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J.F.K. Jr. Visits Cuba on 35th Anniversary of Missile Crisis

By ROBERT D. McFADDEN

John F. Kennedy Jr., the editor of *George* magazine, has quietly traveled to Cuba on the 35th anniversary of the Cuban missile crisis, in which his father, the president, faced down Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in a nuclear confrontation. But the purpose of his visit was a mystery Friday.

"He is there as a journalist," Nancy Haberman, a spokeswoman for *George*, said, insisting that she had no other details. Others close to Kennedy, including his cousin Robert F. Kennedy Jr., declined to talk about the visit or its significance. U.S. and Cuban officials also said they had no information.

It was thus unclear whether Kennedy went on his own or at the behest of Cuba's government, whether an interview with President Fidel Castro had been arranged, or even whether the trip was intended to provide a scoop for *George* or to convey a larger significance on the anniversary of the crisis that had threatened nuclear war.

On Oct. 22, 1962, President Kennedy disclosed that the Soviet Union, trying to tip the strategic balance of power, had built nuclear missile bases in Cuba that could strike anywhere in the Americas. He ordered a naval blockade of Cuba and urged Khrushchev to recall the weapons and dismantle the bases.

Six days later, Khrushchev backed down, ordering ships carrying warheads to Cuba to turn back and agreeing to destroy the launch sites in return for a United States pledge of nonintervention in Cuban affairs. Soon afterward, Washington imposed an economic embargo against Cuba that still exists.

In Havana on Friday, journalists said Kennedy, accompanied by a male aide, had arrived Thursday and checked into the luxury Melia-Cohiba Hotel overlooking the Havana waterfront. After breakfast Friday, he left by a back door and eluded reporters and photographers. There were unconfirmed reports that he had gone to Trinidad, on the south-central coast, with Cuban officials. Another report said he planned to leave Cuba on Saturday.

There was wide speculation that Kennedy had gone for an interview with Castro — one that might mingle reflections on the missile crisis, an oft-expressed admiration for President Kennedy, as well as issues like human rights, Cuba's limited economic liberalization and the eventual succession of Castro's brother, Raul.

An interview with Castro could be a coup for *George*, founded by Kennedy in 1995 with a focus on political commentary. Kennedy, the editor in chief, does many of *George's* interviews.

Interviews with Castro are rare, but he spoke last year with Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Michael Kennedy, sons of Robert F. Kennedy. They had been invited to Cuba with a group of environmental safety advocates; Castro at the time reflected on the missile crisis, the Bay of Pigs invasion and President Kennedy's assassination.

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