

Interview with Alexander Alekseyev [Soviet Ambassador to Cuba]

SIDE ONE

I'm ready.

It's not important how I talk?

Very good.

[first question: what did people know about Cuba just after the revolution]

Soviet people?

To tell the truth, we didn't know anything. The people didn't know anything. Even I, who worked in Latin America, in Argentina, knew something, but not much, because there was a partisan war, Fidel, Che, we heard a little bit, but to tell the truth we didn't know what was going on there, because in Latin America there have been a lot of revolutions, so we thought that it was just a normal Latin American revolution. A so-called revolution. We knew very little. We of course admired this little group of people who were winning against a dictator, and that's it. In other words, we knew almost nothing. And I was sent especially to find out what had happened in Cuba, what kind of revolution was it, who had come to power, what do they want. That was my main assignment. And I went there, asked for a visa, right after the revolution, in February, when I was working in the Committee for Cultural Ties. But they gave me the visa only in August, and even then only as a correspondent for TASS. I wasn't really going as a TASS correspondent, it's just that Fidel, the Cubans, issued me the visa as a journalist because they thought that the time still hadn't come for a Soviet official...an official from a Soviet government organization to come to Cuba, so I went as a journalist. I And I very quickly got to know, first, Che Guevara. Che Guevara introduced me to Fidel Castro. That was October 16, And from that time we had very friendly relations. Fidel, apparently, understood that the Soviet Union could be useful in providing aid to Cuba, because he understood that Soviet Union could be a counterweight to the Americans, whom he considered his main enemy in that period. Although he didn't think that the revolution would become so radicalized. He thought that everything would be much simpler. But the local counter-revolution...reactionary opposition was so strong that he was ultimately forced to take decisive steps and seek the friendship of and union with our country. So that's more or less how I perceived the Cuban revolution. It was completely clear that this wasn't a communist revolution. We hadn't applied any efforts there, that is, we in no way took part in the organization of the partisan struggle of the Cuban people. We found out everything after the fact and...having understood it, supported the concept. After meeting with Fidel and the Cuban leadership, after I already understood where the revolution was going, I wrote three large articles in Izvestiia. This was in November and December of 1959[? he says 1969 but must mean 1959]. As Adzhubei, the editor-in-chief of the paper, told me, Khrushchev read my articles before they were printed and he gave the green light. They were printed in three editions, rather large articles, with the titles, "Cuba is Moving Ahead," "Where is Cuba Going," and "What is This?" In these articles, I proved that it was a national revolution against American imperialism. So, more or less, that was

everything for December. And then, when closer relations had been established, Fidel Castro thought that since on Cuba there was a very strong anti-Soviet, anti-communist mood, he considered it necessary to work to devalue the propaganda that had been on Cuba up until then, and he suggested bringing to Cuba an exhibition that at the time was in Mexico and invited Mikoyan to the opening ceremony. Which was done in February of 1960. In February, that exhibition opened. It went on for three weeks. Between eight hundred thousand and a million people visited it and for the Cubans it really was a discovery that the Soviet Union wasn't as barbaric a place as the propaganda portrayed it. The newspapers of the time were the same as under Batista and there was a lot of anti-communism and anti-sovietism. After the exhibition, a process of radicalizing the revolution began and in the end the Americans made what in my view are unpardonable steps when they tried to force the Cubans to turn off the revolutionary path. If there hadn't been...what shall we call it...such pressure from the American leaders, maybe the Cuban revolution wouldn't have been so radicalized. Although...although it's also incorrect to say that the Americans pushed the Cubans onto the Socialist path, because Fidel and the Cuban leadership understood that the way to become truly free of American influence was through an alliance with the Socialist bloc. Which was what Che Guevara told me on my first visit, and what Fidel said, in slightly different words, but about the same thing. So that's how our relationship began. In a little while, when Mikoyan was already there...before Mikoyan, Fidel didn't even talk about the arming Cuba or about buying arms from us. Although at that time, in March, a French ship carrying arms from Belgium was blown up. Nevertheless, only after that, I remember that Fidel summoned me and asked me (we already had communication ties, although we didn't have an embassy, to write a request to Khrushchev to deliver a certain amount of light arms after that ship had been blown up. And he even proposed the delivery of those arms by sub marine. And so he wanted to carry out a kind of secret operation. Khrushchev answered him immediately that the Soviet Union was ready to deliver the weapons, that is the light arms, rifles and so forth. But there was no need for submarines. You're a sovereign country and you can buy arms wherever you want. And in fact from that moment our weapons began to be delivered. Even tanks, some T-34s, began to arrive, some artillery, and they took part in the Bay of Pigs . When the Americans landed, our weapons were already there. So..Khrushchev was very taken with the Cuban revolution. He admired it. He was an old revolutionary. So these...this decisiveness from such a small country right beside the Americans, of course, inspired him, the more so that at that time ,the main focus of our relations was the Cold War. And so each side tried as much as possible to prick the other. That is, the Americans tried in every possible way to put us in a tough spot, and we did the same. We really thought that we were doing the right thing. And this confrontation was so serious that, from the point of view of today's new thinking, this was maybe wrong, but in that period, with the deepening of the Cold War, it was the right thing to do. I, for example, carrying out the assignments of our leaders, considered that I was doing the right thing

So that's how our relations got off to a good start. In May 1960, after Mikoyan's visit and the establishment of such close relations, diplomatic relations were established. An embassy was set up. That was in May. May 8, 1960. Around August, the embassy appeared. At that time, I was still a journalist, or as they called me, a "coordinator," since I was the only person on Cuba for three or four months, and since my relationship with the Cuban leaders was very good, and the ambassador was still new, and he didn't know Spanish, I was appointed cultural advisor. I was after all from the Culture

Committee. And so I remained on Cuba as an advisor, continuing to maintain connections with the Cuban leadership.

Well, some time passed, and relations between us became very good, getting better and better. We began to receive Cuban sugar, which was in short supply in our country, and over thirty years we received from Cuba hundreds of millions of tons of sugar, which you could say saved us in that time. They said it was more expensive, but we didn't pay for it with dollars, with hard currency, but with genuine Soviet rubles.

Then in the end...

I'm coming to the crisis right now. And just in this period, in 1962...in 1961, problems already had arisen, Cuba's relations with the Americans were already strained, we helped in every possible way. So in 1961, there was Bay of Pigs, the landing, which was beaten back by the Cubans in 72 hours. And then the Americans were in a very difficult situation, and we thought that the Americans would not forgive that defeat and sooner or later they would attack Cuba. Or at least Khrushchev thought so. And so in 1962, when there were a lot of terrorist attacks, landings by small partisan groups, Khrushchev got the idea to render radical aid to Cuba. And so in May, that is, at the end of April, I was summoned to Moscow. I didn't know why. It seemed rather strange to me, really, such a summons. I didn't know what to take with me. I got to Moscow and the very first day...I think it was May 7...anyway, on that day the Politburo appointed me ambassador, but I still didn't know about this, and I had a meeting with Khrushchev and he expressed great interest in Cuba, asked me about it. He had already met with Fidel in the United States at a session... I think it was the 15th session of the United Nations. They already had had personal contact. And then Mikoyan came. Mikoyan talked a lot about it. He also asked me, and I told him about Cuba. And finally he told me, "So, we're appointing you ambassador." I tried to turn down the offer, because frankly I didn't need it. I said that they needed a person on Cuba who understands economics. But Khrushchev told me, "No, you have good relations with Fidel Castro and with the Cuban leaders, and so as far as economics is concerned, we'll give twenty advisors if you need them." And they really gave me twenty advisors, a group of our specialists in various fields. So that's how our conversation went.

Then he said, "I'll summon you here again." Well, to tell the truth, I tried to decline. I didn't suspect anything. There wasn't one word about the Caribbean crisis or about missiles. And indeed, in a week...in a couple of days, I was again summoned to the Kremlin...and again by Khrushchev. At first I was summoned by Kozlov, and then Khrushchev. And at that time in his office he wasn't alone. Our first meeting lasted about an hour. We talked and I told him about Cuba. He really understood me right away. Evidently he had his own thoughts...and he knew what he wanted from Cuba, although at the time I couldn't figure him out. I thought, really, that Khrushchev was only interested in saving the Cuban revolution and help our Cuban friends.

But this time in Khrushchev's office there was already a group of Politburo members and Soviet leaders. Kozlov, the second secretary of the Central Committee after Khrushchev, was there. Mikoyan, who had been on Cuba and knew Cuba. He was the vice prime minister. And then there was Rashidov, who was the secretary of the central committee of Uzbekistan and a candidate member of the

Politburo. I don't know why he was there. I think he had already been on Cuba with some delegation, and for that reason he was there. Then Marshall Malinovsky, minister...minister of defense. Andrei Andreevich Gromyko, foreign minister. And Marshall Biryuzov, the commander of the missile forces. Well, didn't really know them, I knew only by their portraits who they were and why they were sitting there. I talked about Cuba again. Mikoyan helped me. He recounted his own impressions. Everyone expressed a great deal of interest in the Cuban revolution. And then, after a while, Khrushchev asked me one question that just knocked me off my feet. He asked, "How, in your opinion, would Fidel feel about deploying medium-range missiles with nuclear warheads? How would he feel about this, our decision?" He almost said "the decision of our government." Well, in a word, about that which had already been decided. "How would he feel about it?"

I, well, thought for a minute or two. I couldn't even imagine such a possibility. And I said to Khrushchev, "Nikita Sergeevich, I don't think that Fidel will accept such a proposal, because Fidel's whole strategy for defending the Cuban revolution is based on solidarity with international public opinion, especially with Latin American public opinion, and on the arming of his people. They are ready to fight. Although of course their forces aren't equal, nevertheless the Americans might not want to get involved in such a difficult struggle. That's what I think."

And at that moment, Malinovsky spoke up, a little aggressively. He said, "How can it be that your vaunted Socialist Cuba wouldn't accept such a proposal." He spoke like that, in a rather raised voice. "I was in Spain. Spain is a bourgeois country, and even so in the Thirties it openly accepted our aid. So Cuba all the more so should accept it."

Well, I didn't know what to say. I didn't answer. Kozlov answered for me. He said, "Rodion Yakovlevich, what are you attacking Aleksei for. You asked him and he answered you."

Well, "How can it be..." and so forth.

And based on that I can conclude now...then I didn't pay attention to it...that the military men were interested, they were especially interested in deploying the missiles, in order not just to save the Cuban revolution, but also really to defend the interests of the Soviet Union. This is completely understandable. This was apparently Khrushchev's idea, because Khrushchev at our first meeting, and at next meeting with all the leading Politburo members...

Yes, so Khrushchev expressed the opinion that whether or not Fidel accepts this offer, all the same we will help Cuba with other means. But this won't keep the Americans from intervening, because he was absolutely convinced that after the defeat at Bay of Pigs, the Americans would attack Cuba. So he said, "OK, Comrade Rashidov, Biryuzov and you will go to Cuba and discuss our proposal with Fidel Castro."

Well fine. No one opened his mouth. No one said anything, or made a speech, like, "No, we shouldn't do this" and soon, although...now they say that there were disagreements in the Politburo. No, this is absolutely not true. In any case outwardly this wasn't evident. And after this... Khrushchev also said that it's important to carry out this operation in secret so that if the Cubans agree to such a

gesture, we have to deploy these missiles so that the Americans don't see them and before the elections. On November 6 elections would be held, elections to Congress, so that during the election campaign they would not discover them. That's the most important thing. So, that's what Khrushchev thought.

Well, that discussion was on Friday, and we were supposed to fly to Havana on Monday. But once again, on Sunday in the evening, they were looking for me all over Moscow, finally they found me and brought me to Khrushchev's dacha in Zhukovka. At Khrushchev's dacha all the members of the Politburo who were in Moscow were sitting on the terrace. Gromyko came after a while. And Khrushchev declared to the Politburo members, "Comrade Alekseev said that Fidel would not accept our proposal for the deployment of the missiles. So, I think that we need to talk with Fidel not as if such a decision has already been made, but as if we could consider these questions if, say, Fidel came to such a conclusion that would oppose American attack plans.

So, this is what we went with. We came to Fidel... we understood, or at least I thought that Fidel of course would not accept our proposal, because I understood that such a decision would result in many Latin American countries not rendering any aid to Cuba. . So, when we got to Havana, I met first of all with Raul Castro, I told him that a delegations has come, although I did not say why, but just requested a meeting with Fidel. We had very important business to discuss with Fidel. They knew Rashidov, they knew me , but this engineer Petrol was not any engineer at all, that was Marshall of the Missile Forces Biryuzov. And evidently Raul understood what we were going to talk about. Or maybe they themselves thought about it earlier. In approximately three hours we had a meeting with Fidel Castro in the office of Dorticos, the president. The president himself was not there. Only Fidel and Raul were there, just the two of them, and Raul took notes. It was the first and the only time in my eight years on Cuba when somebody took notes. Apparently, the Cubans considered it so important. Based on this, I concluded that they figured out what was going to be discussed, Well, we met with Fidel, we began to tell him that comrade Khrushchev was very concerned about Cuba's fate, that we were ready to help in every way, and so forth, and so on. In other words, we talked. Fidel listened to all this, and finally we asked: "Tell us, what do you need to help Cuba preserve its independence? We are ready to do an awful lot, and we could even consider, just as Khrushchev said, we could even consider the possibility of deploying missiles on Cuba. Fidel thought about it...it was interesting that he didn't reject the whole idea at once, like we thought he would. He said, "Yes, that's an interesting idea. If this could help the Socialist bloc, Cuba is ready to accept a part... not a part...the risk of taking this step. We, of course, quite sincerely, or at least I, I said, "Fidel, no, this is not to help the Socialist bloc, this is only for Cuba" Because I was convinced this was what Khrushchev was thinking. Hard as we tried to convinced him that this was for the Cuban revolution, he maintained that no, this was for the Socialist bloc. But to tell the truth we were satisfied, we has fulfilled our mission, but it wasn't clear what Fidel was thinking.

Later, Fidel explained that.. when he was asked at the last meeting why did you accept when Alekseev said that you would not accept the proposal, he said "We are both right, because Alekseev though that public opinion would protect me, and I thought that this was necessary for the Socialist bloc to strengthen its positions in the struggle against our common enemy. So, that exactly how Fidel perceived it. It wasn't important how it was perceived, we came back, reported to Khrushchev that the

mission was complete. And that's when it all began. In spite of Khrushchev's warning that we should not rush things, we should not make mistakes, we should plan carefully so that the Americans don't find out anything. Nevertheless our military people quickly developed plans and began, after Raul's visit in about two weeks to Moscow... We concluded with him, developed with him an agreement, a military agreement on cooperation with Cuba, and at that time, we had already begun sending the missiles and troops to Cuba. We began sending troops in July. In July, August, although the treaty had not been signed, I brought the treaty to Fidel only at the beginning of August, he then made certain corrections to it. It was a very technical treaty, Fidel politicized it and sent it off to Moscow with Che Guevara, Khrushchev looked at it and accepted everything, but our troops and our missiles were already on their way to Cuba at full speed. Eighty five ships were used, as they say now. That is, almost all our ships, or at least most of our ships, were involved in this operation. As for shipments from other countries, we chartered ships from other countries.

So, this big operation was of course discovered by maritime countries and by the Americans themselves, they didn't understand what was happening. But Che Guevara declared in Moscow in September that in fact Cuba was arming itself, that Cuba was buying and receiving a lot of arms in order to calm the Americans, because the Americans knew that something was being shipped. And of course these were missiles, more than 20 meters long, they were transported over roads, although at night, by our people. Nevertheless the Cuban people that something big was there, and they wrote about it to the Americans, and there were also American agents. But they didn't discover the missiles, they didn't think, that is they didn't want to think that they were nuclear missiles. They thought it was some other kind of weapon.

And only when the U2 airplane was sent on October 14, it became clear... our launch pads were discovered, the missiles themselves were not photographed, but the launch pads and access roads which very clearly indicated that this set up could only be for medium-range missiles. The more so that those divisions were sent from some Soviet cities, say from Novorossiisk or someplace else, they arrived there and were deployed in exactly the same way that they had been deployed, say, in Novorossiisk. And in Novorossiisk, say, their launching sites were already photographed from satellites. So, when they compared, it wasn't difficult to reach the conclusion that these were actually our missiles.

So, that's how the discovery of the missiles happened. It was on October 14, Kennedy found out about it on October 16. While we on Cuba and in Moscow didn't know at all that we had been found out. And the missiles were being prepared, they were not completely ready, the warheads were separate from the missiles, but nevertheless, shortly, at the end of the month they could be ready for launch, at least some of the missiles.

Well, as you know, on October 22, Kennedy gave a speech on radio and television and announced the quarantine blockade and so on, and demanded the removal of our missiles.

So, that's when our confrontation began. The correspondence between Kennedy and Khrushchev began, Khrushchev immediately responded, at first rather aggressively, considering that we doing the right thing, Cuba is an sovereign state and has the right to arm itself, to defend itself and so

forth. But Khrushchev of course didn't understand the mentality of the Americans and he thought that they should have accepted it. You understand, that when he told us that we would deploy the missiles, the Americans won't be able to do anything. We will talk with the m on absolutely equal terms. We will win parity. We will not only save the Cuban revolution, but also will talk on equal terms. Because, say, their missiles are in Turkey, although they weren't there, but we thought they were, and in Italy, and in West Germany. And we can't do anything, because we are forced to live under this sword of Damocles. And when the Americans feel how difficult it is.... Right now our missiles are far away, that is why they... so to speak, the public opinion does not feel the pressure, but when the missiles are right next door, they'll understand what it's like. So, in this way, we will give the m a taste of the same medicine that they have been feeding us. This was what we thought. And he [Khrushchev] thought, he said that Kennedy is a smart, intelligent person, a pragmatic person, he won't allow relations to worsen, he understands the danger of thermonuclear war. And he said, "The most important thing in this operation is not to lead the country into thermonuclear war. He said "Any fool (he always used such language) any fool can unleash thermonuclear war, but there won't be any way out of it. So we have to do everything to prevent war but at the same time to achieve parity and discussions on equal terms." That's how he finished.

In the end, as you know, the result was that Mikoyan came, because the situation was such, the Americans wanted to speak only with the Soviet Union, while we insisted that the Cubans also participate because it was the third country. But the Americans, of course, to humiliate Cuba, didn't agree to this. Nevertheless, I showed Castro the whole correspondence that took place between Kennedy and Khrushchev, and information from the United States, and he in fact sort of participated in it, help out a bit, but not directly, in any case.

The Americans demanded to conduct an inspection, and Fidel very much opposed to it. And then, he even told us that we have to be strong, because he knows the Americans, and if we yield to them, say, in the case of inspection, they will demand more. And he said that they will demand the removal of IL-28 aircraft, the removal of torpedo boats, the removal of the Soviet troops, and there were 42 thousand of our soldiers there and 42 missiles, even more than 42 thousand, but we in fact had 42 missiles. And that they will finally demand to include people from emigre circles and from counterrevolutionary circles in our government. But Mikoyan and I tried to argue that no, the Americans will not demand this because they themselves were very frightened by this operation, but nevertheless, it happened so that during two weeks... Mikoyan talked with Fidel for three weeks, because it was a difficult talk... In fact, all of this was demanded. And we accepted all their demands: we removed the planes, we removed the ships, and we agreed to an inspection, we put the missiles out in the open on the decks of the ships, but not in Cuban territorial waters, we removed the troops, and the only thing the Americans didn't demand was changes in the government. So this is how the operation ended, Fidel at first wasn't very happy, but then in six months he went to Moscow at his own initiative. There was a trip in March...May...April and May of 1963. He met with Khrushchev and they cleared everything up and Fidel accepted that really although it had been unpleasant, the removal of the missiles without the agreement of Cuba... The most interesting things was that when all those conversations were going on between Kennedy and Khrushchev and Kuznetsov, our first deputy foreign minister, talked in New York

with Kennedy's representatives, all this was kind of...went more or less OK, and Fidel sort of participated. But the first...on the 22nd Fidel and I, as ambassador, found out about the removal of the missiles in a strange way. At about 7 o'clock in the morning, I got a call from President Dorticos. He asked, very interestingly, "Alekhandro, do you know that the radio is saying the Soviet government has decided to remove the missiles."

I said, "Well, American radio might say just about anything." He said, "No, not American radio, Radio Moscow." Well, at that point I understood that something had happened. In any case, by our understanding, neither I, nor Fidel, not one of us expected such an end at all. And then, they could have at least consulted us. It seemed to us that legally the main country that participated in this operation hadn't been asked. The decision had been made unilaterally by the Soviet government. So, well, Dorticos called me and I said, "This simply can't be."

He said, "no, no, that's just the way it happened. If you find out anything, come right away with the telegram."

I didn't have any telegram. In about an hour, a short telegram came that explained that there was no way out, that they expected...that our missiles, our troops could have been bombed and we couldn't respond in any way, we couldn't deploy our nuclear missiles and for this reason we were forced to do this even to send the last letter to Kennedy over the radio, not coded or anything, right over Radio Moscow. This of course was Khrushchev's operation. I think it was done on purpose, not because there was no time but because Fidel understood that situation was very serious, that this could lead to thermonuclear war, which Khrushchev never wanted...that's completely clear, and that consultations with Fidel could hold things up, that Fidel wouldn't agree right away, that he would demand that we put pressure on the Americans, that we put forth new conditions for the Americans, say a withdrawal from Guantanamo or some other conditions, Fidel's five conditions. So Khrushchev made this move, he made this move figuring that sooner or later Fidel would understand because there was no way out, even if his authority were to fall for a little while on Cuba, and it did fall because this was connected with Khrushchev, and the deployment of missiles, and especially the withdrawal, so of course, his authority fell quite sharply, and Fidel needed a great deal of time so that the Cubans understood that Khrushchev was right in this case because it saved to an extent the Cuban revolution, without a doubt. It didn't resolve the cardinal question, but the most important thing was that Khrushchev got the opportunity to talk with the Americans on equal terms, which was what he wanted. I think that the deployment of the missiles was connected mainly not so much with saving the Cuban...right now, with hindsight...with saving the Cuban revolution, although you could say that, sentimentally, but the big politician had other big plans, plans to talk with the Americans as equals, and based on that we can talk as equals, and that was what the military wanted.

SIDE TWO

Well, I saw of course..for me, it wasn't, oh, something exotic, because before that I had already been in Argentina, I already knew Latin America a little. But Cuba, from the point of view of nature and so forth, surprised me a little. The sea is beautiful, everything. But I was surprised by the people, the

revolutionary people who were completely in that period, probably 95 or 99 percent with Fidel' Castro. So there were large demonstration. And of course I was struck by the Cuban leaders. My first meeting was with Che Guevara, who for me to this day is a saint. He was convinced of his ideas, not at all mercenary revolutionary. Fidel as a top leader who perfectly understood his people. And I, well, Fidel almost...or Cuban leaders in any case, once or twice every week gave a speech on television or at a meeting, and I liked this very much, how they went to these meetings, look, give speeches, see how the people reacted, because the public was electrified. The Cuban people is emotional, and then their relations with Americans had always been difficult. And so I liked all this, although there wasn't there...anything communist. On the contrary, the Communist Party, the Popular Socialist Party, was half underground. I, for example, didn't meet at all with the communists, except Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, who was the editor of the newspaper. I didn't meet with Blas Roca, because I didn't know how Fidel Castro felt about my contacts with the communists. I even asked him on the 16th, two weeks after I came. He asked, "You still haven't met. ..." I said, "No, I am not sure...." He said, "Please, meet with them." And only then I met with the leaders of the Communist Party, who were just as much loyal Fidelists as the rest of the Cuban people. And so I became imbued with the ideas of the Cuban revolution, became inspired by Fidel, became a loyal Fidelist, which I am to this day, because he a great politician of our time, regardless of the current situation here, and I consider this situation completely unjust because betraying one's friends never made anyone look good. And if fact we have betrayed Fidel, the Cuban revolution, in much of our mass media, many of our leaders. So that's how I perceived Cuba. I was an enthusiast of Cuba, and so my articles in the newspapers were also full of the revolutionary enthusiasm of the time....

[You said that Khrushchev loved Cuba because he was an old revolutionary. Are you also an old revolutionary, is that part of what your love was all about?]

Myself? Yes, I consider myself a revolutionary. I consider myself a revolutionary, because I...was brought up that way...it's true that before the war there wasn't anything especially...then there was the war, and I worked in various countries, say, in France, a particularly revolutionary country, and especially on Cuba, they made me this way, especially the Cubans...I still to this day undoubtedly feel the influence of Fidel and Che Guevara.

[question. you became good friends with Fidel and Che. tell me about your first meetings with them on the level of friendship, not on your official duties.]

Well, I admired them before I met them. I already admired their...say...behavior in the mountains. Their first attack...at Montcado, when a group of revolutionaries attacked an enormous army, an entire regiment, 120 or 130 people. That was a desperate step, but a decisive step, because Fidel considered that the Cuban people, if they were to carry out a successful attack at Montcado, would support him. Then the landing at Granma, from 82 people, and only how many, 12 maybe, yes, I think 12, remained, and these 12 people were able to raise the country up against the huge army of Batista and against the force of American imperialism, without a doubt. That all inspired me. And then, when I met them, Che completely openly talked about his progressive ideas and...his Marxist ideas, without a doubt. Fidel Castro, no, he didn't say anything. He talked about a just society; he didn't talk about a socialist society,

he talked about a just society, about the people's struggle, about handing out weapons, and I remember even at our first meeting he told me, when he said that weapons were given out to the people to defend the Cuban revolution, he said, "Well, Marx would be happy, because his idea is...coming to life in practice, I've given the people arms." And in one of the conversations, in one of his comments, he declared the following, when he mentioned trade ties, I asked about diplomatic ties, he said, "No, it's too early for diplomatic ties, our people wouldn't understand yet." And he said, "Lenin said," he said, and here I think he's quite correct, he said, "Lenin said that for ideas to take on value, you have to throw them out to the masses, and then if the masses accept them, you have to act on them. For me, this seemed strange. I thought that Fidel had been brought up in a Belgian college, the son of a rich landowner, and that right away put me on my guard, and then after a while I understood that Fidel knew Marxism quite well, not worse than we did, although he understood that the situation wasn't right to apply it to Cuba. After that...then, why were our relations friendly? Because even in our first conversation, there were many moments when we talked very directly. Tell, for example, he said to me, "Well, [Khrushchev] was clever, he sent an emissary who has the same name as I do, Because Fidel's name is Alekhandro, he has two names, Fidel-Alekhandro, and his underground, revolutionary nickname was Alekhandro. And I'm Alekhandro. And I had prepared, I was ready, it turns out we had been born on the same day. I said, "Fidel, not just that, we were born on the same day." I said, "But I warn you, I have four birthdays. But the most important one, that's the one I share with you."

He said, "What do you mean, four birthdays?"

And so I told him, that my mother tells me I was born on the first. Fidel was born on August 13. My mother tells me I was born on August first, 1913. The priest christened me in the church and wrote the third, August third. But that was according to the old calendar, so you have to add 13 days. Fidel quickly understood, added...13 to one, and it turned out that I was born not on the 13th, but on the 14th, one day after, and then I let him in on it. I said, "Fidel, did you forget that there's eight hours difference between Moscow and Havana." Fidel laughed, chuckled a bit, and in that way our friendship began from our very first meeting. And so it began, little by little. I met with him rather frequently. Then, after a while, I met Raul. At that point I still didn't know Raul. And I met with the communists, too, but as a rule I didn't keep up contacts with the communists, because my relations with Fidel, Che Guevara and with Raul, and with Dorticos were enough to understand properly Cuban policy. And of course I did everything possible...to tell our leaders what Cuba was like. People, of course, ...already were seeking out my opinion, and to this day they still do....

[question: Khrushchev was emotional about Cuba, what did he say]

Well, first of all, here are some examples: ...He already knew... As I said, according to Adzhubei, the first articles that were written and that he read and passed on were mine. Then...Adzhubei came to Cuba, and his daughter, Rada, who also saw and felt how I had become enamored with Fidel and told him. Then there was Mikoyan, long before the Caribbean crisis, in 1960, at the exhibition. And he was also impressed with and charmed by the Cuban revolution and leaders, and he discussed this with Khrushchev, too. And Khrushchev, with this kind of baggage, that is, sympathy for the Cuban revolution, went to 15th session of the United Nations, where the Americans in essence slighted Fidel. They didn't

give him a hotel room...the whole delegation...well, it was really strange...to try to humiliate him...I don't know whether it was the government or not, but in a word, Fidel didn't get a hotel room to put up his delegation, and he already wanted to pitch a camp...he was a kind of strange person...in...Hyde park, well, I mean in some New York park to camp there. And then in the end he got into the Teresa, in a hotel in the black part of town. And Khrushchev, seeing this...he was like Fidel, by the way, explosive...and he made decisions...quickly and maybe not always thought through, but just like that. And probably because of all that had been before, and because Fidel had been cut off, thrown out, and even quite the opposite, humiliated by the Americans in this black hotel, Teresa, Khrushchev decided to go see him...and without any agreement, without anything, came to see him and visited with him. So that's one story.

Well, and then, there were a lot when Fidel already was...when he came to Moscow, he...Khrushchev spent more time with him than with other foreign leaders. On his first visit, Fidel spent 38 days, on his second visit, he spent a week and half or two weeks. And when Fidel came, Khrushchev in fact met with him just about every day, Fidel was put up in a separate house in the Vorobyovy Hills, the Lenin Hills, next-door to Khrushchev's house, and Khrushchev would come through came the fence, sometimes with his grandson, to visit Fidel three, four or five hours, like that. They'd talk, chat and so forth. That's the kind of relationship they had. And in spite of the fact that he didn't consult with Fidel, he understood that Fidel would forgive him in the end, and Fidel in the end did forgive him. Fidel never said anything bad about Khrushchev. That's the way it was....

[question: did you ever hear any politburo members disagree with Khrushchev's decision to deploy the missiles?]

No, I didn't hear anything. Not one...I met...first of all, twice meeting with together [with Politburo members], and no one opposed Khrushchev at all. Then another meeting, and many other meetings, not one hint, except for one. That was Gromyko. Once, I don't know why, I still don't know...Gromyko was an extremely cautious person. I wouldn't say that he supported all the time. He sat in when the question of the missiles on Cuba was discussed. Krylov, Biryuzov, Mikoyan...Gromyko sat in, too, listened, spoke, agreed with something or other, but in any case he didn't have a position. Khrushchev did all the talking, basically. Khrushchev and Malinovsky most of all. And so for that reason it was unclear to me, when I was already appointed ambassador and our weapons had already been sent, when that treaty had been prepared with Raul, at the beginning of August I went to Cuba as the ambassador. So in the office, one on one, when I was talking with Gromyko, cautious as I had always known him to be, he suddenly said, "I'm very much afraid that the military is going to put us in a very difficult position." I have no idea what he meant. It seemed to me, either the whole operation, it seemed to me that he meant the military's haste, in spite of the fact that the treaty hadn't been concluded, to rush soldiers and missiles and weapons, already in August there was a lot there. That's what it seemed to me. Well, he didn't say anything else. And so I remembered that, but I didn't understand what was the matter, and so now, in 1988 or 1989, during a meeting, I went up to Gromyko and asked him, "Andrei Andreevich, you told me then...remember that business?"

He said, "Yes, yes, I remember."

But of course he didn't remember anything. I don't think that he would remember such a thing. But probably he remembered that he was against, in his heart, but only in his heart. So I said, "Can I use that...that is, talk about that openly, what you said."

He said, "Yes, of course."

And that's really my duty, because he was the only one who said anything at all. I wrote an article in Argumenty i Fauty, again about the Caribbean crisis, and told about that episode. But that's the only one. All the other stories that Mikoyan was against it are on the level of conjecture. That is, I don't know, or at least I didn't see that, and I never did, in conversations during the Caribbean crisis, before the Caribbean crisis, after the Caribbean crisis, no one said anything. Possibly there were some...I think that even probably there were some, who didn't accept it, and I think that Khrushchev, feeling that nevertheless there were...some objections, at least among the people at large, I think that he chose to eliminate this crisis in the way that he did. Because of the crisis, missiles were removed from Turkey, missiles were removed from Italy, that was of course...although it wasn't talked about directly, Kennedy told him, "I...Now we can't talk about this...." Fidel was of course opposed to this because to solve the question of our security at the expense of Cuba wasn't so...so honest, in any case. But in politics everything is possible. And in this way, Khrushchev, as, say, a balance, besides just talking with the Americans on equal terms, managed to get an agreement on the removal of the missiles from there and there, and this way he felt like the winner, and even over those Politburo members or those people who were against. He said, "This is what our missiles accomplished."

So from the point of view of the interests of the state, Khrushchev in this case managed to do something.

[question: were you surprised that Biryuzov told Khrushchev that the missiles could be kept secret?]

The military men?

[clarification of question]

I think that this was Khrushchev's own idea, and the military men did everything possible somehow to...but it was uncovered very quickly... Khrushchev warned all the time in fact...his idea about strategy was...he thought, just as we did, that the Americans would swallow this pill. If they were to find out, they'd make a lot of noise, and we might have to back down, if... But if we were to deploy the missiles and they were to find out that the warheads were already ready and could be launched, they wouldn't touch them. No, I think that this was purely Khrushchev's idea. I don't think the military thought about it.

[question: were you surprised when the military men told Khrushchev that it would be possible to keep the missiles secret?]

Well, you know, first of all, the idea was such that everybody wanted to carry out the orders of the government, the leadership and Khrushchev. Second...second, of course they understood that there was a chance of being discovered, but after all on Cuba there are all kinds of caves and mountains and so

forth, and say, Fidel was unhappy that they didn't really seek out his advice. He said that the missiles...not the missiles, but the approach roads...they began building forty...many of the launch sites, which of course caused, shall we say, confusion for the Americans, and he said that we should have announced the construction of barns, hen houses...and do it that way . That was done, but not enough.

I think that's the way it was...

[question: what was Fidel's reaction to Kennedy's speech that the Americans had discovered the missiles?]

I can't remember now how it was. I met with him after that. I think we met right after the speech. I think even they told me about it, because I hadn't heard the speech, and then I don't understand English. So... in any case, things were calm. There was absolute calm after the first speech, because they were already used, over many years, to the Americans constantly threatening them. And I was charmed by them , hypnotized, and I was very calm, and I said, "Well, now we're going to talk, and we're going to make a deal." But I didn't even suspect that the missiles would have to be removed. ' I thought that there would be some negotiations, they 'd make some concessions, particularly in Europe. I thought that somewhere in Europe there would be some countermove. That's what I thought. No one among us thought about war. And Khrushchev many times warned that in no case...and even in one of his speeches said, "I'm not sending the missiles for war, and I'm even appointing a cavalryman as the commander, Pliiev." Pliiev, that was Pavlov. He was the head...the cavalry commander. You know, so, even such steps were taken. Khrushchev had thought the whole thing through.

[question: did you know that at the time the Americans had so many more nuclear weapons that the Soviets did?]

Yes, of course. Well, you know, neither Fidel nor I knew...what the balance was. But inasmuch as our propaganda always said we were so powerful, because our Sputniks were flying and so forth, we thought that we had enough to destroy each other, and so neither of the countries would risk a war. We all thought that things wouldn't reach the point where nuclear weapons would have to be used. Those nuclear weapons were only a threat. Only a threat, on both sides. Because if the Americans could have destroyed us five times and we could only destroy the Americans one time, that was enough. So in that respect, we of course thought that we had fewer, but thought that it was enough so that Americans wouldn't risk it, the use of nuclear weapons. That's what we thought.

[question: and so that's one of the reasons you and Fidel were calm at first?]

Yes, we were very calm. Very calm to the very last. And Fidel was, too, except for maybe one incident when they shot down the U2. That was a little troubling. But except for that, no, we were calm the whole time. The people were ready, full of enthusiasm. We pretty much knew that they wouldn't use nuclear weapons. An invasion would be unlikely to accomplish anything. So...well...of course, maybe we feared not so much the use of nuclear weapons, so much as an invasion by American forces, or bombing rather, not an invasion, but bombing. Because, you understand, if the Americans started to bomb our camps, our missiles, with forty thousand soldiers. Of course, many thousands of soldiers would have died.

That was certain. From the bombing. So this worried us a bit. But aside from that, we didn't so much...we thought the problem would be solved amicably...with hope that, I say again, somewhere else in the diplomatic game in other parts of the world, where the Americans were less strong compared to us, something would come out in our favor. That's what we thought. Well, in Europe, we always thought...then, in Berlin and so forth.

[question: so you weren't like people in the united states who were terrified and were sure that nuclear war was going to start in a few days?]

No, we didn't think so. In the Soviet Union, probably no one knew, or maybe knew just a little bit, here in our country. On Cuba, no, no...people just didn't know what nuclear weapons were, you understand. They didn't understand them. Now it's all clear. There was Chernobyl and so forth. Even Soviet people at that time probably didn't know much. Americans were already politicized, because they knew about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. So, that was to be expected. And the Americans acted more openly because they have their mass media and so forth. But here no one knew, and on Cuba, too. On Cuba, of course, the speech was...I don't know whether it was published or not, but in any case, people knew about Kennedy's speech. So...that was significant. The Cuban people figured that the Soviets were stronger than the Americans and that nothing would happen. That's how it was.

[question: as the weeks went on, when the American planes started flying over all the time, did Fidel take it more seriously, that there might be an American bombing and an invasion?]

Yes, of course. Well, he wasn't afraid. But he thought that things could come to that. On the second to the last day, Fidel thought that...especially, after...I don't remember, before or after they shot down the plane, Anderson's plane...that's why he gave the...order, on the 26th, to his air force and his artillery to shoot down any planes that fly over...over Cuba. Up to then, there hadn't been such an order and they flew over unimpeded. Then came this new order to...force the Americans to think about what they were doing. But...So, Fidel maybe thought that the Americans might attack, but I don't think he thought the Americans could win, because he was always calling for vigilance, although he did begin to be more cautious in the final days, when he analyzed the situation and felt that not everything was in Kennedy's hands in America and maybe things could get out of control and the military could take over. Of course he allowed for such a possibility. But he didn't allow for defeat. He figured that we, the Soviets, weren't weaker than the Americans in this case.

[question: when Fidel said that everyone should start shooting down American planes, were you there at that meeting or did you know about it later?]

What, what?

[clarification of question]

No, I wasn't there. He was with the military people, and gave the order. But our troops shot down Anders, not the Cubans. That was a rumor, probably started by our military, I think, I don't know

who. But the Cubans didn't object, and for fifteen years I thought that the Cubans had shot the plane down. I was absolutely convinced.

[question: and why weren't the Cubans against it, taking the credit for shooting down the plane]

I can't understand that at all, because Kennedy didn't believe this. Kennedy decided right away that it was on Moscow's orders. First of all, they shot it down without an order from Moscow. The military shot it down, on the order of Garbuz and Grechko, there were two of them there. So...I don't know who started the rumor. But in any case, the Cubans didn't object. And when the plane was shot down, I thought that they hadn't told Moscow about it. They just said that the Cubans shot it down and that was it. But then I read in Khrushchev's memoirs that the Cubans shot the plane down with our missile. And I believed that that's how it happened until the 1980s. Factually, when our men found out that Fidel had given the order to his men, to his artillery to shoot down low-flying planes, our men decided to do the same, to...help out somehow. There wasn't time to ask Moscow, and when the U2 showed up, there were only minutes, they called Pliev, the commander, the commander wasn't in, and then the two of them, as two members of the military council, with the situation in mind, to shoot the plane down. And they shot it down. And that was all. And then they sent a telegram...as I found out later...they sent a telegram to Malinovsky.

Malinovsky answered, that...not too harshly, but he said, "You were a little hasty. From now on, you're forbidden to do that without Moscow's permission. The situation is beginning to settle down." That's how it was. But the Americans, Kennedy in any case, considered that they shot down the plane with the approval of Moscow, with the approval of Khrushchev. So war could have started without the participation of the two state's leaders. That's what that kind of incident could lead to.

[question: when you heard the news...]

What?

[question: when you heard the news that the u2 had been shot down, were you afraid that things might be getting out of control?]

Yes, of course I was worried. But again...since...there was so much propaganda, there were so many planes flying, maybe others were destroyed, too, it seemed to me, I just didn't know. There was, of course, this kind of feeling...But on the other hand, I didn't make a tragedy out of it. I didn't know what was going on in Washington, in the Committee, so you could say we were isolated.

[question: and did you know what was going on in Moscow?]

No, I didn't know anything...nothing at all, we didn't know anything. We knew that letters were being traded between Khrushchev and Kennedy, and that a letter would go in code to Kennedy and to Cuba to Fidel, and the other way around. That we knew. But we didn't know anything about how the work was being carried out here.

[question: it seems it must have been frightening and yet you knew nothing...]

Well, of course it was strange, but that was the system we had, we had this system of secrets, just correspondence, that is, we got the newspapers, there wasn't anything in the newspapers, our radio broadcasts didn't tell us anything. Well, of course we read the American newspapers, and we felt the Americans' worry, but there wasn't anything else, so... maybe that saved us somehow. Of course, that isn't right, because the leaders at least should be aware of everything that's going on, but those were the conditions we worked in, in secrecy. That was normal.

[let's change tapes...]

TAPE SIDE 1

[question: about Fidel coming to you and being sure that an invasion was imminent in the next few days.]

Yes. Yes, that was during the night, the night from the 26th, from Friday to Saturday, or, from the 26th to the 27th. The plane was shot down on the 27th, I think, yes. So, in the morning, about three am, Dorticos called me and in the course of conversation told me Fidel was coming. We immediately had a long conversation. Fidel, of course, was worried, but in any case, I didn't see any kind of panic in him, but he said that he had analyzed the situation...of course I didn't have the opportunity to receive information from America...he had that military information and so he said that something strange was in the works because too many American forces have been activated and the negotiations still aren't going...still haven't found a decisive way out and there's still no light at the end of the tunnel. The Americans could very well start some reckless adventure, as he said. They could...you know...organize an invasion of Cuba, or they could start bombing military sites, our missiles and so forth. Well, likeliest of all, that would be the latter, he thought. And analyzing the situation...he was...uncertain, but in any case that in 24 to 72 hours the Americans would take some action against Cuba. So that's what he thought. And he began to prepare, we began to prepare a letter to Khrushchev. Maybe he already had something in mind, I don't know, but in short, he dictated this letter, and we discussed what we wanted to say, that is, one on the one hand we wanted to warn the Soviet leadership, but on the other hand we didn't want to worry them. In a word, we had a rather difficult time writing this letter. And that went on for about three hours. We talked about different variants of what might happen and so forth. And then, since the letter still wasn't ready and since its main idea was that in 24 or 72 hours there could be an invasion or bombing could begin, I quickly wrote a little telegram to Moscow, a very short telegram, just two or three lines, I don't remember now. And I wrote that Fidel was with me, that we're writing Khrushchev a letter, but I'm informing you in advance that Fidel thinks that in 24 to 72 hours there might be an invasion...an attack...I wrote "an attack." But really of course I should have written either invasion or bombing, which is what Fidel said. But I just wrote in general an attack. And I sent the telegram. And that telegram naturally arrived considerably earlier than Fidel's letter and our leaders in the Kremlin received it.

[question: and what do you think Fidel was trying to say to Khrushchev besides warning about the attack? what did he want Khrushchev to do?]

I think that he was just warning that we had to be on guard, that anything could happen, including, as he thought, that the Americans could use nuclear weapons. Then there were rumors that Fidel proposed carrying out a first strike, which is of course nonsense. It is because in the letter there wasn't anything like that, although he didn't give Khrushchev a way out. He put Khrushchev in a very difficult position, probably thinking that Khrushchev would find some way out in his conversations with Kennedy. I think that's probably the way it was. Well, and the way out turned out to be that the telegram was maybe one of the main factors when Khrushchev accepted Kennedy's conditions. I think so. After, in any case, when Fidel was there, he said, in my presence, that "aside from other factors, your telegram also played a role in our being forced to accept Kennedy's conditions, because the conditions were such that we didn't plan to go to war, and war would have meant the death, above all, of the Cuban revolution, for which we had done all this. So, really, why do it. And if before your telegram, we had been sure that nothing would happen, that we had to be firm with the Americans, well, if now you think that the Americans might attack and we're not planning to use nuclear weapons, that would mean the death of the Cuban revolution. So we made this decision, literally a day later" ...well, I think that the telegram came...my letter before they made the decision, and the telegram came somewhere between the decision and Kennedy's answer.

[question: you told me that when you were writing the letter you were confused about what exactly he was trying to say as well...]

Well, in any case...the letter didn't include any recommendations. Fidel was always careful, he never proposed his own solutions, but he gave Khrushchev food for thought, he showed him that the situation was very difficult, that for sure... And I think that was exactly what he wanted. Because... it's hard to say... He couldn't offer anything at that time except to show that the situation was very serious and very difficult. And we had to take some steps. I think that's how Fidel saw it.

[was Fidel prepared to die?]

If there had been an invasion?

[yes]

He would have... He would have...knowing him, I am absolutely sure that he would have continued to resist. There is no doubt about it. And he would have called forth the people. That is, the landing would not break him. Fidel would have continued a partisan war, that's clear. I can only say that... But I think that maybe Fidel counted on Khrushchev and hoped that Khrushchev's decisive actions would stop the Americans, and they wouldn't attack. That is what I think. I can't say anything else.

[what about you?]

To be honest, I didn't believe it would happen. For some reason, I didn't believe that...an attack would be permitted. I don't know why, but by intuition, it seemed to me this way. Maybe it was a mistake at that time, but I didn't believe in it. In any case, I didn't ...have any fear at that time. Even Fidel told me, as a joke, he said:

"Alekhandro, an attack is coming, let's go to the bunkers." I told him, Fidel, I am the captain of this ship, I can't leave it..," I don't know... Maybe from not knowing anything, the situation was the calmest in the country where the missiles were on Cuba. And people were most nervous in America and in the Soviet leadership. But on Cuba, no... Not among the people even... People were very enthusiastic and ready to fight... We had some hope that...a way out would be found. That's why we had no fear. Or me, at least... Only after the Caribbean crisis, I began to think that this was an operation that could have cost a lot of lives, and the world was hanging by the thread, on the edge of death, of at least the edge of, apo...apo...apoca...apocalypse...what is it...My God..apocalypse...well, you know, in a word, in a different situation, well you know.

[the morning that president Dorticos called you about what he'd heard on the radio, what was your reaction?]

I didn't believe it at first, I didn't believe it.. But when he said that it was Moscow Radio, I believed, how could I not believe the president. I was a very unhappy person. Because nothing indicated such an outcome. I was unhappy not because the missiles were being withdrawn, but because Fidel had not been notified about it. If Khrushchev had sent a telegram beforehand to Fidel saying that the situation was such and such, we are forced to agree to withdraw the missiles because of this and that, I would have accepted this without qualms. But because the Cubans...found out about it on the radio...it wasn't proper. Friends shouldn't act like this. But when such a...strong, big nation could do this to a small, vulnerable nation, I thought it was the height of betrayal. It was terrible, and only later we realized that Khrushchev was doing this on purpose, because he thought that Fidel wouldn't agree.. There was no way out, the more so that Fidel had sent such a telegram. So this is how it was..

[and what was Fidel's reaction?]

I think it was terrible, because Fidel, although he was in our embassy the day before that, he spent there a few hours, and I met with him every day, he suddenly.... I went to Dorticos and hoped to see Fidel there I didn't see him there, and I didn't see him for two or three days. He wouldn't meet with me. In spite of our friendship and everything, he avoided me. Because I was an official representative of the Soviet Union, not Alekseev, not Alekhandro, but the ambassador...That's why I communicated with Dorticos the whole time. And only later, when U Thant came and after negotiations with him, I also took part in them, I introduced him to the military people, Fidel already understood that the situation had cooled down, and he met with me ... So I came to his house... It was, I think, November 1... And I told him that Mikoyan was coming... And I, for the first and the only time in my life, I exceeded my authority. I told Fidel. Fidel said that Raul was going to meet Mikoyan at the airport. And I told him, "Fidel..." And Fidel knew Mikoyan was an extremely delicate person. And I said "Fidel, my God..." We talked very sincerely, we didn't play diplomatic games with him, we always very simply and directly. I told him, "You'll insult Mikoyan, he won't understand anything." And he said, "Well, why do I have to meet him?" Well, in a word, I dropped a hint so that he'd think it over. And in fact, in spite of the fact he had said Raul would come, when the plane was making its approach, Fidel himself arrived at the airport. And I later found out Mikoyan's reaction. Mikoyan was...very much afraid that no one would greet him, and when he looked through the window and saw the beard, they say he cheered up. But the meeting was

fairly cool. They met him, he took him to the house, he left him there, there wasn't any discussion, and Mikoyan was left to his own thoughts. Then on the very first day, Mikoyan was scheduled to meet with Fidel at nine in the morning in Fidel's house on the third floor there on Eleventh Street. But a message came from the embassy, a telegram from Khrushchev saying that Mikoyan's wife had died. And the discussion hadn't even really gotten started, and Fidel was ready to let Mikoyan have it and tell him exactly what he thought about what had happened, and I asked the secretary to give Fidel a note that a tragedy had struck Mikoyan. And she was able to warn him, and Fidel knew before anyone, Fidel and I knew, and Mikoyan still didn't know. And so Fidel tried to speak with Mikoyan more politely, more considerately. And when I came in...I told Mikoyan, "Anastas Ivanovich, a telegram has arrived from Khrushchev at the embassy." He said, "I know. I've been waiting for it. Quick, go and get it for me." Well, the embassy was right next door, five minutes away. I went to the embassy and got the telegram and delivered it. And that played a decisive role in the first steps...the first negotiations between the Cubans and Mikoyan would have been very...difficult. So this played a kind of buffer role, a calming role. The discussions with Mikoyan over the course of the week were very civil, because everyone understood the tragedy, the more so that Mikoyan decided not to go. He sent his son, he said I can't help out there, he said, the situation is such that friendship between our countries is worth to continue the negotiations in spite of everything. And that's how the negotiations went. In three weeks, the negotiations were over. Fidel wasn't happy at first, of course, with much of it, but after a while he understood. He thought that the Americans wouldn't keep their word and sooner or later would attack Cuba. That what he thought. He always told us, "You don't know the Americans. They'll promise you something and then won't carry out that promise. The more so that they don't believe you. They don't believe that you removing the missiles, and that's why they're demanding an inspection.

[OK, I think we've covered everything. what should be the lesson from the crisis for us all?]

What?

[translator repeats question]

Well, of course, I think that...first of all...I'll take the second part... The lesson was that when it began...well, probably we shouldn't have deployed the missiles, probably. But, well, it's hard to say, in that period, when each side was trying to...let's say, harass the other, his enemy, to...create problems...and then there was the Cold War. Probably deploying the missiles wasn't the best way, which is what I told Khrushchev from the first. But I wasn't thinking that it was dangerous for the world, but that it wouldn't benefit Cuba, and that Fidel wouldn't accept it. But most important was that when the situation had developed to the point that there was the possibility that there could be world-wide nuclear catastrophe, the leaders found the strength...Kennedy, and especially Khrushchev, because Khrushchev was the initiator of it all, to swallow their pride and begin to recognize that these kinds of difficult problems needed to be resolved through political means. And I think...that the Caribbean crisis, without...exaggerating, if the crisis hadn't occurred, I don't know where we'd be today, but in any case, the Caribbean crisis brought two great powers to parity, and it showed us the danger that could result from ...shall we say, illegal...flagrant acts.

[comment by interviewer]

Yes , I think that especially at the end when it became clear that stubbornness on the part of one side or the other could turn out to be irreversible for the whole world, nuclear war, our leaders found within themselves the strength, in spite of both the American hawks and the Soviet hawks, to agree on a political resolution of this explosive problem. And all the recent events, all the last years speak to the fact that when Gorbachev's new thinking took over, it was possible to find solutions...political solutions for all difficult, difficult problems. I think that the Caribbean crisis is a model for the resolution of such very complicated problems. That how it seems to me .

So what else.?

[question: what do you think would have happened if Kennedy and Khrushchev had continued as leaders of their countries?]

I think that would have been very fortunate. It seems to me, because they both were the wiser for their experience, and they were fairly pragmatic people, the more so that Khrushchev respected Kennedy a great deal, he respected Kennedy because...well, I don't know, maybe Khrushchev just had a feeling for good people, that's true without a doubt, and his respect for Kennedy , particularly after that decision, was quite great. They probably would have...from that time we would have had good relations with the United States, with these two presidents. For some reason, it seems that way to me. Because they both understood that there was no other way out for both our countries. And Khrushchev was of course getting old, he was or course a revolutionary, but such questions about revolutionary movements worried him less then, I think.

[question: and do you think Fidel was wiser after the crisis as well?]

How would Fidel have felt about it?

[yes, was Fidel the wiser]

Yes, to an extent, he got a little wiser, absolutely. Because later he admitted that Khrushchev had acted properly. But that was after...although, at first, I was shocked, I didn't understand either, and only later understood...it see med to me that we started it all in vain, that we could have done without it, but in hindsight it's hard to say.

[thank you.]