

Robert Kennedy Jr.'s 25 Truths on the Secret Negotiations between Fidel Castro and President Kennedy

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More than half a century ago, Fidel Castro and John F. Kennedy conducted secret negotiations aimed at normalizing relations between the United States and Cuba. Robert Kennedy Jr., nephew of the assassinated President, recounts these events and praises Obama's policy of rapprochement, which is making his uncle's "dream" a "reality(1)". [\[1\]](#)

1. After the October 1962 missile crisis, a conflict that almost led to a nuclear disaster, and its resolution that included the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba and US missiles from Turkey, President John F. Kennedy decided to undertake a process of normalization of relations with Cuba.

2. During his trip to the Soviet Union in 1962, Fidel Castro spoke at length with Nikita Khrushchev about Kennedy. According to the former president's nephew, "Castro returned to Cuba determined to find a path to reconciliation" with the United States.

3. In 1962, Kennedy commissioned James Donovan, a New York lawyer, and John Dolan, an advisor to Attorney General Robert Kennedy, to negotiate the release of the 1500 Bay of Pigs invaders held in Cuba. During his meeting with the Washington emissaries, Fidel Castro made clear his desire to normalize relations with the United States and maintain links based on sovereign equality, reciprocity and non-interference in internal affairs. "My father Robert and JFK were intensely curious about Castro and demanded detailed, highly personal, descriptions of the Cuban leader from both Donovan and Nolan. The US press had repeatedly caricatured Fidel as drunken, filthy, mercurial, violent and undisciplined. However, Nolan told them: "Our impression would not square with the commonly accepted image. Castro was never irritable, never drunk, never dirty." He and Donovan described the Cuban leader as worldly, witty, curious, well informed, impeccably groomed, and an engaging conversationalist."

4. The two visitors were also impressed by the popular support the revolutionary government enjoyed: "They confirmed the CIA's internal reports of Castro's overwhelming popularity with the Cuban people following their many trips with Castro [throughout the country] and after witnessing the spontaneous ovations he received as he entered baseball stadiums."

5. John F. Kennedy was aware of the Cuban people's desire for independence and dignity and "understood the source of the widespread resentment against the United States."

6. During his meeting with US journalist Lisa Howard, Fidel Castro expressed his "desire" to

come to a friendly understanding with the United States.

7. For his part, "JFK began thinking seriously about the resumption of relations with Castro. Any initiative in this direction, however, would find him navigating in troubled waters. The mere mention of détente with Fidel would have the effect of a political bombshell during the run-up to the presidential elections of 1964."

8. In September 1963, Kennedy charged William Attwood, former journalist and US diplomat to the United Nations with opening "secret negotiations with Castro."

9. The same month, President Kennedy established "another secret communications channel with Castro through French journalist Jean Daniel." Before traveling to Cuba to interview the Cuban Prime Minister, Daniel met with JFK in the White House, where he was charged with delivering a message to Castro.

10. "I think Kennedy is sincere. I also think that this expression of sincerity could have political significance today," Fidel Castro is said to have replied to Jean Daniel. "He still has the possibility of becoming, in the eyes of history, the United States' greatest President, the leader who finally understood that coexistence between capitalists and socialists is possible, even on the American continent. This would make him an even greater president than Lincoln."

11. Fidel Castro, in response to the criticisms of Kennedy who had denounced the alliance with Moscow, pointed out that the US hostility toward the island nation had begun well before Cuba's rapprochement with the Soviet Union and "well before the appearance of the pretext and alibi of communism."

12. Nevertheless, the CIA was resolutely opposed to any policy changes vis-à-vis Havana. "For the CIA, détente was nothing less than perfidious sedition." Adlai Stevenson, then US ambassador to the United Nations, warned President Kennedy: "Unfortunately, the CIA is still in charge of Cuba." In his opinion, the agency "would never allow a normalization of relations."

13. "The CIA was aware of JFK's secret contacts with Castro and sought to sabotage these efforts at achieving peace."

14. Thus, in April 1963, "CIA agents secretly sprayed a deadly poison on a wetsuit that was supposed to be offered to Castro by James Donovan and John Dolan, JFK's emissaries. In so doing they hoped to assassinate Castro and accuse JFK of the murder, thereby completely discrediting him and his peace efforts."

15. According to William Atwood, "the attitude of the CIA was to hell with the President it was pledged to serve."

16. "Many leaders of the Cuban exile community had expressed their disgust at the 'betrayal' of the White House, accusing JFK of engaging in 'coexistence' with Fidel Castro [...]. A small number of hard, bitter homicidal Castro haters now directed their hatred towards JFK and there is credible evidence that these men and their CIA handlers might have been involved in plots to assassinate him."

17. On April 18, 1963, José Miró Cardona, former Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government, but by then leader of the Cuban Revolutionary Council, an exile organization

created by the CIA, accused Kennedy of treason and warned of the consequences: "There is only one route to follow and we will follow it: violence."

18. "Santo Trafficante, the Mafia boss and Havana casino czar who had worked closely with the CIA in various anti-Castro assassination plots, informed his Cuban associates that JFK was about to be hit."

19. The day of John F. Kennedy's assassination, November 22, 1963, Fidel Castro was meeting with Jean Daniel, one of JFK's secret channels to Castro. Upon hearing the news, the Cuban leader turned to the French journalist and said, "Well, it's the end of your peace mission."

20. "After the death of JFK, Castro persistently pushed Lisa Howard, Adlai Stevenson, William Attwood and others to ask Lyndon Johnson, Kennedy's successor to resume the dialogue. Johnson ignored the requests and Castro eventually gave up."

21. Robert Kennedy, then US Attorney General, also pressured Johnson to continue the talks with Havana, however without success.

22. The brother of assassinated president also criticized the ban on US citizens traveling to Cuba: "The present travel restrictions are inconsistent with traditional American liberties."

23. Dean Rusk, then Secretary of State, made the decision to exclude Robert Kennedy, too favorable to an agreement with Cuba, from foreign policy discussions.

24. According to William Attwood, "if it were not for the murder, we probably would have opened negotiations and normalized relations with Cuba."

25. Fidel Castro paid tribute to JFK: "At the moment Kennedy was assassinated, he was changing his policy toward Cuba. To a certain extent, we were honored in having such a rival. He was an outstanding man."



[25 vérités de Robert Kennedy Jr. sur les négociations secrètes entre Fidel Castro et le Président Kennedy](#), June 1st, 2015

Translated from the French by Larry R. Oberg.

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[1] Robert Kennedy Jr., "JFK's Secret Negotiations with Fidel", *IPS*, January 2015. <http://www.ipsnews.net/2015/01/opinion-jfks-secret-negotiations-with-fidel/> (Site consulted April 21, 2015); Robert Kennedy, Jr, "Sabotaging U.S.-Cuba Détente in the Kennedy Era", *IPS*, January 6, 2015. <http://www.ipsnews.net/2015/01/opinion-sabotaging-u.s.-cuba-détente-in-the-kennedy-era/> (Site consulted April 21, 2015).

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