

THE ASSASSINATION OF U.S. PRESIDENT J.F. KENNEDY AND SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONS

COLLECTION OF DOCUMENTS

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INTRODUCTION TO PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS

The assassination of U.S. President J.F. Kennedy is one of the sensational events of the second half of the 20th century. The continuing stream of journalistic works, investigative reports, documentary and feature films repeatedly confirms that interest in this event remains and will continue for many years. This topic is actively used not only for conspiracy purposes—to stir up audience attention and earn fame and money—but also for political interests. The recent Executive Order by D. Trump dated January 23, 2025, No. 14176, on the publication of classified materials related to the assassination of the 35th U.S. President, is largely connected to the internal political struggle in the country and questions about the omnipotence and lack of control of its intelligence services.

The topic of Kennedy's assassination has long been firmly established in scholarly historiography. No serious researcher of modern Soviet-American relations has bypassed it. Scientists have paid special attention to the causes and consequences of the Cuban Missile Crisis, as well as the history of preparation and signing of the 1963 Moscow Treaty.

[The document continues with detailed discussion of Soviet-American relations during this period, including Kennedy's "Strategy of Peace" speech at American University on June 10, 1963, where he publicly announced the White House's plans for nuclear weapons limitation and devoted much attention to problems of peaceful coexistence with the USSR. It describes how Khrushchev positively responded to Kennedy's speech, which was published almost in full in Pravda on June 13, 1963.]

Khrushchev proposed sending condolences to Kennedy's widow Jacqueline, both from his own name and on behalf of his wife, which was a new element in Soviet diplomatic protocol.

While the mourning texts were being prepared in nighttime Moscow, the Soviet embassy in Washington sent condolences to Jacqueline Kennedy, the president's brother Robert Kennedy, and D. Rusk. Dobrynin was awaiting further instructions from the Center when at 4 PM the Associated Press news agency reported the arrest on suspicion of Kennedy's murder of L.H. Oswald—a former serviceman, supporter of Communist Cuba, who had previously lived in the USSR and was married to a Soviet citizen.

This news extremely alarmed Dobrynin. Later in his memoirs, he wrote: "The situation began to take on a troubling character, as questions arose about Soviet involvement in events connected with Kennedy's murder. Everyone still had fresh memories of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Anti-Soviet sentiments could flare up again with renewed force. Potentially, this could lead to a new serious conflict. All these troubling thoughts gave me no peace. Of course, I was certain that we were not involved in this drama. However, I had serious concerns about whether our intelligence services might have had some connections with Oswald."

Concerned by this news, Dobrynin conducted an urgent meeting with the head of the Soviet residency in Washington. The latter confirmed that neither the KGB nor GRU had any connections with L.H. Oswald. The correspondence with Lee Harvey was conducted through

regular mail and was most likely already known to U.S. authorities. The only oddity was Oswald's last letter to the Soviet embassy, dated November 9, 1963, but which reached Soviet diplomats only on November 18. The message was typed, not handwritten like all of Oswald's other letters, and contained a number of unclear points. In the letter, Lee Harvey recounted that while in Mexico, he had approached the Soviet embassy and Cuban consulate requesting visas for himself and his family to visit the USSR and Cuba, but was refused. Oswald wrote about FBI surveillance and about an offer from one of the federal agents to his wife Marina to "betray" the Soviet Union and remain under U.S. protection. The KGB resident in the USA, who sent a cipher telegram with the translation of this letter to Moscow, considered the document a forgery and provocation.

Dobrynin immediately sent two cipher messages to Moscow containing the following proposals: First, to transmit to American authorities, if they requested it, all correspondence with Oswald. Second, for Soviet leadership to send official condolences to Washington and visit the American ambassador's residence in Moscow. These steps, in Dobrynin's opinion, should help counter the hysteria growing in American mass media due to Oswald's possible connections "with extreme left elements."

The cipher messages reached the Soviet leadership's desk at 7:30 AM and 8:30 AM on November 23. By this time, the MFA central apparatus had already prepared draft texts with condolences and a Central Committee resolution about Mikoyan's trip to the USA. Presidium members quickly approved the documents by polling. Regarding the trip, an interesting detail should be noted—it wasn't a Soviet delegation traveling, but Mikoyan alone, though accompanied by Head of the USA Department of the USSR MFA M.N. Smirnovsky, Mikoyan's assistant V.V. Smolyachenko, interpreter V.M. Sukhodrev, and security guards.

After the Central Committee resolution was adopted, between 11 AM and noon, Khrushchev, accompanied by Gromyko and Sukhodrev, went to the American embassy to pay respects to the late U.S. president. During a brief conversation with Ambassador F. Kohler, the Soviet leader not only announced that Mikoyan would travel to Washington for the funeral but also inquired about the arrest of the killer. Kohler limited himself to abstract information—he didn't name him, only mentioning he was a former deranged Marine, adding that his exact guilt hadn't been established yet. Khrushchev, probably expecting the ambassador to mention L.H. Oswald's leftist views, came prepared with a statement that the Communist Party had always been against terror methods and even cited a phrase attributed to Lenin, supposedly said in 1887 after his older brother Alexander's execution: "We will go a different way."

This statement by Khrushchev showed that Kennedy's death caused serious concern in the Kremlin, as it could potentially become a major problem. Therefore, it became important to understand who L.H. Oswald was and what he had done in the Soviet Union.

[The document continues with details about the Soviet investigation into Oswald, the funeral proceedings, meetings between Mikoyan and Johnson, and the development of Soviet-American relations following Kennedy's assassination.]

...they were ahead of mine." Johnson promised that "there would be no changes to Kennedy's policy," and stated that the USA would not invade Cuba. The conversation turned out to be the longest of the new president's seven meetings with foreign delegations in those days—instead of half an hour, it lasted almost an hour. The president spoke welcomingly and friendly, even showing flowers and shrubs personally planted by Kennedy near the White House terrace. The meeting showed that the new head of the White House intended to maintain a pragmatic approach in relations with the USSR.

The meeting with Rusk lasted longer and was more pointed. Mikoyan once again raised the problem of creating multilateral nuclear forces and the militarization of West Germany, particularly emphasizing that "we are not afraid of the Germans, as we have so much weaponry that in case of war we could destroy West Germany on the very first day. We fear that West Germany might provoke a war in which you would also be involved, perhaps even against your wishes." Rusk in turn assured Mikoyan that the FRG government would never get the opportunity to independently control nuclear weapons, and that "multilateral nuclear forces will never become the tail that wags the dog."

Rusk confirmed Johnson's words about the continuity of Kennedy's foreign policy course and even proposed a joint freeze on military budgets. Already at the beginning of the conversation, he frankly said: "Between us, of course, there exist major disagreements. I don't mean [...] ideological disagreements, which are deep and perhaps even irreconcilable in character. After all, N.S. Khrushchev often says that we cannot convince him to become a capitalist just as he cannot convince us to become communists. But in the broader plan of interstate relations, we maintain contacts between ourselves, although we approach some problems from different positions. We believe it necessary to continue studying and discussing these problems and that we should not show impatience."

Notably, the American press commented favorably on Mikoyan's stay in the USA. R. Kennedy addressed Mikoyan with grateful letters. Particularly touching was Jacqueline's letter, which she wrote to Khrushchev during one of her last nights in the White House. Overall, Mikoyan's mission was accomplished. On November 27 at 4:55 PM Eastern Time, the plane with Soviet representatives departed from Andrews Air Force Base to Moscow.

The positive outcome of Mikoyan's trip to Washington became an important signal that the Presidium of the Central Committee agreed on November 29 to transfer to the American side photocopies of the correspondence with L.H. Oswald, including the puzzling letter of November 9. The next day, the correspondence was in Rusk's hands. The transfer was timely, as the day before, by Johnson's decision, the Presidential Commission for the Investigation of the Assassination of U.S. President J.F. Kennedy had been formed, better known as the "Warren Commission" after the authoritative American jurist who headed it, Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court Earl Warren.

Information about the transfer of correspondence with L.H. Oswald spread quite quickly through official and unofficial channels. Thus, several hours after the meeting with Rusk at a reception hosted by Atomic Energy Commission Chairman G. Seaborg in honor of the Chairman of the

USSR State Committee for the Use of Atomic Energy A.M. Petrosyants, Dobrynin spoke with L. Thompson. The latter not only thanked for the transfer of documents but also reported that one of the journalists had "somehow incomprehensibly" learned about the transfer of photocopies to the State Department...

[The document continues with details about the investigation, document transfers, and the creation of the JFK Presidential Library]

Archaeological Preface

The collection of documents "The Assassination of U.S. President J.F. Kennedy and Soviet-American Relations" was prepared as part of the ongoing project by the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History to publish documents from the "Cold War" period. The starting point of this project can be considered the preparation and publication under the editorship of Academician A.A. Fursenko of the fundamental publication "Presidium of the CC CPSU"...

[The preface continues with technical details about document collection, classification, and archival sources]

Record of Conversation between N.S. Khrushchev and U.S. Secretary of State D. Rusk August 5, 1963

Reception by Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR N.S. KHRUSHCHEV of U.S. Secretary of State D. RUSK

The Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR N.S. Khrushchev received in the Kremlin on August 5 the U.S. Secretary of State D. Rusk, who was accompanied by Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee of the U.S. Congress J.W. Fulbright, U.S. Representative to the UN A. Stevenson, Senators G.D. Aiken, L. Saltonstall, J.J. Sparkman, G.G. Humphrey and J.O. Pastore, Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency W.C. Foster, Chairman of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission G.T. Seaborg, Special Assistant to the Secretary of State L. Thompson, U.S. Representative to the 18-Nation Committee on Disarmament C. Stelle, Consultant to the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency A. Dean, Deputy Assistants to the Secretary of State R. Davis and J. Greenfield, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense W. Bundy, as well as U.S. Ambassador to the USSR F.D. Kohler.

N.S. Khrushchev says he is pleased to welcome D. Rusk and the accompanying persons who have arrived for a noble cause of interest to all humanity - the signing of the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water. Banning tests is, figuratively speaking, a medical prescription. If anyone is against this, such a person should undergo psychoanalysis, since they don't understand what is harmful to their health.

D. Rusk thanks for the warm reception given to him, as well as for the fact that N.S. Khrushchev postponed his vacation to be present at the signing of the Treaty.

He conveys warm greetings to N.S. Khrushchev from Kennedy and says he looks forward to conversations with N.S. Khrushchev and members of the Soviet government.

He notes that if everyone from the USA who wanted to be present at the signing had come to the Soviet Union, it would have been perceived as an invasion.

N.S. Khrushchev says that such "invasions" we welcome. He thanks D. Rusk for the kind words and expresses gratitude to Kennedy for his good wishes and for the correct assessment of this historic act.

This should be considered an undertaking taken in the right direction, creating a good atmosphere for solving major problems.

You and we represent antagonistic systems of states, we have often used and continue to use expressions of displeasure toward each other, and we should solve issues step by step. After all, even to fell an oak tree, one must first chop it and saw it. A mother, teaching her child to walk, doesn't push him in the back but teaches him to take small steps, otherwise he'll hurt his nose or even his head.

Each such act of international significance gradually strengthens trust between us, leads to creating a favorable atmosphere. We highly appreciate the actions of the President and the U.S. government, the Senate and all American citizens who support the Treaty.

In our time, war can no longer be an instrument for resolving disputed issues between states. Therefore, we must pay attention to developing the economy, culture, everything that meets human needs and brings joy. We must end the arms race, which leads to catastrophe.

Of course, our social systems are different and on this issue we cannot convince each other.

D. Rusk expresses his agreement that the systems are indeed different, however, there are common interests, for example, the desire for peace. Perhaps the Treaty will serve as a starting point for solving other problems. Both the USA and the Soviet Union have many internal tasks. For instance, the United States needs to build schools for 500,000 students and reconstruct a number of major cities. The Soviet government also has much to do, and we know, says D. Rusk, what care N.S. Khrushchev devotes to improving the welfare of the Soviet people.

N.S. Khrushchev says that indeed our systems are incompatible and even if we lay side by side in coffins, we would still occupy different positions. But we need to build a better life for the living, not coffins. We must do everything to stop the arms race, not rest on our laurels, move forward and forward. There are a number of issues that I have outlined to Harriman, says N.S. Khrushchev, as well as in public speeches. They should be discussed.

For us, the fundamental issue is the German question. Until we solve it, we will constantly, like hedgehogs, be pricking each other with needles. It's understandable that each side wants to solve it in its own way. We understand what a victory it would be for the U.S. President, Congress and supporters of capitalism if they managed to eliminate the GDR. Well, what if the

opposite happened? If the FRG became a socialist country and joined the socialist camp? However, in modern conditions, both are unrealistic, and this issue cannot be resolved without war.

We are experienced people and have fought ourselves. Isn't it time for us to seek acceptable solutions? We need to move the chariot of events from military rails to the rails of peace, that is, to solve issues in such a way as to fix the actually existing situation.

One should not be too attentive to Adenauer and other allies of yours who strive for one specific goal. We also have allies, continues N.S. Khrushchev. Unfortunately, some of them do not understand the real situation in the modern world. Time will pass and they will, of course, understand that they were wrong.

D. Rusk acknowledges that the German question is of fundamental importance for relations between our countries, and he, Rusk, would not want to exclude that some mutual understanding could be reached on it. The German question is important for the Soviet Union and the USA for historical reasons. The USA has twice participated in wars in Europe and is interested in the stability of the situation in this region.

D. Rusk further says that he is ready to discuss with Soviet representatives the question of possibilities for seeking mutually acceptable solutions during his stay in Moscow.

In D. Rusk's opinion, there has been some easing of the situation in the center of Europe recently. Relations have improved, particularly trade relations, between the FRG and countries lying to the east of it.