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## A FRENCH NEWSMAN'S INTERVIEWS WITH KENNEDY AND CASTRO

# The Cuba crisis, in retrospect

*Jean Daniel, correspondent of the Paris weekly L'Express, spent most of November in Cuba, where he had several interviews with Premier Fidel Castro, including one interrupted by the news of President Kennedy's assassination. On Oct. 24, before leaving for Cuba, he interviewed Kennedy at the White House. Daniel agreed not to publish the interview until he met the President a second time after his visit to Havana. Daniel felt, however, that the President's death released him from that commitment, and his paper published both the Kennedy and Castro interviews. The interviews were also published in the New Republic (They appeared Dec. 7, 14, 21, and are continuing) while somewhat varying versions were published in the New York Times (Dec. 11), the London Observer (Dec. 8) and other newspapers. The report that follows summarizes a major section of the Daniel interviews, based on the New Republic text.*

**A**ROUND THE END of February, 1962, the Cuban and the Soviet governments had reached the definite conviction that a U.S.-sponsored invasion of Cuba "might take place from one moment to the next." The problem facing Fidel Castro and Premier Khrushchev then was how to convince the U.S. that such an invasion would be the "same as an attack on the Soviet Union"—and the solution, proposed by the USSR, was the emplacement of Soviet IRBMs in Cuba. They arrived in the latter half of July, were first officially reported by the U.S. government in September, and a month later the U.S. responded by a blockade of Cuba that brought the world to the brink of war.

A year after this crisis, Fidel Castro told of the sequence of events that led to

those fateful days. Specifically, Daniel reports that Castro felt that at a time when "an attempt is being made to frighten all mankind by propagating the idea that Cuba, and in particular I, might provoke a nuclear war . . . The world should know the true story of the missile emplacement." Early in 1962, Castro related, "we had received an accumulation of information warning us that a new invasion of the island was being prepared under the sponsorship of the CIA . . . We also knew that the Pentagon was vesting the CIA preparations with the mantle of its authority, but we had doubts as to the attitude of the President. There were those among our informants who even thought it would suffice to alert the President and give him cause for concern in order to arrest these preparations."

**ADZHUBEI'S REPORT:** What "triggered the whole situation," Castro said, was a copy of *Izvestia* editor Alexei Adzhubei's official report to Khrushchev of his Jan. 30 interview with President Kennedy—which reached him a week later in Havana. "What did Kennedy say to Adzhubei? Now listen to this carefully, for it is very important: he said that the new situation in Cuba was intolerable for the U.S., that the American government had decided it would not tolerate it any longer; he had said that peaceful coexistence was seriously compromised by the fact that 'Soviet influence' in Cuba altered the balance of strength, was destroying the equilibrium agreed upon and [at this point Castro emphasized his statement by pronouncing each syllable separately] **Kennedy reminded the Russians that the U.S. had not intervened in Hungary**, which was obviously a way of demanding Russian non-intervention in the event of a possible invasion. To be sure, the actual word 'invasion' was not mentioned and Adzhubei, at the time, lacking any background information, could not draw the same conclusions as we did. But when we communicated to Khrushchev all our previous information, the Russians, too,

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began to interpret the Kennedy-Adzhubel conversation as we saw it and they went to the source of our information. By the end of a month, the Russian and Cuban governments had reached the **definite conviction** that an invasion might take place from one moment to the next. This is the truth.

"What was to be done? How could we prevent the invasion? We found that Khrushchev was concerned about the same things that were worrying us. He asked us what we wanted. We replied: **Do whatever is needed to convince the U.S. that any attack on Cuba is the same as an attack on the Soviet Union.** And how to realize this objective? All our thinking and discussions revolved around this point. We thought of a proclamation, an alliance, conventional military aid. The Russians explained to us that their concern was two fold: first, they wanted to save the Cuban revolution [in other words, their socialist honor in the eyes of the world] and at the same time they wished to avoid a world conflict. They reasoned that if conventional military aid was the extent of their assistance,

the U.S. might not hesitate to instigate an invasion, in which case Russia would retaliate and this would inevitably touch off a world war.

**A MATTER OF HONOR:** "Under the circumstances, how could we Cubans have refused to share the risks taken to save us? [By this "risk" Daniel subsequently explained, Castro was referring to a decision of the Soviet government to offer missiles to Cuba, i.e., to the fact that, according to Castro, the original offer of missiles came from the USSR—not as a response to a Cuban request]. It was, in the final analysis, a question of honor, don't you agree? Don't you believe that honor plays a role in politics? You think we are romantics, don't you? Perhaps we are. And why not? In any event, we are militants. In a word, then, we agreed to the impacement of the missiles. And I might add here that for us Cubans it didn't really make so much difference whether we died by conventional bombing or a hydrogen bomb. Nevertheless, we were not gambling with the peace of the world. The U.S. was the one to jeopardize the peace of mankind by using the threat of war to stifle revolutions.

"And so in June, 1962, my brother Raoul and Che Guevara went to Moscow to discuss ways and means of installing the missiles. The convoy arrived by sea in three weeks. The U.S. was able to find out that the weapons were being shipped in, of course; but it took them two months to discover that these weapons were guided missiles. Two months . . . in other words, longer than we had calculated. Because, of course, we were seeking intimidation, not aggression."



Photo by Marc Riboud, The Observer, London

#### PREMIER FIDEL CASTRO MAKES A POINT IN AN INTERVIEW

The Cuban leader gave his version of the missile crisis

**KENNEDY INTERVIEW:** In contrast to his interviews with Castro (one of which began at 10 p.m. and ended at 4 a.m.), Daniel spent less than 25 minutes with Kennedy. On Daniel's initiative, the subjects of Cuba and Vietnam were

brought up, and he asked Kennedy whether the ideas contained in his earlier expression of support for the Algerian revolution—made while he was a Senator—had been "faithfully applied in Saigon and Havana." Kennedy replied that they hadn't time to discuss Vietnam, but "I'd like to talk with you about Cuba" and that their discussion could continue after Daniel's return from Cuba. Kennedy began by noting that the European press had accused the U.S. of being blind to the real situation in Cuba.

Then he declared: "I tell you this—we know perfectly well what happened in Cuba, to the misfortune of all. From the beginning I personally followed the development of these events with mounting concern.

"I believe that that there is no country in the world, including all the African regions, including any and all the countries under colonial domination, where economic colonization, humiliation and exploitation were worse than in Cuba, in part owing to my country's policies during the Batista regime. I believe we created, built and manufactured the Castro movement out of whole cloth and without realizing it. I believe that the accumulation of these mistakes

has jeopardized all of Latin America.

"The great aim of the Alliance for Progress is to reverse this unfortunate policy. This is one of the most, if not the most, important problems in American foreign policy. I can assure you that I have understood the Cubans. I approved the proclamation which Fidel Castro made in the Sierra Maestra, when he justifiably called for justice and espe-

cially yearned to rid Cuba of corruption. I will go even further; to some extent it is as though Batista was the incarnation of a number of sins on the part of the U.S. Now we shall have to pay for those sins. In the matter of the Batista regime, I am in agreement with the first Cuban revolutionaries. That is perfectly clear.

**'NOT A SOCIOLOGIST':** "But it is also clear that the problem has ceased to be a Cuban one, and has become international—that is, it has become a Soviet problem. I am the President of the U.S. and not a sociologist. I am the President of a free nation which has certain responsibilities in the Free World. I know that Castro has betrayed the promises made in the Sierra Maestra, and that he agreed to be a Soviet agent in Latin America."

Kennedy then accused Castro of bringing the world "to the verge of nuclear war" in October, 1962. He said the Soviet Union understood this, but that "so far as Castro is concerned, I must say I don't know whether he realizes this, or even if he cares." He then declared that Latin America will not attain "justice and progress" through Marxian socialism. "The U.S.," Kennedy concluded, "now has the possibility of doing as much good in Latin America as it has done wrong in the past; I would say that that we alone have this power—on the essential condition that Communism does not take over there."