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Letter from Fidel Castro to Khrushchev

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Summary:

Fidel Castro explained to Khrushchev his decision to shoot down American planes operating in Cuban air space and reaffirmed his opposition to any inspection of Cuban territory.

Credits:

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Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

"Dear Comrade KHRUSHCHEV,
I have just received your letter.

Our government's position on the issues you raised is laid out in our declaration made today, the text of which is certainly familiar to you.

I want to explain to you a few things concerning the measures we have taken by way of anti-aircraft defense.

□You say: "Yesterday you shot down one such plane, although you had never shot down any of them before when they flew over your territory."

Earlier there had occurred random violations without definite military goals, so that those flights did not represent real dangers. Now it is quite a different matter. The danger has arisen of sudden attack upon definite military targets. We have thus decided that we should not sit back with our arms folded, since the suddenness of attack, in circumstances in which the radar system was still not operational and in which planes with impunity were flying with potentially aggressive goals, could lead to the complete annihilation of those targets.

We believed that after our expenditures of money and effort we should not allow that to happen, and that moreover it would weaken us from the moral as well as the military point of view.

With regard to this, Cuban armed forces have on 24 October of this year mobilize from their reserves 50 anti-aircraft batteries for the defense of these Soviet targets.

Since we did not want to run the risk of sudden attack, it was necessary to order the artillery to open fire.

The Soviet military leadership can provide you with additional information on how the plane was shot down.

In the past, violations of air space have been carried out secretly, without any attempt to justify them juridically.

But yesterday the US government tried as before to find juridical justification for the right to the violation of our air space at any hour of the day or night. We cannot accept this, since to do so would be a renunciation of our sovereign prerogatives. However, we agree to avoid incidents, especially now, since they could pose obstacles to negotiations. With this in mind, we will give the Cuban batteries instructions not to open fire, but only for the period in which negotiations are being conducted, and without altering our decision, published yesterday in the press, to defend our air space.

At the same time we should take into account the gravity of the fact that, in the current tense situation, incidents can arise by chance.

I want to inform you as well that we are generally opposed to the inspection of our territory.

I highly appreciate the efforts you have made to maintain peace, and we are in full agreement on the necessity of fighting for this goal. If we are successful in reaching a just, stable, and conclusive peace settlement, it will be an invaluable service to humanity.

With brotherly greetings,

Fidel CASTRO. "