

August 15th., 1997

Castro joked, JFK firm in 1962 missile crisis

By Francois Raitberger

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The French daily Le Monde carried what it said were the most extensive excerpts ever published of Castro's account of the crisis and of White House meetings during the stand-off over Soviet nuclear missiles stationed in Cuba.

Recently declassified recordings of the White House meetings also show President John F. Kennedy resisting intense pressure from hawkish generals to invade the Communist-ruled island.

Vincent Touze, a French academic who obtained a copy of Castro's secret account in Cuba and found the Kennedy passages in newly declassified tapes, told Le Monde the documents showed how little control Castro had over Soviet arms and the crucial role Kennedy played in avoiding a nuclear war.

The crisis, which could have been the opening to a third world war, began Oct. 15, 1962 when U.S. spy planes spotted Soviet missiles on Cuba and ended Oct. 28 when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev said they would be withdrawn.

Castro, in a secret 1968 speech to his communist party's central committee, said: ``We were in the antechamber of the holocaust and we were cracking jokes...Of course we knew that we would be made to play the part of the dead man, but we were determined to play the part.''

Castro was less sure about his ally Khrushchev, who he says bungled from the start the risky bid to deploy missiles just off the Florida coast, and admitted the Cubans were naive.

``We did not know what a missile of that type looked like, nor where it should be installed,'' he said.

“If we had known what the missiles looked like, and if the problem of camouflaging the equipment had been left to us, how easy it would have been to...camouflage everything,” he said.

Castro said the Soviet troops' failure to hide the missiles was so blatant some Cubans suspected it was done on purpose.

“I can assure them that this is completely wrong: it was a disaster, a total lack of foresight,” he said.

Castro said he suggested 1,000 missiles when a Soviet field marshal visited Havana to propose deploying the weapons. But Moscow offered 40, with some more aboard submarines.

Castro said he had wanted to inform Washington of the Soviet-Cuban defense agreement before the missiles could be spotted. But Khrushchev rejected the suggestion in July 1962.

Castro's defense minister and brother Raul, who made the suggestion on a trip to Moscow with the late Ernesto “Che” Guevara, told the Central Committee: “Khrushchev, who was very rude, said 'Don't worry, I'll grab Kennedy by the balls'.”

The White House tapes, declassified in October 1996, showed leading U.S. military men pressing hard for an invasion of Cuba and civilian advisers torn between intervention and the naval blockade Kennedy finally chose.

“I just don't see any other solution except direct intervention -- right now,” U.S. Air Force chief Curtis Le May is quoted as telling Kennedy on Oct. 19.

“In my judgment, from a military point of view, the lowest risk course of action, if we are thinking of protecting the people of the United States against a possible strike on us, is to go ahead with a surprise air strike, the blockade and invasion,” said U.S. Army chief Earle Wheeler.

“If you want to take over the place, and really put in a new government that is non-Communist, then you will have to invade the place,” said Marine Corps head David Shoup, pounding the table.

“Don't frig around, go and take the missiles out.”

When Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman William Fulbright offered a similar view to the president three days later, Kennedy replied:

``Some people would say, 'Let's go in there with an air strike'. You'd have these bombs go off and blow up 15 cities in the United States, and they would have been wrong.'"

Kennedy, backed by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, announced instead a blockade of Cuba Oct. 22, and Soviet ships carrying strategic missiles to the island turned back two days later.

The excerpts show that Kennedy was still considering bombing or invading Cuba as late as Oct. 26 but preferred to stick to a diplomatic showdown. The crisis ended Oct. 28 with the Soviet leader backing down.

Le Monde has posted transcripts and audio excerpts of the Kennedy tapes on its Internet site (www.lemonde.fr).

Christian Ostermann of the Cold War International History Project said the tapes, though available to scholars and journalists since October, had been slow to come to public attention primarily for technical reasons.

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Distributed by Cubanet

Castro joked during the 1962 missile crisis

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The White House tapes, which Le Monde said were declassified in October 1996, showed America's leading military men pressing hard for an invasion of Cuba and civilian advisers torn between intervention and the naval blockade Kennedy finally chose.

"I don't see any other solution than direct intervention, right now," U.S. Air Force chief Curtis Le May is quoted as telling Kennedy in a meeting of the top brass on October 19.

"I feel that, from a military point of view, the least dangerous step is the full range of military actions on our part," U.S. army chief Earle Wheeler said, according to the French translation of the recordings.

"We must go in...for a decisive victory, as rapid as possible," said Marines Corps head David Shoup.

When the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee William Fulbright voiced an identical view, Kennedy replied:

"In the United States, there will always be people to say 'Let's go, let's bomb'. The bombs will be launched and will erase 15 cities from the map of the United States. They will then be deemed to have been wrong."

Kennedy, backed by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, announced instead a blockade of Cuba on October 22, and Soviet ships carrying strategic missiles to the island turned back two days later.

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By FRANCOIS RAITBERGER, Reuters

VERNES 15 DE AGOSTO DE 1997

ASUNCIÓN SERENA

ESPECIAL PARA EL MUNDO

PARIS.— La III Guerra Mundial estuvo realmente a punto de estallar hace 35 años, como confirman los documentos publicados ayer por el diario francés *Le Monde*.

El enfrentamiento entre las dos superpotencias de entonces, Estados Unidos y la Unión Soviética, terminó pacíficamente en lo que se conoce como *crisis de los misiles*, pero según un documento inédito cubano y las grabaciones de la Casa Blanca las dos superpotencias estuvieron a punto de entrar en colisión.

En el texto cubano, un discurso de Castro al Comité Central del Partido Comunista de enero de 1968, el dirigente acusa a los soviéticos de abordar este crucial momento de 1962 con gran debilidad. «Fue un desastre, una falta total de previsión. Desde un punto de vista estratégico, se trató de algo formidable para el campo socialista. La presencia de misiles [nucleares de Cuba] reforzaba la posición soviética. Si hubieran querido, podrían haber puesto 1.000 [...] Imaginad mi reacción cuando me dijeron que instalarían 80», dice Castro. «Había que mantener nuestra posición con firmeza», puntualiza.

El 15 de octubre de 1962, aviones espías norteamericanos descubrieron las rampas de misiles nucleares en la isla de Cuba, instalados por la Unión Soviética y apuntando hacia Estados Unidos. A raíz de esta revelación, Kennedy ordenó el bloqueo de Fidel Castro y su isla. El petróleo de la Unión Soviética no llegaba

Castro reconoció que Cuba confió en exceso en la URSS en 1962

«Le Monde» desvela testimonios secretos de Kennedy y el líder cubano



REUTER

Fidel Castro.

a Cuba y la economía del país comenzaba a resentirse.

John Kennedy apostó desde el principio por una solución pacífica al conflicto, frente a la mayoría de sus colaboradores, que



ARNOLD NEWMAN

John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

pedían una intervención militar rápida y decisiva. Sin embargo, nada fue necesario porque Jruschov acabó cediendo, y Estados Unidos y la Unión Soviética llegaron a un acuerdo finalmente.

Desde el otro lado, y durante la crisis, el presidente de Estados Unidos mantuvo reuniones diarias con su Gabinete. Las conversaciones fueron grabadas por orden de Kennedy, y sin el conocimiento del resto de los asistentes. Algunas de las transcripciones, hasta hoy inéditas, vienen a reforzar la idea de un presidente dispuesto desde el primer momento a la negociación, incluso a ciertas concesiones. En definitiva, a una solución pacífica. Y todo ello en solitario, frente a la gran mayoría de sus consejeros, que le urgía a emplear las armas de forma rápida y contundente.

«BOMBARDEEMOS!».— En la reunión del 19 de octubre, Kennedy argumentó: «El razonamiento lógico es que no es verdaderamente necesario invadir Cuba. Es, simplemente, el género de dificultad con la que debemos aprender a vivir, lo mismo que cohabitamos con la Unión Soviética y China».

«En Estados Unidos, siempre habrá gente que dirá: "¡Bombardeemos!". Las bombas serán arrojadas y borraremos 15 ciudades del mapa. Entonces dirán que estábamos equivocados», concluyó Kennedy.

Minutos después, el presidente abandonó la sala y David Shoup, comandante del cuerpo de marines, comentó: «Escala, es todo lo que sabe decir [...] y si existe un solo medio de hacer este trabajo es dejarse de rodeos!».

Este era el sentimiento de la mayoría del gabinete de crisis. Sin embargo, Kennedy optó por el bloqueo de Cuba.

Chicago Tribune

August 15, 1997

While Castro joked, Kennedy prevented war, materials show

REUTERS

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In a secret 1968 speech to his communist party's central committee, Castro said, "We were in

the antechamber of the holocaust, and we were cracking jokes . . . Of course we knew that we would be made to play the part of the dead man, but we were determined to play the part."

Castro was less sure about his ally Khrushchev, who he says bungled from the start the risky bid to deploy missiles just off the Florida coast, and acknowledged the Cubans were naive.

"We did not know what a missile of that type looked like, nor where it should be installed," he said.

"If we had known what the missiles looked like, and if the problem of camouflaging the equipment had been left to us, how easy it would have been to . . . camouflage everything," he said.

Castro said the Soviet troops' failure to hide the missiles was so blatant some Cubans suspected it was done on purpose. "I can assure them that this is completely wrong; it was a disaster, a total lack of foresight," he said.

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Moscow offered 40, with some more aboard submarines.

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U.S. military leaders pressing hard for an invasion of Cuba and civilian advisers torn between intervention and the naval blockade Kennedy finally chose.

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"If you want to take over the place, and really put in a new government that is non-Communist, then you will have to invade the place," said Marine Corps head David Shoup, pounding the table.

When Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman William Fulbright offered a similar view to the president three days later, Kennedy replied:

"Some people would say, 'Let's go in there with an airstrike.' You'd have these bombs go off and blow up 15 cities in the United States, and they would have been wrong."

Kennedy, backed by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, announced instead a blockade of Cuba on Oct. 22, and Soviet ships carrying strategic missiles to the island turned back two days later.

The Guardian

Friday, August 15, 1997

Castro had no control of Cuban missile crisis, paper reveals

Publication of new information shows the Cuban leader's frustration with the Soviet Union. **Paul Webster** reports from Paris

FIDEL CASTRO'S readiness to bombard the United States with nuclear missiles and his exasperation with the Soviet Union during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis have been revealed in France, after the publication of a speech he made to the Cuban Communist Party in January 1968.

Parts of the 12-hour tirade, in which the Cuban leader accuses Moscow of running away, were printed in *Le Monde*. The newspaper obtained documents from a French historian, Vincent Touze, a specialist on the showdown that nearly led to war between the two superpowers.

The crisis, which could have been the opening to a third world war, began on October 15 1962, when US spy planes spotted Soviet missiles on Cuba. It ended on October 28 when the former Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, said they would be withdrawn.

The newspaper illustrated the development of the crisis with details of recordings of John F. Kennedy in the White House.

But the new light on what happened in October 1962 comes mainly from Mr Castro's speech in which he admits to being naive about his

confidence in the Soviet Union.

Referring to his disillusionment with the Soviet military and the then leader, Khrushchev, the Cuban president said he had agreed without hesitation to the original proposition to set up a missile base made by a Soviet team led by a marshal.



But the preliminary agreement presented by the Soviet delegation was useless and had been drawn up by "stupid bureaucrats". Mr Castro drew up a project in his own handwriting which was sent to the Soviet Union but never returned.

"Our unlimited confidence was the naive victim of all these subtle matters which we were incapable of conceiving in a revolutionary party

or movement," he said. "It was entirely unbelievable.

"All those hesitations, those ways of acting, indecisive and hesitant, led to problems. We didn't know what these missiles were like or how to set them up."

Mr Castro said it would have been easy to camouflage the missiles but no effort was made to bring down US spy planes or to hide the weapons. Security was so poor that there was speculation that the Soviet military was acting deliberately.

"I can assure you that this

'We defended these missiles with affection - with an incredible love'

- Fidel Castro

was totally false. It was a disaster, a complete lack of precautions."

Mr Castro complained to Khrushchev but Cuba was told that the Baltic fleet would be sent to the area and that Kennedy would be informed 24 hours beforehand.

The verbatim account was interrupted by remarks from Raúl Castro, who said Cuba did not even know how long the missiles were. He appeared

taken aback when he learned they were about 60ft long.

Fidel Castro said he had wanted to inform Washington of the Soviet-Cuban defence agreement before the missiles could be spotted. But Khrushchev rejected the suggestion in July 1962.

Raúl, Mr Castro's defence minister and brother, who made the suggestion on a trip to Moscow with Ernesto "Che" Guevara, told the Central Committee: "Khrushchev, who was very rude, said: 'Don't worry, I'll grab Kennedy by the balls.'"

Despite his criticism of the Soviet Union, Mr Castro fully backed the plan and invited Moscow to install 1,000 missiles and expressed his disappointment when he learnt there would be only 80.

"We defended these missiles with affection, with an incredible love," he said. "We were fighting for the first time almost on equal terms with an enemy who attacked and provoked us incessantly. We were transported by this new situation ... by this extraordinary international proletarian spirit which we had dreamed about."

On October 26 1962, Mr Castro wrote to Khrushchev "to give him courage", saying that if the US invaded, a "massive and total" volley of missiles should be despatched in a pre-emptive strike.

Mr Castro then began losing faith in Moscow and Cuba had to adapt to a new phase of relations with an ally in "total retreat":

WORLD

Castro joked, JFK firm in '62 missile crisis

HDN | 8/16/1997 12:00:00 AM |

Prudence: President Kennedy resisted intense pressure from hawkish generals to invade Cuba, declassified recordings reveal By Francois Raitberger / Reuters
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Voice of America 8/14/97 U-S / CUBA MISSILES

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BYLINE=JULIAN NUNDY

DATELINE=PARIS

CONTENT=

VOICED AT:

INTRO: NEW DOCUMENTS ABOUT THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS OF 1962, JUST PUBLISHED IN FRANCE, SHOW THAT PRESIDENT JOHN KENNEDY WEIGHED THE OPTION OF INVADING CUBA. JULIAN NUNDY REPORTS FROM PARIS.

TEXT: DOCUMENTS PUBLISHED BY THE RESPECTED FRENCH DAILY LE MONDE SHOW THAT PRESIDENT JOHN KENNEDY WAS SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING INVADING CUBA IN 1962 AFTER THE SOVIET UNION STATIONED NUCLEAR MISSILES ON THE ISLAND.

THE NEWSPAPER, PUBLISHING DETAILS OF CABINET MEETINGS IN THE WHITE HOUSE IN OCTOBER 1962 AS WELL AS A CUBAN COMMUNIST PARTY DOCUMENT, SAYS THE LATEST DETAILS WERE UNCOVERED BY A FRENCH HISTORIAN WHO IS RESEARCHING THE EPISODE. THE NEWSPAPER HAS PROMISED TO MAKE THE ORIGINAL TEXTS AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET.

THE 1962 MISSILE CRISIS WAS ONE OF THE MOST TENSE EPISODES OF THE COLD WAR. FINALLY, THEN-SOVIET LEADER NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV BACKED DOWN AND REMOVED THE MISSILES.

IN THE LE MONDE DOCUMENTS, THE CUBAN PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO IS SHOWN TO HAVE A SKEPTICAL VIEW OF HIS SOVIET ALLY, SAYING THAT MOSCOW HAD BEEN HESITANT AND THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COMMUNIST STATES HAD BEEN IN DANGER.

MR. CASTRO IS SAID TO HAVE MADE THE REMARKS AT A COMMUNIST PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING IN 1968. HE CALLED THE UNITED STATES "AN AGGRESSIVE AND ARROGANT ENEMY" AND THE SOVIET UNION "AN ALLY THAT BACKS DOWN." MR. CASTRO SAID HE HAD ASKED THE SOVIET UNION FOR ONE-THOUSAND MISSILES BUT THEY SENT ONLY 80.

THE ACCOUNTS OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY'S DISCUSSIONS WITH HIS DEFENSE AND FOREIGN POLICY CHIEFS SHOW THAT, IN ADDITION TO A NAVAL BLOCKADE OF THE ISLAND, THE UNITED STATES HAD PLANS TO INVADE.

ON OCTOBER 26TH, 1962, IN A MEETING WITH AIDES INCLUDING HIS NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR MCGEORGE BUNDY AND ADLAI STEVENSON, THE U-S AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS, KENNEDY SAID WASHINGTON SHOULD WORK OUT WHICH CUBANS IT COULD INSTALL IN A NEW, POST-COMMUNIST CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT ON THE ISLAND.

HE SUGGESTED MOBILIZING THE EXILED CUBAN POPULATION OF MIAMI, FLORIDA, PARTICULARLY DOCTORS, WHO COULD BE RECRUITED TO GO WITH THE INVASION FORCE.

HOWEVER, THE ACCOUNTS ALSO SHOW THAT KENNEDY WAS RELUCTANT TO GO TOO FAR, BELIEVING THAT THE SOVIET REACTION COULD LEAD TO ALL-OUT WAR. THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT SAID THAT IF THE UNITED STATES INVADED, ITS TROOPS WOULD REACH THE MISSILE BASES ONLY AFTER A DIFFICULT BATTLE.

BY THAT TIME, THE MISSILES COULD BE AIMED AND EVEN FIRED AT AMERICA. A SOLUTION

SUGGESTED BY KENNEDY WAS TO BOMB THE
BASES BEFORE LAUNCHING AN INVASION. (SIGNED)

NEB/JWN/JWH/KL

Vincent TOUZE

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