

Moscow Clears Release Of '62 Correspondence

Documents Date to the Cuban Missile Crisis

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The Soviet Union has told the State Department that it has no objection to the release of still-classified correspondence between former president John F. Kennedy and former Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

The Soviets, in an April 3 diplomatic note from Vladimir F. Zayemskiy, head of the Latin American desk at the embassy here, to John F. Tefft, deputy director of the Soviet desk at State, suggested a joint publication be worked out of all the letters.

The unusual note was filed yesterday in U.S. District Court as part of a Freedom of Information Act suit brought by American University professor Philip Brenner and the National Security Archive, who have been waging a three-year battle for the release of the letters and other documents from that period.

The State Department has released more than 1,000 documents in response to the FOIA request but has withheld 700 others, including the letters, on the grounds that release would harm national security.

the 1962 understandings have continued to spark controversy, including a dispute over Soviet construction of a submarine base in Cuba in 1970, the 1979 dispute over Soviet troops in Cuba and current friction over the Soviet sale of jet fighters to Havana, he said.

If the publication were done "on a commercial basis," Zayemskiy said in his note, the Soviets "would not object if the U.S. were to be the first to publish . . . transferring a portion of [the] proceeds to our account."

Brenner's lawyer, Stuart H. Newberger, said the department has argued that communications with foreign governments are presumed confidential and are not to be disclosed publicly. "The Soviet letter, through formal diplomatic channels, informs State that they essentially waive the ordinary confidentiality that might apply to such communications," Newberger said.

A State Department official said yesterday that the letters, 25 in all, "haven't been released in part because they contain information still relevant to current policy questions." But "in light of the diplomatic note," he said, "we are looking at that [determination] again." Some of the correspondence has been made public in the past, Newberger said, but about a dozen items have not been released.

Brenner submitted affidavits in October from nine senior Kennedy administration officials—including Theodore Sorensen, former counsel to Kennedy, and George Ball, former undersecretary of state—who were involved in the dramatic standoff with the Soviets in the fall of 1962, when the countries appeared on the brink of nuclear war. Those officials said they could not think of anything in the documents they wrote 28 years ago that might be considered a secret today.

Scholars and researchers believe the letters could shed light on precisely what the two sides agreed upon to resolve the conflict, which was never settled by a formal treaty.

The issue is not a historical curiosity, according to Michael Beschloss, a historian who is writing a book on the Kennedy-Khrushchev relationship. Disagreements over