

Record of Conversation between A.I. Mikoyan and Cdes. O. Dorticos, E. Guevara, E. Aragonés,
C.R. Rodriguez, and R. Roa at the Presidential Palace

November 18, 1962

After mutual greetings A.I. Mikoyan asked E. Guevara whether he went to the province of Pinar del Rio.

E. Guevara. I did not go to Pinar del Rio, it was not necessary. The situation is truly becoming less tense.

A.I. Mikoyan. Today I wanted to talk about the question of declaring Latin America a nuclear-free zone. You know about the Brazilian draft of the resolution. I want to note right away that this question mainly concerns the Cuban side. It only concerns us as members of the UN. The draft presented by the three is unacceptable because of the wording that it covers only the territory “under their¹ jurisdiction,” which would give the Americans a free hand. In our understanding, Ecuador’s amendment changes the situation for the better, because it contains the phrase “regardless of jurisdiction,” in which case Panama, Puerto Rico, and other territories with U.S. bases in Latin America would be included in the nuclear-free zone.

The second question is this. We think and it would be helpful if Cuba made a proposal at the UN according to which the great powers would have to commit to not have their nuclear weapons or delivery systems in Latin America. We practically promised to remove such weapons from Cuba. We should eliminate the possibility of Americans having nuclear weapons in Latin America as well. This UN resolution would be beneficial to Cuba.

Of course, we could also put in this proposal. However, it would be tactically advantageous if it was Cuba’s initiative.

Finally, the third question. It is hard to argue against a nuclear-free zone in Latin America. This is a liberal and pacifist measure. This principle is adopted for Africa. Although the position in Latin America is a bit different because of the proximity of the U.S. However, to extend the ban on means of delivery would not be favorable for Cuba, because this may include the MiG-21, some means of coastal defense, and more.

Of course, one could oppose the ban on means of delivery, but this proposal could be turned down. Perhaps the Cuban comrades could think of a way to phrase the proposal that would make it possible to accept the proposal without harming such things like the MiG-21 and some means of coastal defense, etc.

O. Dorticos. Cde. Mikoyan, do you know about the amendments made by our representative at the UN, Cde. Lechuga?

¹ Latin American countries’

A.I. Mikoyan. What I am about to say is not a reproach, but, frankly, nobody told me anything about Cde. Lechuga's amendments. You are very sensitive when it comes to you, but yourselves do not consult on matters of tactics.

Right now our common strategy at the UN is very important. We want to work together and think that we are allies, we need cooperation; Soviet troops are stationed in Cuba. Therefore, we must develop a joint strategy. What position should we take if your amendments are not accepted? You do not have to respond today, maybe tomorrow, but we need a joint strategic line. I think that representatives of other socialist countries will adhere to a common strategy, inform each other in order to ensure the unity of our actions. I think that it would not be good if representatives of socialist countries would become isolated when voting on this issue. Maybe we should abstain from voting on this question? We need to think it through and agree on a common strategy.

C.R. Rodriguez. Do you think that it is necessary to abstain?

A.I. Mikoyan. I think that during the vote on the draft resolution, point by point, we may vote against some points, on others we could abstain. On the whole resolution in general, it seems that we should abstain as well.

O. Dorticos. I think that is precisely how we should act.

A.I. Mikoyan. Did you get a message from your representative at the UN?

O. Dorticos. Yes. On Friday, November 16th, we received a telegram from Cde. Lechuga about his conversation with Kuznetsov.

E. Aragonés. More precisely, we received the telegram on Saturday, November 17th.

O. Dorticos. We already discussed the question and came to the same conclusion as you.

A.I. Mikoyan. Unfortunately, I have not had the opportunity to go over the materials you received from New York. Maybe we will get corresponding materials from Moscow soon.

If we have one line, then perhaps Minister Roa together with Cdes. Alekseyev and Bazykin could compare our positions on all points. If our representatives need new instructions, we will provide them. If not, we will keep the old guidelines. This question is essentially Cuban, but we want to act together with Cuba in this matter.

O. Dorticos. Thank you. Indeed, our minister could meet tomorrow with Alekseyev and Bazykin.

E. Guevara. When we discussed this issue, I noticed that in fact it has two aspects. We can consider the Cuban aspect of this issue. However, we are looking for a way to accept this draft because, it seems to me, the second aspect of this issue is important to the Soviet Union.

After all, the U.S. is improving long-range missiles. To this the Soviet Union is not indifferent. This aspect is less important to us, because Cuba is not far from the U.S. We should analyze this, I think.

A.I. Mikoyan. What significance could this have for us?

E. Guevara. The Americans are building a military base in Paraguay, even though these data are not sufficiently verified. They could create around 50 such bases in Latin America.

A.I. Mikoyan. These bases are not worrisome for us. The long-range missiles located on the territory of the Soviet Union are capable of destroying the United States. The presence of American bases in Latin American countries will have the significance to the extent that we will target our missiles at these bases from the territory of the Soviet Union in the same way, as we targeted American bases in Europe and Asia.

Of course, the existence of such bases in Latin America has tactical significance and affects the interests of Cuba, but we have enough missiles for all these bases. All our missile-producing factories are working at full capacity.

Due to the fact that we have important information from Moscow and we have questions related to the swift elimination of the Cuban missile crisis, which requires discussion, I would ask you to find out the whereabouts of Cde. Fidel. I think that the discussion of these questions and review of information should be done with his participation.

O. Dorticos. I have not been in contact with Cde. Fidel today, but I will try to get in touch with him right now. (After a telephone call). Comrade Fidel is not in the city, but he will be found and delivered your message, Cde. Mikoyan.

A.I. Mikoyan. Have there been flights over Cuba's territory recently?

E. Guevara. On Sunday, November 18th, there were only two flights at high altitudes.

A.I. Mikoyan. The Americans are not stupid. They are now afraid to fly low-level flights. Of course, they are not so much afraid of the Cuban police as the Soviet anti-aircraft missiles.

E. Guevara. Maybe so. Of course they are not afraid of our militia.

A.I. Mikoyan. Well, now we reached a consensus on this matter. Give me your hand.

E. Guevara. I am glad to shake your hand.

O. Dorticos. Do you recall, Cde. Mikoyan, that during your first visit here the reactionary youth tried to organize a provocation during the laying of the wreath at the José Martí monument. A person by the name of Salvat was involved in this provocation, and then he fled to

the United States. Recently, counter revolutionaries organized an attack from the sea on Hotel Sierra Maestra, and Salvat was on one of the boats.

E. Aragonés. Fewer and fewer reactionaries remain in Cuba. In 1963 we will achieve great success in the Party leadership. The selection of candidates for the party is in full swing.

A.I. Mikoyan. I think that in Cuba, the method of selection of candidates for the party meets the requirements of the situation. If the requirements were not high, everyone would want to be a member of the Party. The submission of nominations by the general assembly of workers provides an opportunity to screen the people fairly thoroughly. This way, you choose candidates who have distinguished themselves and are known by the people. They will be good communists.

O. Dorticos. The method of selecting party members that we are trying right now is producing interesting results. It is important to note that non-Party workers are also involved in this selection process.

A.I. Mikoyan. That is an interesting method, although it is not used in other parties.

O. Dorticos. Every revolution produces its own special methods and forms.

A.I. Mikoyan. The Cuban Revolution was ground-breaking. Now there are ground-breaking ways of selecting party members. It is quite possible that this experience may be of interest to other countries where the socialist revolution will be victorious. I am not only talking about Latin American countries, but other continents as well.

O. Dorticos. It is important to note that at the final stage, the Party makes the decision. The Party does not automatically accept everyone who is nominated by the workers. The Party has the final word.

A.I. Mikoyan. Yes, I was aware of this. This experience may have some international importance if it succeeds. The Cuban communists were the first to win on the continent, and their Party should be the example for the Communist Parties of Latin America.

Soviet communists put the interests of the International Communist Movement as a priority. We subordinate national interests to those of the international revolutionary movement as a whole.

During the key days of the crisis in the Caribbean, when we had information that the Americans would soon begin to attack Cuba, we made a statement in which we condemned the U.S.' plans of aggression. However, before we started to prepare the statement, we gave an order to Cde. Pavlov to bring all our troops in Cuba to combat readiness. Simultaneously, we gave orders to Cde. Malinovsky to prepare all our forces for the fight.

The blood of our soldiers was not spilled in Cuba, but they were prepared to fight to the last drop of blood in defense of the Cuban Revolution. Not everyone does this. True, the staff of the Chinese Embassy in Havana, or rather several members of the staff, did go to blood banks and donated several liters of blood, but this is just an empty demonstration. There are enough Cuban women ready to give blood if it becomes necessary.

Or for example, your newspapers write that the Cuban ambassador in Shanghai was given 38 thousand letters of support for Cuba. Did those letters help you very much?

If you want, we can ask our citizens and you will get 200 million letters in support of Cuba. But I do not think that this would do anything to strengthen Cuba's defense. The Chinese have outdone everyone in the numbers of letters of sympathy, the number of meetings; they juggle revolutionary phrases, calling on the Cubans to "destroy American imperialism by their own forces." But they do not provide any kind of practical assistance to Cuba, even within their means.

Why could they not, for example, take military action against Taiwan to distract the Americans? They could do it at least the same way they did it, for who knows what reason, in 1958. They could take over the Portuguese base in Macau, on Chinese territory near Canton, like Nehru did when he captured Goa. Thereby they dealt a blow to a U.S. ally in NATO. Finally, they could capture Hong Kong – an English base, which would be a blow against a U.S. NATO ally.

But thousands of Soviet people in Cuba were ready to give not just a few liters of their blood, but all their blood and lives to defend Cuba.

O. Dorticos. We never doubted that the Soviet people would bravely fight alongside the Cubans to defend the revolution. This would confirm the deep friendship that ties our peoples. We are sincerely grateful to the Soviet Union for this. This is exactly what Fidel said in his speech from November 1st.

A.I. Mikoyan. It is not a matter of gratitude. The fact is that we are brothers indeed.

O. Dorticos. Of course, we discussed our disagreements fraternally, as Marxist-Leninist parties should.

A.I. Mikoyan. Precisely.

But when you think about the Chinese position, you get a bitter feeling. They are not doing anything to help Cuba, just shouting. But they attack the people who are really helping Cuba. Your own comrades told me that the Chinese could have shipped rice ahead of schedule, especially given your economic difficulties. Instead, they are late in shipping, i.e. before the end of the year you will not get the promised rice from them. They may have some difficulty with

their ships, but we were able to send hundreds of ships to do everything we can to help Cuba. We spoke about this with Cde. Guevara.

O. Dorticos. I agree with you.

By the way, I would like to say regarding Cde. Guevara that he is not a factioneer, but a disciplined Party leader. It is true that he sometimes forgets about what needs to be done, but there is no misconduct from him.

E. Guevara. We should have proclaimed a new slogan: “We will get rice by our own forces.”

C.R. Rodriguez. This year we really will have the largest rice harvest.

O. Dorticos. C.R. Rodriguez is lucky.

C.R. Rodriguez. When there is not enough malanga, imperialism is to blame. However, when we get a good rice harvest, they say we are just lucky. I don't see a way out of this.

E. Guevara. Cde. Mikoyan, tell us please, where are your submarines located?

A.I. Mikoyan. A certain number of our submarines are located in the distance of 4 to 5 days travel. Some of them are nuclear. They could be autonomous for 6 to 8 months. They are armed with missiles similar to the “Polaris” missiles.

The problem here, comrades, is that the Caribbean Sea is too far from the Soviet Union. The balance of forces in the world is in our favor. In the Caribbean Sea the situation is different. In this sense the person who said about the importance of the geographical closeness is still right. Time will pass and the situation will change.

Despite all this, we give Cuba great help, while the Chinese are only shouting at the top of their lungs.

O. Dorticos. What connection do you see between our differences and the position of the Chinese Communist Party? There is no connection.

A.I. Mikoyan. We do not confuse or connect your line with the Chinese line. We consider you our true and good friends and such good Marxists that we cannot afford to identify your position with the Chinese.

But the other day a translator read to me a message from Xinhua [News Agency], which contained a call on Chen Yi and the Cubans to “mostly with their own forces to destroy American imperialism.”

We do not think that you can be susceptible to such calls. I speak to you as a comrade, without any hints. We respect your views and consider you Marxists-Leninists, but, speaking truthfully, we do not think that you can destroy American imperialism “on your own.”

O. Dorticos. This is quite understandable.

If you do not mind, Cde. Mikoyan, now we can go to the movie theater, where Cde. A. Guevara, the director of the Cuban Cinematic Arts and Film Industry, has prepared a movie for you called “Cuba 1958.”

A.I. Mikoyan. Thank you.

After the end of the film, Cde. Dorticos told A.I. Mikoyan that at 12 o’clock at night Fidel Castro arrived in Havana, but considering the late hour he asked to reschedule the meeting for the next day. A.I. Mikoyan did not object to this suggestion.

The conversation and movie took 4 hours.

Ambassador A.I. Alekseyev was present.

Recorded by Tikhmenev

[Signed]

[Source: From the personal archive of Sergo A. Mikoyan donated to the National Security Archive. Translated by Anna Melyakova for the National Security Archive]