

Speech by Nikita Khrushchev on the Cuban crisis (23 May 1963)

Caption: On 23 May 1963, at a meeting marking the friendship between the peoples of the Soviet Union and the Republic of Cuba, Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, summarises the Cuban crisis.

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[...]

No matter how much imperialist reaction, headed by the United States, tries to stop or check the great revolutionary process of liberation of mankind, it is powerless to do so. People fighting for their freedom and independence are strong enough to defend their gains with the backing of all the forces of peace and socialism. This was convincingly demonstrated by what took place in the Caribbean towards the end of last year.

Today, six months later, the extent of the danger threatening peace as a result of the treacherous actions of the aggressive forces of American imperialism has become even clearer. At that time, the bellicose circles in the United States took steps which brought mankind to the brink of world thermonuclear war.

The Caribbean crisis was one of the sharpest clashes between the forces of socialism and imperialism, the forces of peace and war in the entire post-war period. When they prepared their invasion of Cuba, the American belligerents thought that the Soviet Union and other socialist countries would not be able to render effective aid to the Cuban Republic.

The imperialists reckoned on the geographical remoteness of Cuba from the socialist countries allowing them to utilise their overwhelming military superiority in this area and attack the Cuban people and wipe out their revolutionary gains. As everyone is aware the American imperialists are no greenhorns when it comes to suppressing the liberation struggle in Latin America and other areas of the world.

The imperialists' plans to strangle the Cuban revolution came to grief thanks to the firm stand of the Cuban Government headed by Comrade Fidel Castro, the fighting solidarity of the Cubans, the military might of the Soviet Union and the powerful political and moral support of the socialist countries and all the peace-loving forces which joined the united front to defend the heroic Island of Freedom. Due to the fact that a real danger arose of an open conflict between two nuclear Powers, the Soviet Union and the U.S.A., the Cuban crisis turned from a local one to a world crisis. In these circumstances it was necessary to seek a way out of the situation on the basis of sensible compromise.

The settlement of the crisis in the Caribbean meant upsetting the plans of the American military clique. The unity and solidarity of all peoples who came together to repulse the most aggressive and reckless imperialist circles tied the hands of those who were ready to doom millions of people to death and destruction just because of their own selfish interests. This was the triumph of the policy of peace and peaceful coexistence, thanks to which the revolutionary gains of the Cuban people were successfully defended, the prestige of the socialist countries was raised even higher and the threat of world thermonuclear war, which would have resulted in untold suffering, sacrifice and destruction to people of every country, was averted.

In the United States of America, we hear again the voices of the "wild men" calling for a blockade and even an armed attack on Cuba. Some Senators and the Pentagon leaders have been talking of the need to conduct a more tough policy in relation to Cuba. All this cannot but put us on our guard. Are these big noises once more thinking of creating a crisis like the one which existed in the Caribbean last October?

I must declare with the utmost gravity that if the U.S. Government does not display the necessary common sense and appreciation of the situation and lets itself be dragged onto a dangerous path, an even more threatening situation could occur in the world than did last October. If the bellicose imperialist forces were to create such a situation it would apparently be considerably more difficult to find a way out of the crisis than in 1962.

A violation of the pledges given by the United States of America could only be judged as perfidy. It would gravely undermine good faith and would thus make the possibility of reaching agreement harder. From this it is obvious that if the Government of the United States of America does not firmly adhere to the agreement which has been reached and aggravates the situation, peace may hang by a more slender thread than at the

time of last year's Caribbean crisis.

If this happens we shall be obliged to carry out our international duty, our pledges to the fraternal Cuban people and come to their aid. We declare with the utmost gravity: "Don't play with fire, gentlemen, and don't play with people's destinies!"

We consider that a normalisation of the Caribbean situation could be achieved on the basis of the implementation of the five points put forward by Fidel Castro, Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Cuba. The just demands of the Cuban people are supported by the Soviet Union, by all the socialist countries and by all progressive mankind.

(Speech at a Cuba-U.S.S.R. Friendship Meeting, May 23, 1963. **Pravda**, May 24, 1963.)