

Report given by Nikita Khrushchev to the Supreme Soviet on the resolution of the Cuban missile crisis (12 December 1962)

Caption: On 12 December 1962, Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, outlines to the Supreme Soviet his point of view on the resolution of the Cuban missile crisis

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Eliminating the threat of a thermonuclear disaster during the Caribbean crisis

The course of events in the Caribbean confirmed that there definitely was a grave threat of aggression. By the 20th of October, at the approaches to Cuba, in the south of the U.S.A., the Americans began rapidly to concentrate large formations of the Navy, Air Force, parachutists and marines. The U.S. Government dispatched reinforcements to its military base at Guantanamo, part of Cuban territory. An announcement was made about large-scale military manoeuvres in the Caribbean Sea. In the course of these "manoeuvres" it was planned to beach a landing party on the island of Vieques. On October 22 the Kennedy Government declared a state of quarantine around Cuba. The word "quarantine", incidentally, in this context is only a fig leaf. In actual fact it was a matter of a blockade, piracy on the high seas.

Things moved fast. The American command alerted all its armed forces, including the troops in Europe, the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and the Seventh Fleet based in the Taiwan area. Several paratroop, infantry and armoured divisions, with a complement of almost a hundred thousand men were prepared for the attack on Cuba alone. In addition, 183 ships with 85,000 sailors on board were directed to the shores of Cuba. The Cuban landing was to have been supported by several thousand planes. Virtually 20% of all the U.S. Strategic Air Force planes carrying atom and hydrogen bombs were on round-the-clock patrols. Reservists were called up.

The European NATO allies of the U.S.A. also alerted their troops. A joint command of the U.S.A. and Latin American states was set up and some of these countries sent their warships to take part in the blockade of Cuba. As a consequence of these aggressive moves on the part of the U.S. Government, the world was threatened with thermonuclear war.

In face of these increased war preparations, we, for our part, were obliged to take corresponding measures. The Soviet Government empowered the Soviet Defence Minister to put the entire Soviet army in full battle readiness, and, above all, to put on the alert all Soviet rocket forces equipped with inter-continental and strategic rockets, to bring into operation anti-missile defence and the fighter units of the anti-aircraft defence, the Strategic Air Force and the naval forces. Our submarine fleet, including atomic submarines, took up their positions. We also alerted our land forces and delayed the retirement of older personnel in the strategic missile forces, the anti-aircraft forces and submarine fleet. The armed forces of the Warsaw Treaty countries were also brought into full battle readiness.

Under these circumstances, if one or the other country had not shown restraint, had not done everything necessary to avert outbreak of war, there would have been an explosion with irreparable consequences.

Today, when tension caused by the Caribbean events has been eased, when we find ourselves in the final stage of settling the conflict, I want to report to Supreme Soviet Deputies what the Soviet Government did in order to extinguish the rising flame of war.

On October 23, immediately after the United States' blockade of Cuba came into force, the Soviet Government, simultaneously with defence measures, made an announcement in which it unambiguously warned that the U.S. Government was taking on itself grave responsibility for the destiny of the world and was recklessly playing with fire. We frankly told the U.S. President that we would not stand for piratical acts by American ships on the high seas, and would therefore take the appropriate measures.

At the same time, the Soviet Government appealed to all people to bar the way of the aggressors. We also took certain steps in the United Nations. The peace initiative taken by the Soviet Government for settling the Cuban crisis was fully backed by the socialist countries and the people of most other U.N. member countries. U Thant, U.N. Secretary-General, also made every effort to settle the conflict.

The Government of the United States of America, however, continued to stir up the atmosphere. The U.S. militarists pushed on with their intentions to carry out the attack on Cuba. In the morning of October 27, we received information from Cuban comrades and from other sources in which there was a direct warning of the impending attack being launched within the next couple of days. We regarded these telegrams as a signal of extreme alarm. And there was every reason for alarm.

Immediate action was called for in order to stop the attack on Cuba and preserve peace. The U.S. President was sent a note which sought a mutually acceptable solution. At that time it was still not too late to extinguish the already smouldering tinders of war. In dispatching this note we took into consideration the fact that the notes of the President himself expressed alarm and a desire to find a way out of the situation that had arisen. We announced that if the U.S.A. would give a pledge not to invade Cuba, and would restrain other allied states from aggression against Cuba, the Soviet Union would be ready to withdraw from Cuba the arms which the U.S.A. termed "offensive".

In his reply, the U.S. President declared that if the Soviet Government agreed to withdraw these arms from Cuba the American Government would call off the quarantine, that is the blockade, and would give an assurance not to invade Cuba, both from the United States and from other countries in the Western Hemisphere. The President made it very plain—and this is known to the whole world—that the U.S.A. would not attack Cuba and would also restrain its allies from similar actions.

But the reason for sending our arms to Cuba was to prevent an attack on her! That is why the Soviet Government kept its agreement to withdraw ballistic missiles from Cuba.

So, to put it briefly, we came to a mutually acceptable solution which signified the triumph of reason and the success of peace. The Cuban question entered the phase of peaceful negotiations and, as far as the United States of America was concerned, the question was, so to speak, transferred from the hands of the generals to those of the diplomats.

On October 29, talks commenced in New York between representatives of the U.S.S.R., the U.S.A. and Cuba, with the participation of U Thant. Comrade Mikoyan, First Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R., flew to Havana for an exchange of opinion with the Cuban Government.

In the meantime, both sides set about fulfilling the pledges they had made. The Soviet Union withdrew from Cuba all the rockets which the U.S.A. termed offensive along with the Soviet personnel who had been serving on the rocket sites. The United States was given an opportunity to verify that all ballistic rockets which had been in Cuba were now actually shipped out, and this was confirmed in the announcements made by officials in the U.S.A.

Simultaneously, in our desire to speed up a settlement of the Caribbean crisis, we agreed to remove Soviet Il-28 planes from Cuba within a month, although they were obsolete bombers. By December 7, these planes had been withdrawn from Cuba. They had only been sent to Cuba for use as a kind of flying artillery in shore defence, so that they could operate under cover of anti-aircraft fire.

On its part, the U.S. Government called off the naval blockade of Cuba on November 21 and removed its warships from the area. From the area around Florida, the American Command withdrew its troops and aircraft, massed there for the attack on Cuba. It also demobilised the reservists who had been called up. Also withdrawn were the reinforcements which had been dispatched to the Guantanamo base during the crisis. At the same time the President reaffirmed the U.S. assurance not to invade Cuba.

With this in mind we also rescinded the war measures we had had to take following an aggravation of the crisis over Cuba. The Cuban Republic, in turn, set about demobilising all people called up to defend their country. They went back to peaceful work and their families...

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The above reveals some of the results of the normalisation that has begun in the situation over Cuba.

In the first place, the imminent invasion which threatened Cuba had been avoided and, consequently, a military clash had been prevented. The crisis threatening a world thermonuclear war had been successfully overcome.

In the second place, the United States of America made a pledge before the whole world not to attack the Republic of Cuba and to restrain its allies from doing so.

In the third place, the most die-hard imperialists who reckoned on sparking off a world thermonuclear war over Cuba, were baulked. The Soviet Union, the forces of peace and socialism, proved that they are strong enough to make the war supporters keep the peace.

Which side conquered? Who won? You might say victory belonged to reason, the cause of peace and security. All sides displayed a sensible approach and took into account the fact that if steps had not been taken to help overcome the dangerous course of events, they might have stumbled into a third world war. Thanks to mutual concessions and compromise, an agreement was reached which made it possible to relieve the tension and normalise the situation.

Both sides made concessions. We withdrew our ballistic rockets and agreed on the withdrawal of the Il-28 bombers. This was satisfactory to the Americans. But both Cuba and the Soviet Union also received satisfaction: the American invasion of Cuba was averted, the naval blockade removed and the situation in the Caribbean normalised. People's Cuba exists, is growing strong and developing under the leadership of its revolutionary government and its fearless leader Fidel Castro.

Some people say that the United States allegedly forced us to give way in certain respects. If the matter is looked at in this way, then these people must admit that the United States was also forced to give way. Settlement of outstanding issues between states without resorting to war, by peaceful means—that is the policy of peaceful coexistence in operation. If we had reached agreement on constructing our relations on this basis and if the relations of the U.S.A. with Cuba had been constructed on the basis of the United Nations Charter, there would have been no need to send and set up our missiles in Cuba.

We are satisfied with the outcome of events in the Caribbean area, and there can be no doubt at all that all other peoples wanting peaceful coexistence are satisfied too. They are now able to live and work in peace.

Let's imagine for a minute what could have happened if we had acted like hard-headed politicians and refused any mutual concessions. It would have been like the two billy goats who met on the bridge over a ravine and, locking horns, refused to give way to each other. As we all know they both crashed down into the ravine. Is it sensible for human beings to act like that?

Among the ruling circles in the U.S.A. there are some politicians who are rightly called "wild men". The "wild men" have insisted and still insist on launching war against the Soviet Union and the socialist camp as soon as possible. It should be obvious that if we had taken an uncompromising stand, it would only have helped the wild men's camp to utilise the situation for dealing a blow at Cuba and for unleashing world war...

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Let no one doubt that the successful battle to preserve Cuba's independence and the undeniable victory in this conflict for the peace forces will oblige many people to change their minds about the way the international situation is developing and their own evaluation of the balance of forces in the world today. They will now see the danger of a nuclear catastrophe in more real terms. At any rate the millions of Americans under the influence of the events over Cuba feel very sharply, for the first time in their country's history, the proximity of thermonuclear war. They now appreciate that their country's territory is not insured against a devastating return blow. During the days of the crisis the American people felt the scorching breath

of thermonuclear war on the very threshold of their homes. They began to understand that if a world war were to break out it would not take place somewhere across the ocean, in Europe or Asia, but all over the world, including the territory of the U.S.A., bringing grief and death to millions of Americans.

Among the countless letters and telegrams addressed during the crisis days to the Soviet Government, there were many from American citizens. They voiced alarm over the world's destiny, expressed their thanks to the Soviet Government and approved the measures taken by us to relieve the tension in the Caribbean and by doing so to avert thermonuclear war.

The mood of the American people, their attitude to the events over Cuba, were clearly expressed at the elections which immediately followed the successful removal of the main tension in the crisis. The American people, so to speak, "put the skids under" some of the more aggressive political figures, especially such a war-monger as Nixon. We won't lose any sleep over the downfall of such gentlemen who hate peace and the freedom of the peoples.

The peace policy achieved a tremendous moral and political victory. At the same time, we shall be obliged to continue devoting every effort to preserve and strengthen peace.

The situation demands that we keep on our toes all the time and fight tirelessly for a lasting peace throughout the world.

[...]

(The Present International Situation and the Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union. Report to a Session of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., December 12, 1962. **Prevent War, Safeguard Peace**, Russ. ed., pp. 379-83, 383-85, 401-02.)