOYAN: well, of course the main danger was eliminated, and this was understood, that the immediate danger was eliminated. But of course there was an understanding that still an American strike against Cuba was not fully eliminated.