Moscow, October 26, 1962

Dear Mrs. President,

I understand your concern for the security of the United States, Mr. President, because this is the primary duty of a President…

You wish to ensure the security of your country, and this is understandable. But Cuba, too, wants the same thing; all countries want to maintain their security. But how are we, the Soviet Union, our Government, to assess your actions which are expressed in the fact that you have surrounded the Soviet Union with military bases; surrounded our allies with military bases; placed military bases literally around our country; and stationed your missile armaments there? This is no secret… Your missiles are located in Britain, are located in Italy, and are aimed against us. Your missiles are located in Turkey.

You are disturbed over Cuba. You say that this disturbs you because it is 90 miles by sea from the coast of the United States of America. But…[you] have placed destructive missile weapons, which you call offensive, in Turkey, literally next to us…

I think it would be possible to end the controversy quickly and normalize the situation, and then the people could breathe more easily…

I therefore make this proposal: We are willing to remove from Cuba the means which you regard as offensive. We are willing to carry this out and to make this pledge in the United Nations. Your representatives will make a declaration to the effect that the United States...will remove its [missiles] from Turkey…

We, in making this pledge…promise…not to invade Turkey…

The United States Government will make a similar statement…regarding Cuba. It will declare that the United States will…not invade Cuba…

If you are agreeable to my proposal, Mr. President, then we would send our representatives to New York, to the United Nations, and would give them comprehensive instructions in order that an agreement may be reached more quickly. If you also select your people and give them the corresponding instructions, then this question can be quickly resolved.

Why would I like to do this? Because the whole world is now apprehensive and expects sensible actions of us. The greatest joy for all peoples would be the announcement of our agreement and of the eradication of the controversy that has arisen…

These are my proposals, Mr. President.

Respectfully yours,

N. Khrushchev
Washington, October 27, 1962

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I have read your letter of October 26th with great care and welcome the statement of your desire to seek a prompt solution to the problem. The first things that needs to be done, however, is for work to cease on offensive missile bases in Cuba and for all weapons systems in Cuba capable of offensive use to be rendered inoperable…

As I read your letter, the key elements of your proposals--which seem generally acceptable as I understand them--are as follows:

You would agree to remove these weapons systems from Cuba under appropriate United Nations observation and supervision; and undertake, with suitable safeguards, to halt the further introduction of such weapons systems in to Cuba.

We on our part, would agree--upon the establishment of adequate arrangements through the United Nations to ensure the carrying out and continuation of these commitments--(a) to remove promptly the [blockade] measures now in effect and (b) to give assurances against an invasion of Cuba. I am confident that other nations of the Western Hemisphere would be prepared to do likewise.

If you give your representatives similar instructions, there is no reason why we should not be able to complete these arrangements and announce them to the world within a couple of days…I would like to say again that the United States is very much interested in reducing tensions and halting the arms race; and if your letter signifies that you are prepared to discuss a detente affecting NATO and the Warsaw Pact, we are quite prepared to consider with our allies any useful proposals.

But the first ingredient, let me emphasize, is the cessation (end) of work on missile sites in Cuba and measures to render such weapons inoperable…The continuation of this threat…would surely lead to an intensified situation on the Cuban crisis and a grave risk to the peace of the world. For this reason I hope we can quickly agree along the lines outlined in this letter and in your letter of October 26th.

John F. Kennedy
Late tonight Robert Kennedy [President Kennedy’s Attorney General] invited me to come see him. We talked alone.

R. Kennedy said that…“the USA government is determined to get rid of those bases [in Cuba] – up to, in the extreme case, of bombing them, since, I repeat, they pose a great threat to the security of the USA. But in response to the bombing of these bases…the Soviet government will undoubtedly respond with the same against us, somewhere in Europe. A real war will begin, in which millions of Americans and Russians will die. We want to avoid that any way we can, I'm sure that the government of the USSR has the same wish…”

"In this regard," R. Kennedy said, "the president considers that a suitable basis for regulating the entire Cuban conflict might be the letter N.S. Khrushchev sent on October 26 and the letter in response from the President, which was sent off today to N.S. Khrushchev through the US Embassy in Moscow. The most important thing for us,” R. Kennedy stressed, "is to get as soon as possible the agreement of the Soviet government to halt further work on the construction of the missile bases in Cuba and take measures under international control that would make it impossible to use these weapons…”

"And what about Turkey?" I asked R. Kennedy.

"If that is the only obstacle to achieving the regulation I mentioned earlier, then the president doesn't see any unsurmountable difficulties in resolving this issue," replied R. Kennedy. "The greatest difficulty for the president is the public discussion of the issue of Turkey. Formally the deployment of missile bases in Turkey was done by a special decision of the NATO Council. To announce now a unilateral (one-sided) decision by the president of the USA to withdraw missile bases from Turkey – this would damage the entire structure of NATO and the US position as the leader of NATO, where, as the Soviet government knows very well, there are many arguments. In short, if such a decision were announced now it would seriously tear apart NATO."

“However, President Kennedy is ready to come to agree on that question with N.S. Khrushchev, too. I think that in order to withdraw these bases from Turkey…we need 4-5 months. This is the minimal amount of time necessary for the US government to do this, taking into account the procedures that exist within the NATO framework. On the whole Turkey issue if…Khrushchev agrees with what I’ve said, we can continue to exchange opinions between him and the president,” using him, R. Kennedy and the Soviet ambassador. “However, the president can’t say anything public in this regard about Turkey.” R. Kennedy said again. R. Kennedy then warned that his comments about Turkey are extremely confidential; besides him and his brother, only 2-3 people know about it in Washington.

"The president also asked N.S. Khrushchev to give him an answer (through the Soviet ambassador and R. Kennedy) if possible within the next day.”