THE FIXER WHO DIFFUSED THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

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Category: Opinions

Compiled by Jirair Tutunjian, 23 October 2022

To underline the potential that the Ukraine War might lead to nuclear conflagration, politicians, media mavens, and political scientists have pointed out that the last time the world has been so close to nuclear catastrophe was exactly 60 years ago--during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. A number of experts monitoring the war have called for a "wise" diplomat who would bring the warring parties together and end the hostilities peacefully. They were looking for someone like Anastas Mikoyan, the veteran Soviet politician.

While a number of people (President John Kennedy, Premier Nikita Khrushchev, President Fidel Castro, U.S. negotiator John McCloy, U.S. politician Adlai Stevenson, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, and Che Guevara) were involved in diffusing the crisis, Mikoyan was the key to ending the threat of a Third World War.

Khrushchev had four priorities as he tried to prevent the global disaster.

1. To negotiate a smooth withdrawal of the Soviet missiles without provoking the Americans
2. To get Castro to accept international inspection because the Americans demanded it
3. To retain Cuba as an ally
4. To preserve the Soviet Union's prestige and legitimacy in the global communist movement.

Khrushchev knew there was only one person who could be trusted with resolving the diplomatic crisis: Mikoyan, the sixty-seven-year-old trouble-shooter never held a diplomatic post but was often the point man when the Soviet Union faced diplomatic challenges. His official title was First Deputy Chairman of the U.S.S.R Council of Ministers.



The day Mikoyan arrived in Havana, he learned his wife of more than 40 years had died while he was in transit. He stayed to resolve the crisis through direct talks in Havana, New York and Washington, amid constant communication with Moscow.

Castro agreed with Khrushchev re Mikoyan's unique diplomatic skills. At a state dinner on Nov. 17, Cuba's leader addressed Mikoyan and said: "Who if not you, and only you, can carry out this mission. If you cannot do it, then it proves that in general this is impossible."

Mikoyan's priorities were more elaborate than Khrushchev's

1. He had to convince the Cuban leadership that Cuba would not be invaded by the Americans
2. He had to explain which Soviet weapons and military forces could be withdrawn from Cuba with Cuban leadership's approval, and which should stay on the island
3. He had to explain to the Cuban leadership why Khrushchev had agreed to an international inspection of weapons without obtaining Cuba's agreement
4. He had to convince the Cuban leadership that the U.S. would not revoke the agreement and invade Cuba
5. He had to convince Castro not to fire at U.S. surveillance aircraft
6. He wanted to make sure that Soviet-Cuban relations remained as close as possible to their pre-crisis state
7. To explain Khrushchev's decision to Soviet officers and soldiers.

Mikoyan fulfilled his mission while in constant touch with Cuban, Soviet, and U.S leaders. He was crucial in the dynamics of negotiating the end of the crisis. To assuage Soviet military leaders stationed in Cuba, Mikoyan even criticized Marshall Biryuzov for making it easy for the U.S. to detect the missiles. Mikoyan said that rather than hiding the missiles "they were sticking up just like they were at a military parade in Red Square, only on Red Square they would be placed horizontally, and here they were deployed vertically."

During the stressful days, Mikoyan made time to fish with Castro and visit a sugarcane farm with Guevara. This was not the first or the last time Mikoyan was dispatched on a vital diplomatic mission. Over the years, the Kremlin sent Mikoyan on urgent missions to Hungary, India, China, the United States, East and West Germany. He was the smiling face of the "dour" Soviet Union. He was Mr. Da to Soviet Foreign Minister (Mr. Nyet) Andrei Gromyko.

It was many years before a crucial secret condition of the agreement was revealed to the public: when the Cuban Missile Crisis was concluded peacefully, it wasn't revealed that the Americans had agreed to withdraw their missiles from Turkey (across from Soviet Armenia). Because the American media and public was fired up by the crisis and would have regarded the withdrawal of U.S. missiles capitulation to Big Bad Soviet Union, Khrushchev agreed not to make public the important detail. It was one of the rare diplomatic advantages of totalitarian regimes. In democratic U.S., the public wanted to witness a humiliation of the Soviet Union and Cuba. The U.S. public's mood would have made President Kennedy's job insecure. Meanwhile, in undemocratic Soviet Union, the "humiliating" withdrawal of the missiles went without a hitch.

Perhaps the world will soon find a candidate who can fill Mikoyan's shoes and bring the Ukraine War

to a peaceful resolution.

Comments



Kevork Papazian – 2022-10-26 09:14:10
Perhaps the world will soon find a candidate who can fill Mikoyan's shoes and bring the Armenia Artsakh azeri War to a peaceful and honorable resolution.