



November 27, 1962
Minutes of Conversation with Carlos Rafael Rodriguez,
President of the INRA

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Summary:

Unger and Rodriguez discuss a plethora of topics regarding the Cuban Missile Crisis.

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The conversation took place on 27 November and lasted over three hours from 9:00pm until 12:00 midnight. The position of CRR could be largely summarized as follows:

Cuba did not ask for the missiles. The decision of the Soviet government regarding the installation of missiles and strategic weapons in Cuba was put before Cuba as an accomplished fact. Cuba's approval of these installations resulted from the conviction of the republic's authorities that the rocket launchers are a part of the global strategy plan of the socialist camp. Having expressed approval for the installation of the Soviet missiles, Cuba was aware of the enormous responsibility and the enormous risk, such as nuclear bombing of the island in case of a world conflict. However, the plans of the camp and the interests of the revolution took precedence.

Nobody from the Cuban leadership took into account any circumstances in which these weapons would be removed from Cuba. Therefore one of these two points applies: the mistake was either sending them [missiles] to Cuba, or the mistake was removing them. Most likely both decisions were flawed, but surely the latter one was.

The decision to remove [the missiles], formulated in Khrushchev's letter, was a total surprise. This message found Fidel Castro at breakfast on Sunday morning, 28 October. He initially did not want to believe it. Then suddenly, without communicating, but only with the co-workers who were at hand, he formulated a declaration about the five additional guarantees and immediately announced it.

The procedure adopted by the USSR is not to be tolerated and is not acceptable for a sovereign nation. The fact that the decision itself was not coordinated, as well as the consent for inspections without consultations with the Cuban government, has led to an open conflict between Moscow and Havana.

The USSR gave away a lot without getting anything in exchange. Retreating in the presence of imperialism is a flawed and futile policy. The guarantees, such as have been formulated by Kennedy, do not present any value and in fact do not guarantee anything. The announcement of the continuation of the policy of economic pressure and diversionary activities clearly attests to that. Even if one were to treat the decision to remove the missiles as saving peace, then giving away the bombers was absolutely unfounded.

During the secret part of the talks between Fidel and U Thant, the UN Secretary General stated in Havana that he forewarned the US president that in case of an assault on Cuba he would call a U.N. session, he would accuse the US of aggression and he would resign his post. After the missile pretext, U Thant reiterated his warning in case the US did not lift the blockade after the removal of the Soviet installations.

The Soviet concessions are thus one-sided and ineffective. This is the worst policy. The only correct one would be a response of force to force, and the USSR was capable of that. It [the USSR] did not do that because the fear of war is the main element of the policy in Europe and it leads to mistakes. But at the same time it was certain that the Americans were not ready to go all the way and risk a war. The version that [Soviet leader Nikita S.] Khrushchev decided to make concessions as a result of Fidel's sudden letter indicating that the Soviet missile bases would be bombed in a matter of hours is not true because Fidel [Castro]'s warning reached Khrushchev after the Soviet premier had already sent [US President John F.] Kennedy the letter expressing agreement to remove the missiles. An individual armed with a small caliber revolver who withdraws his weapon in the face of an enemy's bigger revolver cannot state that he saved the peace; for the threat

remains. The only correct response would be to introduce yet a bigger gun to the discussion. Armed conflict would not take place because in fact this was not what the US intended. The rickety and weak position of the USSR made possible the success of the United States' imperialistic policy.

An invasion or some other type of US aggression against Cuba has not taken place not because the US is taking into account the armed response of the USSR, but because it would be an enormous and politically costly military operation. Cuba is splendidly armed; it has a superb army and the landing operations would have to cost [the US] 60,000 American soldiers. It would be a very long-lasting loss of face politically and a definitive decline in US prestige.

The essence of our differences lies in different understandings over the issue of coexistence with imperialism and over the nature of the main conflict of the era. It [reference unclear – Trans.] cannot rely on constant concessions. The movements for protecting the peace did not develop in Latin America because that is impossible under conditions where an armed encounter is the only solution to conflicts between countries or where the masses are left to colonial dependence on the US. The point here is not that the masses in this hemisphere do not know the horrors of war, but that they know the horrors of imperialism. From this point of view, one should recognize the current solution of the Caribbean conflict as a delay in the revolutionary process in Latin America and a strengthening of the most reactionary circles, above all in the US, as well as in other countries on the continent.

On that score, [First Deputy Chairman of USSR Council of Ministers Anastas] Mikoyan's talks in Havana did not lead to anything. After the first two meetings and the exchange of opinions on the history of the most recent days, and after Mikoyan's explanation of the Soviet stance, it was jointly decided not to focus on an analysis of the past as there was no hope for agreement. The entire matter should be seen on a somewhat broader plane, that is, a flawed one in relation to the general lack of any Soviet policy toward colonial countries and the colonial revolution. The examples of the Congo, Guinea, Algeria and now Cuba testify that the USSR does not possess a proper conception of its assistance to the anti-imperialist revolutionary movements. At one of the international conferences not too long ago, [Vyacheslav] Molotov as the minister of foreign affairs included Cuba in the national territory of the United States. The current draft of the protocol by Mikoyan, that is, the joint Soviet-Cuban proposal (currently in the possession of U Thant) is an example of the ignorance of Soviet officials in the MFA² with reference to the Caribbean zone. Among other things, he treated the countries of Central America as entirely subject to the US and he assumed the right of the US to make decisions on their behalf without taking into consideration even the formal sovereignty of these nations.

The ending of the exchange of opinions with Mikoyan over the analysis of past mistakes and the degree of correctness of Soviet policy does not mean that the matter will not be returned to at an appropriate time. The plenipotentiary status and the position of Mikoyan, however, did not render possible a fruitful exchange of opinions on this topic. In relation to this the Havana talks exclusively referred to the future, the joint tactic in the UN, the content of the joint proposals, etc. In substance, the goal of Cuba's policy is to impose possibly an immediate discussion of Fidel's five points, where the first four are not debatable, and the fifth is a motion to remove the base at Guantanamo; the point of this minimal program is to begin negotiations on the matter.

The fact that the Soviet press, along with the press of other socialist countries, did not publish the part of Fidel's speech from 1 November in which he talked about the difference of opinions with the USSR made an unusually ill-fated impression on Cuba's leadership. This is a shameful policy of concealing the most serious matters from public opinion. It is hard for communists to criticize the Soviet leadership, but one cannot not do it if one wants to follow one's conscience and be in accord with history. The fact that the Polish press published this excerpt of Fidel's speech should be treated very positively. In this regard, one should not attach more importance to the distrust towards certain political aspects of the PUWP³ which one can observe in some circles of the ORI⁴ apparatus, mostly on the part of comrades who were recruited from the previous PSP⁵. These

young cadres, of a low ideological level, live by the old formulas. Despite, for example, critical opinion of its films or too great of a retraction in the area of agriculture policy, Poland deserves respect and admiration. One should contrast the level of [Michał] Kalecki, [Oskar] Lange, and [Adam] Schaff with the low theoretical level in the Soviet leadership. The fact that it was precisely Mikoyan who distinguished himself in the field of certain theoretical generalizations attests emphatically to the theoretical level of the present leadership of the USSR. In relation to this one should emphasize the exceptionally low and primitive level of [Boris] Ponomarev's article.

The main question currently boils down to how far the USSR is inclined to move and engage itself in the defense of Cuba. Thus, there is not so much a lack of American guarantees as of Soviet guarantees. The Soviet position in this matter is not known and Cuba is inclined to think that it is difficult to count on a Soviet decision to join [przystąpić] a war in defense of the island. This problem will be raised by Cuba at an appropriate time and in an appropriate forum.

Cuba is currently confronting an enormous task. One has to repair the consequences of the mistakes of Soviet policy both on Cuba's territory and on the territory of Latin America, and even Africa. There were two questions facing the revolutionary forces and their allies:

Can the USSR give economic assistance to countries that are so far away?

Is it [the USSR] able to defend them militarily?

As far as the first question is concerned, after years of complete fiascos and the humiliation of the USSR due to not fulfilling commercial contracts with Argentina, Brazil or Uruguay, Soviet assistance for Cuba is making and may make a full rehabilitation. In terms of the military, or rather war, it turned out that such assistance is not possible. This significantly weakens the revolutionary forces on this continent, because it is known that even if one comes to power following a peaceful path, let us say the party in Chile, a putsch from the right, from the military and oligarchic elements, is unavoidable. The incidents with Cuba showed that the party would then be defenseless. The only future lies exclusively in a very active Cuban policy. One has to respond to the aggressive policy of imperialism with a policy of an armed fight with imperialism. The example of the tumbling, and near abolition, of the Brazilian communist party of [Luís Carlos] Prestes testifies to where reformism leads. One should remember the report of [Finnish Communist Otto] Kuusinen at the VII Comintern Congress.

Thus, contrary to the rumors, the Second Havana Declaration is current and alive. It was badly understood. It does not signify the export of revolution but every possible assistance to existing and active revolutionary movements. The national bourgeoisie, not because Stalin said so at the XIX [CPSU] Congress but because it is rickety and afraid of socialist transformations, is not capable of and cannot lead revolutionary movements. Only the working class can lead the revolution.

Certain anti-Soviet moods undoubtedly have been born. Taking away weapons from Cuba had ill-fated psychological consequences and the view that Cuba is alone became very widespread. The consent of the Cuban government to the request by the Soviet authorities not to shoot down American aircraft that were inspecting the removal of the missile installations demoralized the Cuban army. Thus, currently the great work of restoring sympathy towards the USSR awaits the authorities of the republic. Obviously, the conduct of the Cuban press, which contains elements of acrimony or mockery directed at Mikoyan, does not contribute to the success of this action.

The articles of Victor Rico Galana, printed in the Mexican weekly, "Siempre", (the main article was delivered after a proper dispatch through the mediation of PPA⁶ – L.U.) are, in principle and according to the main lines, in accord with the views of the Cuban leadership. One may remark on certain details, but in principle they are correct. Personally attacking Khrushchev can be taken as unfortunate, even though one should not attach too much importance to it. One has to emphasize that Galan wrote his articles before contacting members of the Cuban leadership, and these are exactly the articles which enabled him to get access to Fidel and Dorticos (he has conducted an

interview with the president which will appear on Thursday, 29 November in “Siempre”).

The conversation ended after three hours due to fatigue and the late hour. At the request of the interviewer, C.R.R. agreed to come back to it in a few days. At the same time he announced that he would deliver to his interviewer the text of the article which C.R. wrote in 1950 on the topic of the Leninist conception of coexistence –an article that is entirely topical. C.R.R. is a member of the national leadership of ORI, he participated, in the absence of Blas Roca, as the only ex-member of the PSP in the talks with Mikoyan, and on 7 November this year he gave a speech at the October Academy.

Leopold Unger⁷

[1] INRA (Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria) – NIAR (the National Institute of Agrarian Reform).

[2] Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[3] PZPR (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza), the PUWP (the Polish United Workers' Party).

[4] ORI (Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas), the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations.

[5] PSP (Partido Socialista Popular), the Popular Socialist Party.

[6] PAP (Polska Agencja Prasowa) – PPA (the Polish Press Agency).

[7] Leopold Unger (1922 -2011) was a Polish journalist, columnist and essayist who left Poland in 1969, permanently settling in Brussels, Belgium.