

Castro: Khrushchev Lied to JFK on Missiles

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Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev lied to President John F. Kennedy about the Soviet placement of nuclear missiles in Cuba 40 years ago, Cuban President Fidel Castro told ABCNEWS' Barbara Walters.

In an exclusive interview airing Friday night on 20/20, Castro also suggested that his own words were misinterpreted in Russian, perhaps heightening the tensions.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was a 13-day standoff in October 1962 that brought the United States and Soviet Union to the brink of nuclear war. Kennedy believed that Soviet nuclear warheads were being housed in Cuba, just 90 miles off the Florida coast, and he ordered a blockade to prevent ships from reaching Cuba.

Kennedy was trying to determine whether Khrushchev had already based strategic weapons in Cuba, while Khrushchev was deflecting Kennedy's questions with a semantic argument about whether the weapons were "offensive" or "defensive," the Cuban leader said.

"Kennedy was misled," Castro said. "That was a very big mistake on the part of Khrushchev ... One that we opposed vehemently."

Castro has recently declassified information related to the crisis and has openly questioned Khrushchev's actions. Castro said he believes the Soviet leader's initial proposal to establish a nuclear base in Cuba did not take into consideration political factors.

"Even though Nikita [Khrushchev] was a bold man, he was a courageous man ... and I can make criticisms of him ... of the mistakes he made. I have reflected a lot on that. ... He misled Kennedy. That was his main ... flaw," Castro told Walters.

Castro said he believes Khrushchev also lied to Cuba. "Believe me. We were not interested in becoming part of the whole contention between the two countries. We would not have accepted the missiles if they had said that it was related to the balance of power."

Said Castro: "We were very close to the nuclear war."

In the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, Castro offered condolences and cooperation to America.

Yet the Bush administration has maintained its hard-line stance against Castro. The State Department claims Castro has deliberately tried to undermine America's anti-terror efforts by providing false leads and has accused Cuba of developing biological weapons.

Castro told Walters the administration's accusations are "absolute lies," adding, "We would have to be mad, out of our minds" to try to manufacture biological weapons.

Castro said: "The historical truth is that thousands and thousands of terrorist actions have been conducted against our country, sabotages ... attempts against my life and, plans to have caused thousands of casualties." Castro also disagrees with the administration's attempts to rally support for an attack on Iraq. Castro, whose aides have visited Iraq, refused to weigh in on whether Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is a good leader, saying his views would simply "be pouring oil on the flame."