



Woodrow Wilson
International
Center
for Scholars



COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT

WORKING PAPER #90

New Russian Evidence on Soviet- Cuban Relations, 1960-61

When Nikita Met Fidel, the Bay of Pigs, and Assassination Plotting

By James G. Hershberg, February 2019



THE COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT WORKING PAPER SERIES

Christian F. Ostermann and Charles Kraus, Series Editors

This paper is one of a series of Working Papers published by the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. Established in 1991 by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) disseminates new information and perspectives on the history of the Cold War as it emerges from previously inaccessible sources from all sides of the post-World War II superpower rivalry.

Among the activities undertaken by the Project to promote this aim are the [Wilson Center's Digital Archive](#); a periodic *Bulletin* and other publications to disseminate new findings, views, and activities pertaining to Cold War history; a fellowship program for historians to conduct archival research and study Cold War history in the United States; and international scholarly meetings, conferences, and seminars.

The CWIHP Working Paper series provides a speedy publication outlet for researchers who have gained access to newly-available archives and sources related to Cold War history and would like to share their results and analysis with a broad audience of academics, journalists, policymakers, and students. CWIHP especially welcomes submissions which use archival sources from outside of the United States; offer novel interpretations of well-known episodes in Cold War history; explore understudied events, issues, and personalities important to the Cold War; or improve understanding of the Cold War's legacies and political relevance in the present day.

This CWIHP Working Paper has been made possible by generous support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, other foundations, and private donations from individuals and corporations.

Cold War International History Project
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Telephone: (202) 691-4110
Fax: (202) 691-4001

coldwar@wilsoncenter.org
<http://www.cwihip.org>

THE COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT

WORKING PAPER SERIES

Christian F. Ostermann and Charles Kraus
Series Editors

1. **The Sino-Soviet Alliance and China's Entry into the Korean War**
Chen Jian
2. **Archival Research on the Cold War Era**
A Report from Budapest, Prague and Warsaw
P.J. Simmons
3. **Re-examining Soviet Policy Towards Germany during the Beria Interregnum**
James Richter
4. **Soviet Intelligence and the Cold War**
The 'Small' Committee of Information, 1952-53
Vladislav M. Zubok
5. **Ulbricht and the Concrete 'Rose'**
New Archival Evidence on the Dynamics of Soviet-East German Relations and the Berlin Crisis, 1958-61
Hope M. Harrison
6. **"Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis (1958-62)**
Vladislav M. Zubok
7. **Vietnamese Archives and Scholarship on the Cold War Period**
Two Reports
Mark Bradley and Robert K. Brigham
8. **Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-50**
New Evidence From Russian Archives
Kathryn Weathersby
9. **New Evidence on the Soviet Rejection of the Marshall Plan, 1947**
Two Reports
Scott D. Parrish and Mikhail M. Narinsky,
10. **'To Know Everything and To Report Everything Worth Knowing'**
Building the East German Police State, 1945-49
Norman M. Naimark
11. **The United States, the East German Uprising of 1953, and the Limits of Rollback**
Christian F. Ostermann

12. **Stalin, the Cold War, and the Division of China
A Multi-Archival Mystery**
Brian Murray
13. **The Big Three After World War II
New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post-War Relations with the United States and Great Britain**
Vladimir O. Pechatnov
14. **The 1952 Stalin Note Debate
Myth or Missed Opportunity for German Unification?**
Ruud van Dijk
15. **The 'Iran Crisis' of 1945-46
A View from the Russian Archives**
Natalia I. Yegorova
16. **The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics**
Csaba Bekes
17. **The Soviet-Polish Confrontation of October 1956
The Situation in the Polish Internal Security Corps**
Leszek W. Gluchowski
18. **Beijing and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965-68
New Evidence from Chinese Sources**
Qiang Zhai
19. **'Why Keep Such an Army?'
Khrushchev's Troop Reductions**
Matthew Evangelista
20. **The Russian Archives Seven Years After
'Purveyors of Sensations' or 'Shadows Cast to the Past'?**
Patricia K. Grimsted
21. **'On the Decision to Introduce Martial Law in Poland in 1981'
Two Historians Report to the Commission on Constitutional Oversight of the SEJM of the Republic of Poland**
Andrzej Paczkowski and Andrzej Werblan
22. **77 Conversations Between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-77**
Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Stein Tonnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung, and James G. Hershberg
23. **The Soviet Non-Invasion of Poland in 1980-81 and the End of the Cold War**
Vojtech Mastny

24. **Majales**
The Abortive Student Revolt in Czechoslovakia in 1956
John P. C. Matthews
25. **The Soviet-Chinese-Vietnamese Triangle in the 1970's**
The View from Moscow
Stephen J. Morris
26. **'The Allies are Pressing on You to Break Your Will...'**
Foreign Policy Correspondence between Stalin and Molotov and Other Politburo Members, September 1945-December 1946
Vladimir O. Pechatnov, translated by Vladimir Zubok
27. **Who Murdered 'Marigold'?**
New Evidence on the Mysterious Failure of Poland's Secret Initiative to Start U.S.-North Vietnamese Peace Talks, 1966
James G. Hershberg, with the assistance of L.W. Gluchowski
28. **The Merchants of the Kremlin**
The Economic Roots of Soviet Expansion in Hungary
Laszlo G. Borhi
29. **The End of the Soviet Uranium Gap**
The Soviet Uranium Agreements with Czechoslovakia and East Germany (1945/1953)
Rainer Karlsch and Zbynek Zeman
30. **'One Finger's Worth of Historical Events'**
New Russian and Chinese Evidence on the Sino-Soviet Alliance and Split, 1948-1959
David Wolff
31. **Revolution By Degrees**
Stalin's National-Front Strategy For Europe, 1941-1947
Eduard Mark
32. **The Warsaw Pact and Nuclear Nonproliferation, 1963-1965**
Douglas Selvage
33. **Conversations with Stalin on Questions of Political Economy**
Ethan Pollock
34. **Changes in Mao Zedong's Attitude towards the Indochina War, 1949-1973**
Yang Kuisong
35. **NATO in the Beholder's Eye: Soviet Perceptions and Policies, 1949-1956**
Vojtech Mastny
36. **Mao's Conversations with the Soviet Ambassador, 1953-55**
Paul Wingrove

37. **Gheorghiu-Dej and the Romanian Workers' Party
From de-Sovietization to the Emergence of National Communism**
Vladimir Tismaneanu
38. **The New Course in Hungary in 1953**
János Rainer
39. **'Should We Fear This?'**
Stalin and the Danger of War with America
Kathryn Weathersby
40. **The KGB in Afghanistan (English Edition)**
Vasilii Mitrokhin
41. **The Soviet Union, Hong Kong, and The Cold War, 1945-1970**
Michael Share
42. **The Soviet's Best Friend in Asia**
The Mongolian Dimension of the Sino-Soviet Split
Sergey Radchenko
43. **Romania and the Warsaw Pact, 1955-1989**
Denis Deletant and Mihail Ionescu
44. **North Korean 'Adventurism' and China's Long Shadow, 1966-1972**
Bernd Schaefer
45. **Poland and Vietnam, 1963**
New Evidence on Secret Communist Diplomacy and the 'Maneli Affairs'
Margaret Gnoinska
46. **Moscow's Surprise**
The Soviet-Israeli Alliance of 1947-1949
Laurent Rucker
47. **The Soviet Union and the North Korean Seizure of the USS Pueblo**
Evidence from Russian Archives
Sergey S. Radchenko
48. **1962**
The Eve of the Left Turn in China's Foreign Policy
Niu Jun
49. **The Quarrelling Brothers**
New Chinese Archives and a Reappraisal of the Sino-Soviet Split, 1959-1962
Dong Wang
50. **Rudolf Slansky**
His Trials and Trial
Igor Lukes

51. **Inside the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, and the Seizure of Kabul, December 1979**
Aleksandr Antonovich Lyakhovskiy
52. **'We Need Help from Outside'**
The North Korean Opposition Movement of 1956
James Person
53. **North Korea's Efforts to Acquire Nuclear Technology and Nuclear Weapons**
Evidence from Russian and Hungarian Archives
Balazs Szalontai and Sergey Radchenko
54. **Evolution and Revolution**
Sino-Hungarian Relations and the 1956 Revolution
Péter Vámos
55. **Cutting the Gordian Knot**
The Post-WWII Egyptian Quest for Arms and the 1955 Czechoslovak Arms Deal
Guy Laron
56. **Hope and Reality**
Poland and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1964-1989
Wanda Jarzabek
57. **A Chance for Peace?**
The Soviet Campaign to End the Cold War, 1953-1955
Geoffrey Roberts
58. **Exploiting and Securing the Open Border in Berlin**
The Western Secret Services, the Stasi, and the Second Berlin Crisis, 1958-1961
Paul Maddrell
59. **The Kuklinski Files and the Polish Crisis of 1980-1981**
An Analysis of the Newly Released CIA Documents on Ryszard Kuklinski
Mark Kramer
60. **The Blind Leading the Blind**
Soviet Advisors, Counter-insurgency and Nation Building in Afghanistan
Artemy Kalinovsky
61. **Arming Nonalignment**
Yugoslavia's Relations with Burma and the Cold War in Asia, 1950-1955
Jovan Cavoski
62. **The Soviet Pavilion at Brussels '58**
Convergence, Conversion, Critical Assimilation, or Transculturation?
Susan E. Reid

63. **The Interkit Story**
A Window into the Final Decades of the Sino-Soviet Relationship
James Hershberg, Sergey Radchenko, Péter Vámos, and David Wolff
64. **Beyond India**
The Utility of Sino-Pakistani Relations in Chinese Foreign Policy, 1962-1965
Chris Tang
65. **A Romanian Interkit?**
Soviet Active Measures and the Warsaw Pact 'Maverick,' 1965-1989
Larry L. Watts
66. **The 'Club of Politically Engaged Conformists'?**
The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Popular Opinion and the Crisis of Communism, 1956
Kevin McDermott and Vítězslav Sommer
67. **Ambivalent Alliance**
Chinese Policy towards Indonesia, 1960-1965
Taomo Zhou
68. **'Difficult to Draw a Balance Sheet'**
Ottawa Views the 1974 Canada-USSR Hockey Series
John Soares
69. **The (Inter-Communist) Cold War on Ice**
Soviet-Czechoslovak Ice Hockey Politics, 1967-1969
Oldřich Tůma, Mikhail Prozumenschikov, John Soares, and Mark Kramer
70. **Burning Secrets of the Corfu Channel Incident**
Ana Lalaj
71. **Fraternal Support**
The East German 'Stasi' and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War
Martin Grossheim
72. **Hope Denied**
The US Defeat of the 1965 Revolt in the Dominican Republic
Piero Gleijeses
73. **The Soviet-Vietnamese Intelligence Relationship during the Vietnam War**
Cooperation and Conflict
Merle L. Pribbenow II
74. **The Shah's Petro-Diplomacy with Ceaușescu**
Iran and Romania in the Era of Détente
Roham Alvandi and Eliza Gheorghe
75. **Warming Up a Cooling War**
An Introductory Guide on the CIAS and Other Globally Operating Anti-

communist Networks at the Beginning of the Cold War Decade of Détente
Torben Gülstorff

76. **Not at the Cost of China**
New Evidence Regarding US Proposals to Nehru for Joining the United Nations Security Council
Anton Harder
77. **Two Squadrons and their Pilots**
The First Syrian Request for the Deployment of Soviet Military Forces on its Territory, 1956
Yair Even
78. **China's False Allegations of the Use of Biological Weapons by the United States during the Korean War**
Milton Leitenberg
79. **Researching the History of the People's Republic of China**
Charles Kraus
80. **Showcasing the Chinese Version of Moderni-tea in Africa**
Tea Plantations and PRC Economic Aid to Guinea and Mali during the 1960s
Gregg Brazinsky
81. **Mediating the Vietnam War**
Romania and the First Trinh Signal, 1965-1966
Larry L. Watts
82. **Syngman Rhee**
Socialist
David P. Fields
83. **'When the Elephant Swallowed the Hedgehog'**
The Prague Spring & Indo-Soviet Relations, 1968"
Swapna Kona Nayudu
84. **The Return to War**
North Vietnamese Decision-Making, 1973-1975
George J. Veith and Merle Pribbenow
85. **China's Policy of Conciliation and Reduction (*Sanhe Yishao*) and its Impact on Boundary Negotiations and Settlements in the Early 1960s**
Eric Hyer
86. **Austria, German Unification, and European Integration: A Brief Historical Background**
Michael Gehler and Maximilian Graf
87. **Pointing to the Emerging Soviet Dead Ends**
NATO Analysis of the Soviet Economy, 1971-1982
Evanthis Hatzivassiliou

88. **The Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s**
An Ideological Victory and a Strategic Failure
Chenyi Wang
89. **The British Royal Air Force**
Operations over Laos against the Ho Chi Minh Trail, 1962
Priscilla Roberts
90. **New Russian Evidence on Soviet-Cuban Relations, 1960-61**
When Nikita Met Fidel, the Bay of Pigs, and Assassination Plotting
James G. Hershberg

SPECIAL WORKING PAPERS SERIES

1. **Soviet Deliberations during the Polish Crisis, 1980-1981**
Mark Kramer

New Russian Evidence on Soviet-Cuban Relations, 1960-61

When Nikita Met Fidel, the Bay of Pigs, and Assassination Plotting

James G. Hershberg

The forging of the Soviet-Cuban alliance in the years after Fidel Castro's revolution took power in January 1959, in sync with a deepening split between Washington and Havana, was one of the tectonic developments of the Cold War. Much evidence has emerged, especially on the Soviet side, on relations between the two communist countries and their charismatic leaders, Castro and Nikita Khrushchev, climaxing with the October 1962 missile crisis (and mostly secret Soviet-Cuban crisis which ensued in November).¹ Yet, much remains closed on the formative period of their alliance.

Although Cuban archives remain mostly inaccessible, despite some recent partial openings and considerable oral history testimony², far more has become available from the Soviet perspective. During a May 2015 trip to Moscow, with the help of friendly colleagues and staff, I was able to gain access to some pertinent materials in the archives of both the former Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee (CPSU CC) and the Russian foreign ministry.³

¹ Svetlana Savranskaya, ed., Sergo Mikoyan, *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis* (Washington, DC: Stanford University Press/Wilson Center Press, 2012). The *Cold War International History Project Bulletin (CWIHPB)* has published many translated Soviet documents from late 1962, around the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. See esp. issues no. 5 (Spring 1995), pp. 58-115, 159; no. 8/9 (Winter 1996/1997), pp. 270-354; no. 10 (March 1998), pp. 223-6; no. 11 (Winter 1998), pp. 251-62; no. 14/15 (Winter 2003-Spring 2004), pp. 385-98; no. 17/18 (Fall 2012), pp. 299-348.

² See, e.g., James G. Blight, Bruce J. Allyn, and David A. Welch, *Cuba on the Brink: Castro, the Missile Crisis, and the Soviet Collapse* (New York: Pantheon, 1993), and for translations of Cuban documents released at a 2002 conference in Havana, see *CWIHPB* no. 17/18 (Fall 2012), pp. 135-56.

³ For assistance related to this Moscow trip the author thanks, in particular, the staffs at the Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation (*Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii*; AVP RF) and Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii*; RGANI), especially RGANI deputy director Mikhail Prozumenschikov; at the Institute of World History, Mikhail Lipkin (director) and Stepan Eliseev; Prof. Robert Edelman (Univ. of California San Diego) and Prof. C.J. Young (Cambridge Univ.) for inviting me to the "Sports and the Cold War" conference in Moscow that enabled the research; Christian F. Ostermann, Gary Goldberg, and Laura Deal of the Wilson Center for facilitating the translation of the AVP RF documents; and Svetlana Savranskaya (National Security Archive) for translating the Khrushchev-Castro memcon.

Reproduced below are translated documents, or excerpts, regarding three aspects of Soviet-Cuban relations in 1960-61, after diplomatic ties between Moscow and Havana were formally restored and a Soviet ambassador, Sergey M. Kudryavtsev, arrived in the Cuban capital in the summer of 1960. The first selection concerns the first meeting between Castro and Khrushchev, which took place in New York City on 20 September, 1960, during the annual session of the United Nations General Assembly. The second selection contains conversations between Kudryavtsev and Cuban leaders, especially Fidel Castro, during the run-up to, and aftermath of, the April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. And the third presents a glimpse into the Soviet-Cuban dialogue on the explosive topic of US assassination plotting against Castro.

When Nikita Met Fidel, and Fidel Met Nikita—New York City, September 1960

One of the most iconic moments in Fidel Castro's long career came in September 1960, less than two years after the revolution he led seized power in Havana. In New York City to attend the annual session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Cuban prime minister left his mid-town Manhattan hotel in a huff after a dispute with its management. After threatening to pitch a tent, in a Sierra Maestra-style guerrilla encampment, outside the UN headquarters, or perhaps in Central Park—he relocated, in a gesture of solidarity with African-Americans he declared were oppressed by capitalism, colonialism, and racism, to the Hotel Theresa in Harlem. There, on 20 September, he welcomed Soviet leader Nikita Sergeyeich Khrushchev, who embraced him, figuratively and literally, in what was universally described as a "bear hug"—symbolizing the creation of a sturdy Soviet-Cuban political, economic, and military alliance, and the island's incorporation into the communist world (what was still then known as the "Sino-Soviet bloc," despite increasing evidence of friction between Khrushchev's Moscow and Mao Zedong's Beijing).

As Castro biographer Tad Szulc observed, the "New York act" performed by the cigar-chomping *barbudo* and the grizzled Ukrainian peasant was "magnificent political theatre, leaving no doubt that Cuba had exchanged the American influence sphere for that of the Soviets, with all its attendant political implications in the Western Hemisphere and in East-West

relations.”⁴ By ditching the Shelbourne Hotel on Lexington Avenue and trooping up to a comparatively dilapidated residential hotel in northern Manhattan’s predominantly “Negro” district, where anti-authority, militant civil rights sentiment was rising, to the evident discomfort of their US-supplied security details, Castro and then Khrushchev dramatized their new revolutionary alignment, proclaimed solidarity with non-white, colonized and/or de-colonizing, anti-imperialist peoples, and jubilantly and defiantly thumbed their noses at their (North) American hosts. Their raucous rendezvous in Harlem, which foreshadowed the partnership that would bring the world to the brink of thermonuclear war two years later, instantly entered the lore of the Cold War, the two leaders’ already larger-than-life biographies, and the neighborhood itself, where it is still remembered as an electric moment.⁵

Besides a milestone in international relations, the highly publicized Castro-Khrushchev encounter also intersected with US domestic politics, coinciding with the presidential election campaign between Republican Richard M. Nixon and Democrat John F. Kennedy, in which disputes over who would be a more effective contender against Soviet (and Cuban) communism played a major role. For many years, historians have been able to rely only on the retrospective accounts of both Castro and Khrushchev, as reproduced in their memoirs (and included below). The new record, while presenting no great revelations, adds to our understanding of the first encounter between these titans of 20th-century cold war and communist history.

Khrushchev’s Recollections of Meeting Fidel Castro

Khrushchev recalled his encounter with Fidel Castro in his tape-recorded recollections, which he dictated at his dacha after he was ousted from the Kremlin in October 1964, and that were then smuggled out to the West. Presented first is the edited version, which appeared in the first volume of memoirs published in 1970; and second is the rawer, slightly longer version, translated slightly differently, which appeared in the 2007 publication of the verbatim tape-recorded memoirs:

⁴ Tad Szulc, *Fidel: A Critical Portrait* (New York: Morrow, 1986), p. 562.

⁵ For accounts of Castro’s move to the Hotel Theresa and meeting with Khrushchev, see, e.g., Szulc, *Fidel*, 580-83, and Robert E. Quirk, *Fidel Castro* (New York: Norton & Co., 1993), pp. 335 ff.

From *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1974), pp. 477-479.

Ours was not the only delegation that received unfriendly treatment at the hands of the Americans. There were also the Cubans. The Americans committed a hostile act against the delegation headed by Fidel Castro. The Cubans had rented rooms in some hotel, but they were thrown out. Of course, the US government pretended it was a private affair between the Cubans and the hotel proprietor and refused to interfere. I was told that Castro was furious and that, as a former guerrilla, he was threatening to pitch a tent in a square near the UN building. Then, out of the blue, he received an invitation from the proprietor of a hotel in Harlem, so Castro decided to establish himself there.

When we learned about this outrage which had been committed against the Cuban delegation, we were indignant. We decided that I should go to the hotel in Harlem and shake Castro's hand as a gesture of sympathy and respect. Not that Castro needed anyone to feel sorry for him. He is a man of strong will. He understood perfectly that he was being harassed as part of the reaction of American monopolies to the policies which his government had been conducting in Cuba since he seized power. I asked one of our people to telephone Castro right away and, if he wasn't at the hotel, to leave word that Khrushchev would like to visit him as soon as possible. The word came back that Castro thanked me for calling and offered to come to us instead. I took this to mean that he thought because the Soviet Union is a great country and his was a young revolutionary government representing a small country, it would be proper for him to pay a visit to me first, then later I could make a return call on him.

I felt it would be better for me to make the first visit, thereby emphasizing our solidarity with Cuba, especially in light of the indignation and discrimination they were being subjected to. There was another reason for my going to see him at his headquarters. The Cuban delegation was in Harlem and the owner of the hotel was a Negro. By going to a Negro hotel in a Negro district, we would be making a double demonstration: against the discriminatory policies of the United States of America toward Negroes as well as toward Cuba.

"Call Castro and tell him I'm on my way," I ordered. I told my bodyguard that we were going to drive to Harlem. My security people immediately called up the American head of my police escort. (I knew him already from my previous trip to the US.) He said that I might encounter some unpleasantness in Harlem and tried to persuade me not to go there. This made me all the more determined. I didn't want the newspapers writing that Khrushchev was afraid of Negroes, afraid of being physically abused in Harlem. So I got into a car and went straight to Castro's hotel.

Naturally, the journalists got there first. They know everything. I don't know where they found out. Maybe from the police, maybe from our own people. I couldn't get away from them. In addition to the newsmen and photographers and movie cameramen, an enormous number of Negroes had gathered around.

Castro was waiting for us at the entrance. This was my first meeting with him. He made a deep impression on me. He was a very tall man with a beard, and his face was both pleasant and tough at the same time. His eyes sparkled with kindness toward his friends. We greeted each other by embracing. When I say "embrace," I'm using the word in a rather specialized way. You have to take into consideration my height as opposed to Castro's. He bent down and enveloped me with his whole body. While I'm fairly broad abeam, he wasn't so thin either, especially for his age.

We went to his suite. As we made our way through the hotel, I could see right away that, except for Negroes, no one would live in a place like this. It was old and poor, and the air was thick and heavy. The rooms hadn't been cleaned. The linen on the beds obviously wasn't fresh, and there was a certain odor you find in overcrowded places with bad ventilation.

Castro expressed his pleasure at my visit, and I repeated my sentiments of solidarity and approval of his policy. The meeting was very brief; we exchanged only a few sentences. We said good-bye, and I went back to my residence.

You can imagine the uproar this episode caused in the American press and elsewhere as well.

The next day we arrived at the General Assembly building before the session began. A few minutes later Castro's delegation appeared. I suggested that we go greet the Cubans, and my comrades agreed. We made our way from one end of the hall to the other, and Castro and I embraced demonstrably. We wanted everyone to know that fraternal relations were forming between our country and Cuba. The democratic press welcomed this development, while the bourgeois press reflected the interests of aggressive circles in capitalist countries by picking Fidel and me to pieces. But this was as it should be. I always say, if our friends praise us and our enemies heap abuse on us, it means we are conducting policy along correct class lines.

From Sergei Khrushchev, ed., *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, vol. 3: Statesman [1953-1964]* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), pp. 270-272:

I don't remember what day it was during our visit to the United Nations, but we learned that the delegation from Cuba had arrived, headed by Fidel Castro. The Americans took an insulting attitude toward this delegation, and they did this the way they really know how to in America. The Cuban delegation was expelled from its hotel. Of course, it was supposedly the hotel owner who made this decision, as though it were simply a private matter, so that the government did not have to bear any responsibility, as though it had not interfered. I was told that Castro was raging and thundering, threatening that if shelter was not found for his delegation, that as a former guerrilla fighter he would put up a tent out on the open square near the UN building and live there. Then the owner of a hotel in Harlem offered accommodations for the Cuban delegation. We were furious when we heard about this swinish behavior toward the Cuban delegation. After consulting with the members of our delegation, I proposed that we make a trip to the new hotel and shake Fidel's hand and express our respect and sympathy. No, not sympathy but indignation. He was a man of strong will and hardly needed sympathy, but he understood that this was a response by the American reactionaries to the policy being pursued by the revolutionary Cuban government. He responded proudly because for him it was not a humiliation but a result of the fight he was putting up to oppose discrimination against his country. I asked our representatives to get in touch with Castro by phone and let him know that Khrushchev wanted to make a visit to him immediately. That was a common practice. Many delegations were visiting one another. I was told that Fidel was grateful for our concern, but he himself wanted to come visit us. He evidently thought that since the Soviet Union was a great country and Cuba a small revolutionary island, he should come visit us first and only after that should the representative of the USSR make a return visit to him. Then I asked that he be informed that Khrushchev had already left, because we thought we should be the first to make a visit. This was to emphasize our solidarity with Cuba and our indignation at the discrimination with which Cuba was being treated. There was a second consideration. The Cuban delegation was now being housed in Harlem, a Black district, and the owner of the hotel was African American. The fact that the Cubans were living in Harlem was impressive to Black people, and a visit by Khrushchev to that predominantly Black part of the city for a visit to the Cuban delegation would in general be a demonstrative display of our position.

I informed our bodyguards that we were going. Our guards immediately got in touch with the head of the police detachment assigned to us. Police on motorcycles accompanied us with an extraordinary amount of noise. There were quite a few of them. Our comrades told me that the head of the American police guarding us, a man

I knew personally (because he had also been a guard when I was a guest of President Eisenhower [in September 1959]), was asking that I not go there, because unpleasant incidents could happen in that neighborhood, and he was talking against this visit in every possible way. That convinced me more than ever of the necessity to make this visit; otherwise the journalists would be calling in their reports all over America that Khrushchev was afraid of Blacks or that supposedly there was going to be a demonstration there and perhaps he would suffer some physical injury. Officially I had the right to make the trip, since Harlem was within the limits in which we were allowed free movement, and I asked that the head of the group of police be informed that I was exercising my rights and was going to make this trip, and if he did not want to go there, he did not have to. Of course, he did go. I was given a car and we set off for the hotel where Castro was staying. A huge crowd of people had gathered there, primarily journalists. I don't know what methods they used to find out about everything, but it was impossible to hide from them anywhere. They were present outside our residence, on constant duty, and they followed the police. When I arrived in Harlem the whole area was jammed full of cars. And since so many photographers, movie cameramen, and journalists had arrived, other people also were drawn there. A huge number of the local Black population also gathered. I will not talk here about the external appearance of that part of New York. It has been described perfectly well by others, and people who are interested in America have a clear picture of it.

When we arrived at the hotel, Castro and his comrades were waiting for us by the entrance. This was the first time I had ever seen him in person, and he made a powerful impression on me: a man of great height with a black beard and a pleasant, stern face, which was lit up by a kind of goodness. His face simply glowed with it and it sparkled in his eyes. We enclosed each other in an embrace. (I use the term "enclose" provisionally, keeping in mind my height in contrast to Castro's.) He bent over me as though covering my body with his. Although my dimensions were somewhat wider, his height overpowered everything. Besides, he was a solidly built man for his height. Then we immediately went up to his hotel rooms.

When I entered the hotel I became aware immediately that no one lived there but Blacks. It was an old, rundown building. The air was heavy and stale. Apparently the furniture and the bedclothes had not been aired out sufficiently, and perhaps they were not, as we say, of the first degree of freshness--or even the second. We went into his rooms and exchanged a few remarks. He expressed his pleasure at my visit, and I spoke words of solidarity and approval of his policies. Our meeting was brief; actually, that was all there was to it. I immediately returned to my residence. You can imagine what an uproar was raised in the American press! Not only the American press. The incident echoed widely throughout the world. The rudeness and discrimination toward the Cuban delegation was noted, as well as the demonstrative visit to Castro by the Soviet delegation. And of course our fraternal embrace.

On the next day we arrived at the United Nations before the opening of the session. Then the Cuban delegation arrived. It was seated a fairly good distance away from us. I suggested that we go over and say hello. We demonstratively walked across the entire meeting hall and greeted each other. Castro and I embraced again, showing that fraternal relations were being established between us and that we were treating Cuba as a friend. We emphasized our unity on questions of struggle against imperialism and colonialism and against aggression by the imperialist powers. This demonstrative action came off well. It too was echoed in the press in an appropriate way. The press reactions varied. The democratic press welcomed this and the capitalist press picked us apart. But that too was an expression of the capitalists' attitude toward us and also worked in our favor.

Fidel Castro's Recollections of Meeting Khrushchev

I was not able to find any detailed account by Fidel Castro of his first encounter of Khrushchev—for example, he does not mention it in a massive “spoken autobiography” published in 2006—although he has undoubtedly discussed it in his countless public statements and interviews.⁶ The most substantive description located was during an oral history conference on the Cuban Missile Crisis in Havana in January 1992, a week after the Soviet Union disappeared:

Fidel Castro comments, Cuban Missile Crisis conference, Havana, January 1992, in James G. Blight, Bruce J. Allyn, and David A. Welch, *Cuba on the Brink* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, Inc., 1993, 2002), pp. 192-93:

Let me start by saying that in analyzing a period such as this one, we must also analyze or review the participation of several personalities in it. Two of them are two very important personalities of our time: Khrushchev and Kennedy. They were two people for whom I feel great respect. In the case of Khrushchev, for the gestures of friendship he had for our country in very difficult times, I've always regarded him with affection. I met him personally. I remember when, immediately after a meeting of heads of state in the United Nations, he went to visit me at the Theresa Hotel, where I had virtually been confined at the time due to the enormous hostility directed at me there. I was practically ejected from my original hotel. I had two options: either to get and set up a tent on the United Nations patio, or to go to the Theresa Hotel. There I was welcomed, and I received the visits of many heads of state. Khrushchev among them. That was a great honor; he behaved toward us extremely well. Anytime or every time that we requested anything from him, he did everything possible to try to meet our requests. I had the feeling that I was rather dealing with a peasant—a very

⁶ Fidel Castro and Ignacio Ramonet, *My Life: A Spoken Autobiography* (New York: Scribner, 2006, 2007).

wise peasant—but, more than that, an intelligent man—a very intelligent man—an audacious man, and a courageous man. Those were my personal impressions of Khrushchev.

Soviet-Cuban Consultations in the Run-Up to the Khrushchev-Castro Meeting

To lay the groundwork for the Castro-Khrushchev encounter, the Soviet ambassador in Havana, Sergey Kudryavtsev, spoke with Cuban leaders in the days before the Cuban leader left for New York. From the Russian foreign ministry archives in Moscow, records of conversation were located with, first, Foreign Minister Raúl Roa García, and the next day, with Fidel Castro, at which Soviet-Cuban coordination in New York was discussed. Notably, Roa described Fidel Castro as “very hot-tempered and mercurial, like all Cubans,” in explaining that it was frequently necessary to advise him so he acted “more discreetly and cautiously.” Both Roa and Castro looked forward to meeting their Soviet counterparts (foreign minister Andrei Gromyko and Khrushchev) and promised full cooperation in New York. The Cuban leader promised, in particular, to endorse Soviet positions on international affairs, especially disarmament and Berlin, in his own speech. (Note: The documents were not fully transcribed, so only extensive excerpts are presented below. Also, all records of conversation between Kudryavtsev and Cuban leaders were from the “ambassador’s journal,” not the ciphred telegrams reporting such talks which the Soviet Embassy in Havana sent to the foreign ministry in Moscow; those, unfortunately, apparently remain classified.)

S. Kudryavtsev to A.F. Dobrynin, ‘Record of Conversation with Raúl Roa, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 14 September 1960’

[Source: AVP RF, f. 0104, op. 16, p. 116, d. 4, ll. 157-160. Obtained by James G. Hershberg and translated by Gary Goldberg. Accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/176347>.]

Secret Copy № 1
7 November 1960
Outgoing № 97

The Soviet Embassy
in the Republic of Cuba

Havana

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
with Raul Roa, Minister of Foreign Affairs
14 September 1960

In accordance with instructions [I] had I visited Raul Roa and informed him that N. S. Khrushchev had departed for New York on the steamship Baltika on 9 September and would arrive in the USA on 19 September.

I told R. Roa that Cde. N. S. Khrushchev will of course be glad to meet with him in New York and to discuss any questions which are of interest to R. Roa.

Then I said that the Soviet delegation will be in constant contact with the Cuban delegation on all the questions of the General Assembly agenda and [will] inform it of our position.

Thanking me, Roa said that he would immediately inform Fidel Castro, who is outside Havana right now, of what [I] had said. R. Roa continued, F. Castro and the entire Cuban delegation intend to arrive in New York on 18 September. F. Castro will not delay in meeting N. S. Khrushchev as soon as this is possible for the head of the Soviet government. The Cuban delegation will maintain the closest contact with the Soviet delegation on all the questions and he, Raul Roa, would like to meet A. A. Gromyko as soon as he arrives in New York.

In reply to this I said that, of course, this could be done both through our UN Mission as well as through the Soviet delegation at the General Assembly.

I further told Raul Roa that our position on the question of disarmament is based on the same positions which were presented by N. S. Khrushchev in speeches at the UN General Assembly in 1959, and those proposals which were submitted by the Soviet government at the Committee of 10 Countries in Geneva.

R. Roa said in reply that the information I had reported to him about the position of the Soviet delegation on disarmament would help the Cuban government develop its own position on this question. Right now, continued R. Roa, we are preparing a draft of a speech for F. Castro and therefore your information will give us substantial assistance.

R. Roa continued, F. Castro intends to limit his stay in New York as much as possible. He prefers to leave New York immediately after he makes his speech there. It seems to me, R. Roa stressed, that the speech is not the main thing, although an important place. In my view, it would be important if F. Castro did not limit himself to

just making the speech and used his stay in New York to establish contacts with the heads of government of other countries, and to inform them in more detail about the development of the Cuban revolution and the problems which Cuba encounters today. We have tried to convince F. Castro of this, but it seems to me that this was not exactly successful. R. Roa stressed, I personally think that F. Castro's stay and his establishment of contacts with the heads of government of other countries would help us obtain the support of a number of countries in your [sic--trans.] struggle against the US. In any event, F. Castro's trip to the General Assembly will be important in all respects, not only for him personally, but also for Cuba as a whole. For F. Castro this trip will be a unique experience [shkola] for the formation of an important state figure. R. Roa noted, F. Castro is very hot-tempered and mercurial, like all Cubans, and it is often necessary to give him advice so that he acts more discreetly and cautiously.

<...>

[the rest of the conversations concerned other topics, such as the Dominican question; the restoration of relations with Venezuela; and Tito's trip to the UN General Assembly and the cooling of Yugoslav-Cuban relations--trans.]

SOVIET AMBASSADOR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA
S. KUDRYAVTSEV

[From the Journal of S.M. Kudryavtsev, 'Record of a Conversation with Prime Minister of Cuba Fidel Castro'](#)

[Source: AVP RF, F. 0104, Op. 16, P. 116, D. 4, ll. 161-165. Obtained by James G. Hershberg and translated by Gary Goldberg. Accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/177858>.]

Secret. Copy № 2
7 November 1960
Outgoing № 96

from the journal of
S. M. KUDRYAVTSEV

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
with Prime Minister of Cuba Fidel Castro

15 September 1960

In accordance with instructions I had I visited F. Castro and informed him that N. S. Khrushchev had left for New York on 9 September on the steamship Baltika and would arrive in the US on 19 September.

I told Fidel Castro that Cde. N. S. Khrushchev would of course be glad to meet with him in New York and discuss any questions of interest to F. Castro.

Then I said that the Soviet delegation would be in constant contact with the Cuban delegation about all questions of the General Assembly agenda and would inform it of our position.

F. Castro said in reply that he would be very glad to meet with N. S. Khrushchev and was quite thankful for our readiness to help him during the UN General Assembly session. F. Castro continued, it is the first time I have had to go to such an Assembly, and I still do not know how to act. Therefore N. S. Khrushchev's advice will be very useful. I would like to know how [I] can meet N. S. Khrushchev in such a situation where there might be the opportunity to talk about all questions of interest to Cuba. Personally, F. Castro continued, I don't know at all where and how such contacts between heads of delegations and the delegations themselves are accomplished.

I said in reply that he ought not worry about this. A more convenient place for a meeting with N. S. Khrushchev can be arranged between the delegations as soon as he, F. Castro, arrives in New York. Considering the questions of F. Castro about the work of the General Assembly, I told him in detail about the procedure and means of establishing the necessary working contacts on questions being discussed between the delegations.

F. Castro stressed that he attaches very great importance to the current session of the General Assembly. N. S. Khrushchev gave this session a completely unusual nature. F. Castro continued, I am personally very grateful to him that, as a result of the initiative he has exhibited to me, a representative of a small country fighting to preserve its independence, an opportunity has been presented to this high forum to expose to the entire world the aggressive designs of the American imperialists. You know that I am not able to speak from a written text. Therefore I am thinking out the plan of a speech, and I am selecting individual facts and arguments. [Antonio] Nunez Jimenez is giving me much help in this. F. Castro noted further, I want to devote the main attention in my speech to exposing the aggressive nature of American imperialism and address an appeal to the peoples of the world to protect Cuba from the threat of aggression from the USA.

Having said that he would like to support the proposals of the Soviet Union on the main international problems in his speech, F. Castro asked me in what terms the Soviet delegation would raise the question of disarmament.

I said in reply to this that our position on the question of disarmament is based on the same positions which were described by N. S. Khrushchev's speech at the UN General Assembly in 1959, and those proposals which were introduced by the Soviet government at the Committee of 10 Countries in Geneva.

So that our position on the question is clearer for you, I continued, I would like to pass [you] necessary materials about the position of the Soviet Union on this question in Spanish.

F. Castro expressed gratitude for the information and the materials, stressing that he would support the proposal of the Soviet Union about disarmament without fail and devote a proper place to this question in his speech. Undoubtedly, I will stress the reluctance of the USA to disarm with sharp criticism, and I will explain the reasons why the American government takes such a position.

F. Castro said further that tonight he would read N. S. Khrushchev's speech about general and complete disarmament at the last General Assembly session, and also our statement in the Committee of 10 Countries in Geneva.

Then F. Castro said that along with criticism of the USA government for its complicity in the revival of German militarism he would stress the just nature of the Soviet proposals on the German question and the question of Berlin, and also favor the elimination of all foreign bases on foreign territory. F. Castro continued, in my speech I intend to also declare that military bases on foreign territory not only present a threat to peace, but are also impermissible interference in the internal affairs of these countries, inasmuch as the presence of such bases in itself limits their sovereignty.

In the course of further conversation F. Castro expressed a desire to speak at the General Assembly after N. S. Khrushchev in order to support the main proposals of the speech of the head of the Soviet government with greater effectiveness.

Then F. Castro said that during his stay in New York he intended to establish contact with the heads of the governments of other countries, and especially with the representatives of the countries of Africa.

<...>

[not copied: passages concerning the restrictions on the movements of Castro in New York; future anti-American activities of the Cuban government; Dominican-Cuban relations and the unsuccessful policy of Trujillo]

In conclusion F. Castro asked me again to pass his gratitude to N. S. Khrushchev for the aid. F. Castro said further, I will be accompanied in the trip to the UN General Assembly by Nunez Jimenez. He personally intends to spend 10-12 days in New York, regardless of when he will be given an opportunity to speak. After his departure the Cuban delegation will be headed by Minister of Foreign Affairs Raul Roa.

Counsellor Cde. A. I. Alekseyev was present at the conversation.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA
(S. KUDRYAVTSEV)

Record of Conversation between N.S. Khrushchev and Prime Minister of Cuba Fidel Castro

[Source RGANI, F. 52, Op. 1, D. 512, ll. 2-5. Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya.
Accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/208455>.]

September 20, 1960

New York

Fidel Castro said he was very happy to hear that N.S. Khrushchev would come for a visit, despite all obstacles. Such an important person as the head of the Soviet government would be the first to visit the Prime Minister of such a small country as Cuba. This is very important for the Cubans and for public opinion as a whole.

N.S. Khrushchev replied that he has been waiting for this opportunity for a long time, and it is a great pleasure to meet with Fidel Castro. "The powers do not treat us very well," N.S. Khrushchev continued, "but this should not trouble us. We are cheerful and inspired when our enemies are raging in anger. The American government's attitude is a manifestation of their powerlessness. They do stupid things and all sensible people condemn their behavior."

Next, N.S. Khrushchev said that he would like to use this opportunity to express his deep respect for Fidel Castro personally and through him for the heroic Cuban people as a whole.

F. Castro noted that the poorest people in New York are the Hispanics and Blacks. Despite the anti-Cuban, anti-revolutionary propaganda in TV, film, and print media in the United States, they understand the truth and are sympathetic to the revolution in Cuba. The Hispanics enthusiastically greeted the Cuban delegation at the airport. The US authorities tried to deceive them, claiming that the plane with the delegation would land at another airport.

N.S. Khrushchev said all Latin Americans understand that Cuba's new government is doing everything for the people. He noted further that [Adlai E.] Stevenson said in a recent article that the State Department should protect America from Communism, but the communists are already in New York, so [the State Department] has to put up defenses in Manhattan.

"You," N.S. Khrushchev continued, "made a very good move by transferring to a hotel in Harlem – a neighborhood where ordinary people live. It was very well received here."

F. Castro noted that they relocated to the hotel at night, and still at that late hour a big crowd gathered and shouted welcoming slogans. Enemies of the revolution will not come to this neighborhood. The Blacks said they will protect the delegation from ill-wishers and they will do it without the help of police. They also favorably received N.S. Khrushchev's visit to the area and will remember it for their entire lives.

"It is common knowledge that your first visit to the United States," Fidel Castro said, "made a huge impression and is well understood by the people. I read the statement you made upon arriving to the US and I must say you are very aware of the needs of ordinary people. You speak their language. I am sure that after a second visit to the US, they will have an even better opinion of you."

Further, Fidel Castro said he decided to lead the Cuban delegation only because it was announced that N.S. Khrushchev would lead the Soviet delegation to the XV session of the General Assembly. This is a very important session and it is very good that N.S. Khrushchev will take part in its work.

If imperialist countries do not change their position, they have no future. People all over the world will regard us more and more favorably. The imperialists are trying to create a coalition against us in the UN, but they will not be able to. They have nothing to counter the compelling and persuasive arguments of Chairman Khrushchev. People do not want war; consequently the peaceful aspirations and efforts of the Soviet government are recognized worldwide. The struggle for peace is a very strong argument.

N.S. Khrushchev replied that imperialist powers think they still have control over us, that they can do whatever they want. However, the imperialists can no longer dictate their terms to us, either militarily or economically. We are not dependent on them for anything. We are developing our economy and technology completely independently, and this is the most important thing. Our ideas have always been stronger, and now they are backed by material and technical factors. One must always have the means to support one's ideas, and we have these means.

Our politics, our slogans are clear and relevant to all people – peace, friendship, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states.

F. Castro said that this is the most persuasive argument. People understand this very well and that is why they have a high regard for us, despite the position of the US State Department.

N.S. Khrushchev said that after the conversation with Fidel Castro he would like to tell the reporters that he visited Castro to express the deep respect of the Soviet people and government for the Cuban people, who under Fidel Castro's leadership defeated the forces of tyranny and were victorious.

Further, N.S. Khrushchev said he hopes this is not the last meeting, and when Fidel Castro comes to visit the Soviet government at any time that is convenient for him, they will be able to have a more detailed discussion with no outsiders listening in.

F. Castro said that N.S. Khrushchev is highly respected by the Cuban people, who are very grateful to the Soviet government for its assistance. When N.S. Khrushchev comes to Cuba, Fidel Castro will personally make sure that the Cuban people give him a heartfelt reception.

N.S. Khrushchev thanked Fidel Castro for the warm words and a friendly conversation.

The conversation lasted 40 minutes. Present at the conversation were: F. Castro's adviser [Antonio] Núñez Jimenez, V.S. Lebedev, A.I. Adzhubei, P.A. Satyukov.
Recorded by: [Signature] (V. Vinogradov)

The Bay of Pigs, April 1961: The Run-Up, the Invasion, and the Aftermath

The failed April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion is of course a landmark in the development of the US-Cuban confrontation, the Cuban revolution, and the wider Cold War. In a series of conversations with Soviet ambassador to Cuba Sergey M. Kudryavtsev, Fidel Castro and his top aides, from January to April 1961, considered the prospects for an assault on Cuba by anti-Castro exiles, supported by the US government and organized by the Central Intelligence Agency. Since the ostensibly clandestine preparations (including training camps in Guatemala and Florida), were widely reported on by the media, ranging from *The Nation* magazine to *The New York Times* and *Miami Herald*, and the subject of loud gossip among emigres in Florida and elsewhere, the topic frequently came up—as did the question of whether the new US President, John F. Kennedy, would follow through on an operation evidently begun under Eisenhower.

In the first document, Kudryavtsev describes a talk with Fidel Castro from 21 January, 1961, the evening after John F. Kennedy took office and gave his inaugural address.⁷ As the conversation shows, JFK's speech, expressing his willingness to negotiate with communist adversaries, encouraged Castro, who believed the danger of a US intervention had diminished. Fondly recalling his meetings with Khrushchev in New York four months earlier, Castro also raised his ideas for a visit to the Soviet Union, possibly later that year (it would not happen until the spring of 1963). Castro also speaks optimistically about military operations to suppress "counterrevolutionaries" in the Escambray mountains, and about economic challenges.

[From the Journal of S.M. Kudryavtsev, 'Record of a Conversation with Prime Minister of Cuba Fidel Castro Ruz, 21 January 1961'](#)

[Source: AVP RF, F. 0104. Op. 17, P. 118, D. 3. Il. 48-52. Obtained by James G. Hershberg and translated by Gary Goldberg. Accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/177859>.]

⁷ Kudryavtsev also discussed the new American president and prospects for a US-supported intervention in Cuba with Ernesto "Che" Guevara in January 1961. See records of Kudryavtsev-Guevara conversations on 11, 17, and 30 January 1961 in "Chatting with Che," *CWIHPB* 17/18 (Fall 2012), pp. 157-67, esp. 159-62.

Secret. Copy № 2
15 February 1961
Outgoing № 44

from the journal of
S. M. KUDRYAVTSEV

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
with Prime Minister of the Republic of Cuba
Fidel CASTRO RUZ
21 January 1961

Fidel Castro came to my apartment this evening.

In the conversation which passed in a warm and friendly atmosphere, I touched on several questions of the domestic political situation and the foreign policy situation of Cuba.

Fidel Castro talked much about how he was quite satisfied with the results of the mobilization of the Cuban people held on days when the threat of possible direct intervention from the US hung over Cuba. This mobilization, stressed Fidel Castro, again showed the readiness of the Cubans to defend their homeland, and helped the revolutionary government rally all the people together to repel possible American aggression. This mobilization helped the military formations of the people's militia better prepare from the military point of view, and at the same time reveal and correct some shortcomings in the organization of the country's defense as a whole.

The people's militia, continued Fidel Castro, has passed through a good combat school, moved considerably forward in mastering modern weaponry, and have now essentially been turned into a serious military force capable of resisting any aggressor.

In the course of further conversation the discussion turned on the operations conducted by the people's militia to put down counterrevolutionary breeding grounds in Escambray. Saying that every cloud has a silver lining Fidel Castro noted that the participation of the people's militia in operations to clean out the mountain forests in Escambray strengthens their combat readiness still further. In his words, at the present time there are groups of counterrevolutionaries in the mountains of Escambray surrounded by individual armed detachments of the people's militia. Right now it has been decided to send additional detachments of the people's militia to this region directly from the capital so that they get a baptism of fire, liquidating the counterrevolutionary clusters in this region.

Fidel Castro said, the counterrevolutionary breeding grounds in Escambray do not present any serious danger either to the revolutionary government or the domestic situation of the country as a whole. A decision was made just now to conclude agrarian reform in this region more quickly and to first of all undermine the economic base of the rich peasants, who are as a matter of fact supporting these counterrevolutionary groups, supplying them with food. The most dangerous elements of the rich peasants will be exiled from this region and hauled into court in the event that their ties with the counterrevolutionaries are detected.

Fidel Castro continued, on the whole the activity of the internal counterrevolutionaries fell somewhat after the adoption of a stricter law by the government. However, this does not mean that internal counterrevolutionaries have been done away with. On the contrary, a long and difficult struggle lies ahead, but we are all confident that the internal counterrevolution will be brought to an end in 1961.

Then the conversation turned on the economic situation of the country. Fidel Castro noted in this connection that, in his opinion, the state of the economy does not arouse any serious worries, although of course there will be some difficulties in 1961 in supplying the population with individual goods.

At the same time unemployment in agriculture will probably be ended, and this fact will strengthen the revolution even more. In order to continually supply the population of the country with food the government intends to somewhat reduce the amount of land occupied by sugar cane. The stalks of the sugar cane will be used to feed cattle, and the land under the sugar cane released from the sugar cane plants will be sown with grain crops.

The mood of the peasant population is very good. At the present time all cooperatives and public estates [*narodnye imeniya*] are on the whole operating successfully. A growth of sugar production is taking place. As regards the situation in nationalized industry, of course the mobilization performed in January created certain difficulties in this sphere. However, this mainly affects the quality rather than the quantity of output produced.

In our view the external danger, Fidel Castro continued, has somewhat declined with the coming to power of Kennedy. However we, of course, realize that it would be naïve to think that the US will suddenly abandon its aggressive designs with respect to Cuba. In our view, the preamble [sic: *vstupitel'naya chast'*; trans.: presumably referring to Kennedy's Inaugural Address, given the date of the conversation] of Kennedy represents a certain concession to the forces of peace and progress, that is, to the socialist camp. Fidel Castro stressed, I am confident that the consistent struggle of N. S. Khrushchev for peace, disarmament, and the elimination of the vestiges of colonialism forced Kennedy to make some concessions. This is what

forced him to say that the US is supposedly ready to hold talks and they are also in favor of peace. Of course, Kennedy continued in the previous positions on the questions of Latin America, and he still could not say anything new in this area. But this worries us least of all. Fidel Castro said further, a national liberation movement is developing in Latin America and whatever Kennedy says he will not be able to stop it.

In my view, continued Fidel Castro, the second part of the speech of the American President is more important. It is this part of the speech which can be defined as positive. Of course, everything depends on whether these words of Kennedy's remain on paper, or he will actually pursue a policy of lessening tensions.

In any event, said Fidel Castro, the Cuban government thinks that the most dangerous period for Cuba has passed, and now our main task will be to throw all [our] efforts into ensuring the best organization of Cuban industry, agriculture, and the state apparatus. The main task will be to increase the production of industrial goods, and also food for the Cuban people.

In the course of further conversation at his own initiative Fidel Castro touched on the question of his plans for a trip to the Soviet Union. He talked much on this subject, stressing that he anticipates to accomplish this desire of his in the spring or summer of this year. Fidel Castro continued, I would like the majority of my stay in the Soviet Union to be devoted to the study of the experience of managing agriculture. Fidel Castro said, I am especially interested in your achievements in the virgin lands, the organization of state farms there, and all the problems associated with opening up these lands. In this connection he again began to develop the idea regarding sending approximately 1000 young Cubans to our state farms in order for them to adopt the work experience there, study the language, and then become active leaders of the Soviet experiment in Cuba.

Returning again to the plans for his trip to the Soviet Union, Fidel Castro said that he would like to give Cde. N. S. Khrushchev a wigwam in advance which could be built in Cuba beforehand, and then erected near Moscow by two Cuban craftsmen. Fidel Castro noted, I would like for Cde. N. S. Khrushchev to have good memories of Cuba and the hard work of its people.

He began to speak in this connection about the successful experiment of building wigwams in the area of Treasure Lake [trans. note: on the Isla de Tesoros (Treasure Island), now called the Isla de la Juventud (Island of Youth)] for tourism purposes, which a delegation of Soviet journalists viewed.

In the course of further conversation Fidel Castro warmly spoke of Cde. N. S. Khrushchev and the aid of the Soviet Union. Fidel Castro stressed, I will never forget my meetings with Cde. N. S. Khrushchev at the UN General Assembly in New York.

The struggle of Cde. Khrushchev for peace has won him personally, the Soviet Union, and its foreign policy universal respect in the entire world. The authority of the Soviet Union, Fidel Castro continued, as far as he can judge from the reports of his ambassadors, has grown immeasurably recently especially in the countries fighting for their independence. The growth of the authority of the Soviet Union, the growth of the popularity of its foreign policy, Fidel Castro said in conclusion, is what is forcing Kennedy to search right now for ways to develop more flexible methods in US foreign policy.

At the end of the conversation I passed Fidel Castro lectures on military questions in English which were sent at his request.

Thanking me for the materials, Fidel Castro said that he needs them very much. He would not only study them closely himself, but would also give instructions about the study of the materials contained in these lectures by all senior Cuban military leaders.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA
(S. KUDRYAVTSEV)

In the second conversation, on 24 February, Cuban Foreign Minister Roa, after a lengthy consideration of the Congo crisis in the wake of Patrice Lumumba's assassination, notes that the anti-Castro exiles in Guatemala had stepped up their military preparations. Expecting an impending invasion with US support, Roa speculates that Washington, which had accelerated its efforts to gain Latin American support for the anti-Castro action, hoped to create a "small bridgehead" on Cuban soil where a "puppet" government could be established. In this conspiracy, the United States could then openly aid a "government" that would be headed by former prime minister (under Castro, in 1959) José Miró Cardona, who had gone into exile to oppose Castro, and who in fact headed the CIA-organized Cuban Revolutionary Council that was supposed to organize a post-Castro government in Havana. To counter US diplomacy, Roa noted that Cuba was appealing to Latin American governments to resist efforts to draw them into the anti-Castro operation.

From the Journal of S.M. Kudryaytsev, 'Record of Conversation with Minister of Foreign Affairs Raul Roa, 24 February 1961'

[Source: AVP RF, F. 0104. Op. 17, P. 118, D. 3. ll. 94-97. Obtained by James G. Hershberg and translated by Gary Goldberg. Accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/188122>.]

from the journal of
S. M. KUDRYAVTSEV

Top Secret. Copy № 1
22 March 1961
№ 110

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
with Minister of Foreign Affairs Raul ROA

24 February 1961

Today I visited Raul Roa and held a conversation with him about the 14 February statement of the Soviet government in connection with the murder of Patrice Lumumba. I presented the content of our statement in detail and expressed the hope that the Cuban government would support the proposal of the Soviet government presented in this document.

Raul Roa said in reply that the Cuban government, just like the Soviet government, was deeply offended by this crime and thinks that it cannot remain unpunished. During discussion of the question about the situation in the Congo in the second part of the 15th UN General Assembly session, Raul Roa stressed that the Cuban government will speak in favor of handing Mobutu and Tshombe over to a court and halting the so-called UN operation in the Congo. We will act together with the Soviet delegation and also demand the removal of [Dag] Hammarskjold from the post of UN Secretary-General, and vigorously condemn Belgium, which bears direct responsibility for the murder of Lumumba. Raul Roa continued, the Cuban government intends to henceforth give comprehensive support to the legal government of the Congo. Cuba has already recognized the government of Gizenga and will support it in the UN.

Raul Roa said, the question of the policy of the Cuban government at the upcoming UN General Assembly session which opens in March was considered at yesterday's meeting of the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers has charged me, as leader of the Cuban delegation, with maintaining the closest contact with the

delegation of the Soviet Union, and also with the delegations of the Afro-Asian countries on the question of the Congo.

Raul Roa continued, at the Council of Ministers meeting a general political guideline was adopted that in its future activity the Cuban government should step up its relations with the Afro-Asian countries, and also with the neutral countries. Then Raul Roa noted that the Council of Ministers had charged him with holding a discussion of the question of the aggressive actions of the USA against Cuba. It is obvious that the Cuban representative to the UN will take part in the discussion of the question of the Congo. However, considering the importance of the question of the Congo, said Raul Roa, I myself would prefer to hold its discussion in the [General] Assembly. I will try to talk with Fidel Castro about this question. Raul Roa let it be understood unambiguously in this connection that it would not be a bad thing if this thought were hinted to Fidel Castro or [Cuban President Osvaldo] Dorticos from our side if the occasion arose. Raul Roa stressed that personally he gives the question of the Congo no less importance than the Cuban question, and prefers to consider them in close relationship. Raul Roa asked who will head the Soviet delegation and whether Cde. A. A. Gromyko would take part in the second part of the Assembly session.

Then Raul Roa informed me about the upcoming foreign policy steps of the Cuban government in connection with the impending threat of the intervention of the forces of external counterrevolution. Raul Roa said that according to information at the disposal of the Cuban government the military preparations of the counterrevolutionary bands in Guatemala have been notably stepped up recently. These bands allegedly intend to act against Cuba at the end of February or the beginning of March. Raul Roa said further, it is clear to everyone that the landing of assault groups of the external counterrevolution in Cuba can only be accomplished with the direct support of the USA.

The Cuban government knows that the Kennedy Administration has organized a rapid stepping-up [of diplomatic activity] among the governments of the Latin American countries, trying to get agreement from them to support the actions of the counterrevolutionaries against the legal government of Cuba. Our ambassador to the OAS [Organization of American States], [Carlos] Lechuga, Raul Roa continued, reported that, by organizing an invasion of Cuba by forces of the external counterrevolution, Kennedy intends to create a small bridgehead on Cuban territory in which the formation of a puppet government can then be proclaimed. Kennedy wants to present the matter to world public opinion such that there would purportedly be two governments in Cuba and that the counterrevolutionaries already have territory in their hands which they control. In reality, after the invasion by forces of the external counterrevolution Kennedy intends to create a puppet government in exile which will be in Florida or Guatemala. [Former Cuban Prime Minister José] Miró Cardona is believed to be appointed the head of this government.

Raul Roa noted that the US government recently organized so-called pro-Castro acts [*vystupleniya*] in a number of Latin American countries with the aid of its agent network. Then the fault for these acts was shifted to Fidel Castro's "agents," who allegedly were striving "to overthrow" the legal governments of the Latin American countries.

With the aid of these provocative methods Kennedy is striving to stir up the governments of a number of Latin American countries against revolutionary Cuba in order to incline them to take part in joint actions against the government of Fidel Castro.

Taking this into consideration, in its meeting yesterday the Council of Ministers of Cuba decided to send the governments of all the Latin American countries a note which presented the basic principles of the independent foreign policy of the Cuban government to assure them that revolutionary Cuba desires to live with everyone in peace, does not threaten their independence, and does not intend to [serve as] a base for an attack or aggression against other countries. Raul Roa stressed, we think the Americans' preparations of provocations against Cuba will at least be made difficult with the aid of the note, if not paralyzed beforehand.

In the aforementioned note of the Cuban government, Raul Roa continued, it will also stress that Cuba will vigorously repel any aggression by itself and will make use of the aid of those countries which are ready to unselfishly support it so that it can defend Cuban independence and territorial integrity.

Raul Roa stressed, the Council of Ministers also charged [him with] pointing out in the note that the revolutionary government of Cuba respects the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, and does not intend to export revolution, but at the same time will fight against the export of counterrevolution with all its resources. It should also be declared in the note that, as before, Cuba will remain within the OAS in spite of all the bad experience of this organization, and that Cuba is ready to cooperate with all other Latin American countries. At the same time, continued Raul Roa, the note expresses the gratitude of the Cuban government to all those governments and peoples of Latin American countries who state their solidarity with Cuba, refuse to take part in the economic blockade being conducted by the USA right now, and condemn the American policy of force they are conducting with respect to Cuba. The note will also denounce the recent hostile maneuvers of the USA with respect to Cuba.

In accordance with these instructions of the Council of Ministers, Raul Roa said further, the Cuban MFA prepared such a note to the governments of the countries of Latin America. This note was delivered to the ambassadors of these countries today,

24 February. A copy of this note will be sent to the Chairman of the UN General Assembly and the General Secretariat in the next two days for distribution among all UN members as an official document. At the same time a copy of the note will be distributed to all representatives of the OAS.

Thus, Raul Roa said in conclusion, we think that this note will serve as a unique basis for the development of a discussion about the Cuban question in the Political Committee and the UN General Assembly. It is possible that in the event an urgent need arises the Cuban question will also be raised in the Security Council. The note of the Cuban government to the countries of Latin America will be published in the press on 28 February. At the end of the conversation Raul Roa gave me for information a copy of the aforementioned note to the governments of the countries of Latin America (attached).

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA
(S. KUDRYAVTSEV)

The next day, 25 February, Kudryavtsev met with Fidel Castro, who, in the midst of a conversation on various topics, assessed the likelihood of a US-backed intervention, and expressed strong confidence in Cuba's ability to rebuff any such invasion--especially as it had already succeeded in crushing the resistance in the Escambray mountains and also intercepted airdrops of arms and supplies intended for them. Castro also alluded to alleged Vatican support for such an invasion, foreshadowing the crackdown on the Catholic Church he would enforce after the Bay of Pigs landing had been crushed.

From the Journal of S.M. Kudryavtsev, 'Record of Conversation with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Cuba, Fidel Castro, 25 February 1961'

[Source: AVP RF, F. 0104. Op. 17, P. 118, D. 3. ll. 98-108. Obtained by James G. Hershberg and translated by Gary Goldberg. Accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/188123>.]

from the journal of
S. M. KUDRYAVTSEV

Secret. Copy № 1
22 February 1961
№ 111

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Cuba
Fidel CASTRO

25 February 1961

Fidel Castro came to my apartment on the evening of 25 February with [Antonio] Nunez Jimenez.

1. [discussion of situation in the Congo]

2. In the course of further conversation several questions were touched upon connected with the situation of recent days.

Fidel Castro declared that, in his opinion, it was probable that in these days an attack will be made by the forces of external counterrevolution at Kennedy's order. On the one hand, the recently increased dropping of American weapons from aircraft and their supply on small ships to the shores of Cuba tells of this. For example, on 24 February in the area of the province of Pinar del Rio representatives of Cuban counterintelligence received a large batch of weapons from a counterrevolutionary group from the US in the open sea, including small field guns [*pushki*]. This counterrevolutionary group took the representatives of Cuban counterintelligence for agents of the internal counterrevolution. In approximately the same period weapons were dropped by parachute in a number of provinces, in particular in Oriente, Las Villas, and Pinar del Rio – in places where counterrevolutionary groups are evidently located, according to information of the external counterrevolution.

Fidel Castro continued, information comes to us that the Vatican is pushing Kennedy to act against Cuba more quickly. It is known that the Vatican is pursuing large and active preparations in the countries of Latin America, seeking the agreement of the governments of these countries for a condemnation of the Cuban government and a breaking of diplomatic relations with it. In recent days the leadership of the NSP [ed. note: probably PSP, for "Popular Socialist Party," the pro-Moscow Cuban communist party] has received some information demonstrating the preparations of counterrevolutionary assault groups to sail from Guatemala, Florida, and Costa Rica. Finally, Cuban counterintelligence recently discovered a number of quite large counterrevolutionary groups which were seized, in particular in the provinces of Oriente, Matanzas, and Pinar del Rio. From the statements of those arrested it follows that the counterrevolutionary groups were preparing to act against the revolutionary government in the period from 28 February through 8 March. They received the order about such actions from the USA.

Fidel Castro said, Kennedy and the external counterrevolution are placing unjustified hopes on the counterrevolutionary movement in the mountains of Escambray. However, the Americans do not yet know that the resistance of the counterrevolutionaries in Escambray has been broken and clearing operations are going on to liquidate the individual small groups having no military importance. More than 30 counterrevolutionaries have been killed in clashes and more than 300 counterrevolutionaries have been taken prisoner. There remained only a small group in the eastern part of Escambray which will be liquidated in the near future.

Fidel Castro continued, it seems to me that Kennedy thinks this is the most suitable moment for landing counterrevolutionaries, believing that the forces of the Cuban army and the people's militia are occupied in Escambray at this time and that accordingly we cannot cope with the landing parties if they are landed at a number of points of the country. However, Kennedy is deeply mistaken. His plan to seize part of Cuban territory and create a puppet government is doomed to fail. The Cuban government has carefully prepared to repel aggression, and Escambray cannot now prevent the Cuban armed forces from acting swiftly and proficiently. The protection and defense of the east coast of Cuba have been reinforced and the garrisons on the Isle of Pines have been considerably reinforced. Fidel Castro stressed, I am more than convinced that now the counterrevolutionaries will not be able secure a foothold even on the Isle of Pines, not to mention Cuba itself.

The revolutionary army and the people's militia are properly prepared for defense and are at combat positions right now. The results of the conclusion of military operations in Escambray will be published in the near future and an exhibit of the American weapons dropped into Cuba and seized by units of the revolutionary army and people's militia has been organized. Fidel Castro stressed, this will inflict a serious blow to the morale of both the external as well as the internal counterrevolution and put the USA in a difficult position on the eve of the discussion of the Cuban question at the UN.

The Cuban government does not exclude that at the last moment Kennedy might have second thoughts and put off the realization of his aggressive plans, especially as in connection with the events in the Congo the international political situation as a whole does not favor American imperialism unleashing a new conflict. However, Kennedy does not want to come to the conference in Quito with empty hands, and therefore will take steps to foment a civil war in Cuba and try to undermine the Cuban revolution from within.

Fidel Castro stressed, the Cuban government is completely confident that it is able to handle any situation. At the present moment the government is deliberately not raising a fuss about the aggressive intentions of Kennedy in order to take the counterrevolutionaries unawares if they nevertheless try to land assault groups. The

defeat of the counterrevolutionary assault groups will allow Cuba to be made safe for a long time, since it will be very hard to collect new contingents of capable soldiers of the counterrevolution after this.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA
(S. KUDRYAVTSEV)

A week later, at a lunch for Cuban leaders on 3 March, Fidel Castro discussed the “new threat” of a counter-revolutionary invasion and predicted the Kennedy Administration, which he now viewed as “even harsher and more hostile” than Eisenhower’s, was preparing “some big provocation” against Cuba.

From the Journal of S.M. Kudryaytsev, ‘Record of Conversation with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Cuba, Fidel Castro, 3 March 1961’

[Source: AVP RF, F. 0104. Op. 17, P. 118, D. 3. Il. 110-113. Obtained by James G. Hershberg and translated by Gary Goldberg. Accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/188124>.]

from the journal of
S. M. KUDRYAVTSEV

Top Secret. Copy № 1
22 March 1961
№ 87

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Cuba
Fidel CASTRO

3 March 1961

The conversation was held over a lunch which I held in honor of Fidel Castro. Besides Fidel Castro, Ernesto Guevara, Raul Castro, Martinez Sanchez, Armando Hart, Haydee Santamaria, and Celia Sanchez were at the lunch.

The conversation chiefly concerned the political situation developing in Cuba in recent days in connection with the new threat of an invasion of the forces of the external counterrevolution.

Fidel Castro said, we are absolutely convinced that Kennedy is preparing some big provocation against Cuba. From the first days the new American government has taken an even harsher and more hostile line with respect to the Cuban revolution than the Eisenhower Administration. The main efforts of the Kennedy government are being directed along two lines at the present time: first, through an all-round stepping up of the internal Cuban counterrevolution and second, through isolating Cuba from the countries of Latin America. Under the influence of the active assistance coming from the USA the internal counterrevolution has been unusually lively in recent days. Almost every day large batches of American weapons are dropped from American planes in various points of the country. Aircraft belonging to the counterrevolutionaries often violate Cuban airspace and drop counterrevolutionary leaflets with calls to overthrow the revolutionary government. In particular, just yesterday, for example, three aircraft flew over Cuba which threw out leaflets with calls to overthrow the revolutionary government. Unfortunately, noted Fidel Castro, we cannot yet take effective measures against the flights of these aircraft inasmuch as Cuban air defense does not have sufficient means for this. Orders are given in documents sent from the USA to local counterrevolutionary organizations to start insurrections throughout the entire country. In addition, propaganda through all American radio stations directed at Cuba has recently increased significantly; plus, once again the main thrust is being made on a call to rise up against the revolutionary government.

Fidel Castro said further, we have information that increased preparations are going on in Florida, Guatemala, and Costa Rica for an action of the external counterrevolution against Cuba. Information about the sailing of assault groups in the direction of Cuba which has been received from Guatemala has not yet been confirmed. However, for its part the Cuban government has taken all the necessary steps to increase the defense of the Cuban coast. Cuban patrols have not yet detected the movement of assault groups anywhere.

Fidel Castro noted, it is not excluded that the forces of the external counterrevolution concentrated in Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Florida are waiting until a more or less large uprising has been raised in Cuba which would serve as a specific signal for a general action.

These hopes of the external Cuban counterrevolution, Fidel Castro noted ironically, will remain pipe dreams. Our situation is strong right now, and there can be no talk of some broad, large uprising in the country. In recent days a number of quite large conspiratorial centers, which set as their goal the organization of uprisings in various parts of the country, have actually been discovered and rendered harmless. Therefore now attempts of the counterrevolution to begin an uprising have become even more unrealistic than before. Individual acts of terrorism are rather gestures of desperation and powerlessness than a sign of strength.

Fidel Castro said further, recently the Catholic Church, the center of all counterrevolutionary activity, has discredited itself even more in the eyes of the broad strata of the population with its statements hostile to the revolution. Therefore right now it is not in a position to lead the masses of believers. On the contrary, right now the government has to restrain the actions of the people against the Church for foreign policy considerations, for the hatred for the Francoist priests is extraordinarily high. The liquidation of the counterrevolutionary hotbeds in the mountains of Escambray, continued Fidel Castro, is being protracted to a certain degree by virtue of the fact that the counterrevolutionaries are hiding in caves and do not engage in clashes with either units of the people's militia or units of the revolutionary army. Therefore it is obvious that another two or three weeks will be needed for a final elimination of these hotbeds until Escambray is cleared of counterrevolutionaries. However, in a military sense Escambray does not present a problem for the Cuban government any more.

Fidel Castro noted, the USA will try to keep us in constant tension and direct its main efforts at undermining the Cuban revolution from within. Only after this will they probably move the forces of the external counterrevolution, who get direct American support, against Cuba. The actions of the forces of the external counterrevolution are also made difficult by virtue of the fact that Cuba is an island and does not have common borders with other countries. It's not a simple matter to move large assault groups by sea and evidently the relatively calm existence of the Cuban revolution is to a certain degree due to the geographical position of Cuba.

Fidel Castro said, in external terms, the situation is on the whole even better than the Cuban government expected. The 23 [sic; 24] February note of the Cuban government to the government of the countries of Latin America has received a positive reaction in a number of countries of Latin America, not only from the public but from the governments themselves. The Cuban government has received a number of reports from its embassies in Mexico, Ecuador, and Brazil that the governments of these countries regarded the arguments cited in this note with understanding and in all probability will not give in to the pressure of the US government, which is seeking the agreement of the countries of Latin America to a collective severance of relations with Cuba.

In the course of further conversation I asked Fidel Castro's opinion about the advisability of inviting some state and public figures, in particular Raul Roa and [his] son, [Labor Minister Augusto] Martinez Sanchez, [Rolando Díaz] Astarain, [Cuban National Bank President Raúl] Cepero Bonilla, and two or three other people to visit the USSR in 1961 for familiarization with the life of the Soviet people. Fidel Castro said in reply that he would be very grateful if these people were invited to the Soviet Union. These ministers ought to become acquainted not only with the life of the

Soviet people, but also with the work of Soviet ministers so that they could adopt the best Soviet practices, which Cuba needs very much. Fidel Castro stressed further that, in his opinion, a trip by Cuban ministers to the Soviet Union will also be useful in political terms. This would help Cuba to implement even closer political cooperation with the USSR, and also help the ministers look at individual international problems more broadly. Concerning the question of the timeframes of the trips of individual Cuban ministers to the USSR, Fidel Castro expressed the wish that the Cuban government could decide itself when it would be more advisable for a particular minister to go to the USSR after receiving the invitations. This is caused by the fact that the situation in Cuba is constantly tense and therefore the presence of a number of ministers in place is often required.

The rest of the conversation with Fidel Castro turned on ordinary subjects. Guevara and Raul Castro, who expressed approximately the same views, also took part in the discussion.

Embassy Counsellor Cde. B. A. Kazantsev was present at the conversation.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA
(S. KUDRYAVTSEV)

By 12 March, in a conversation at the Soviet ambassador's apartment, Fidel Castro believed the danger of an intervention had receded, and that the émigré forces might instead form a government-in-exile. He remained confident that if an attack nevertheless took place, the Cuban forces could overwhelm the invaders. Still, he felt so concerned about the danger of a US "provocation" that he indicated he did not feel comfortable leaving the country, even to make a much-desired visit to the Soviet Union, until the state political and military apparatus was better prepared. He acknowledged some stepping up of the efforts of the "external counterrevolution," but attributed this to "blind desperation" rather than any strengthening of their forces. Castro insisted domestic opponents were in a "state of disarray," in particular citing the work of fake "counterrevolutionary groups" that had countered the real ones.

[From the Journal of S.M. Kudryaytsev, 'Record of Conversation with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Cuba, Fidel Castro, 12 March 1961'](#)

[Source: AVP RF, F. 0104. Op. 17, P. 118, D. 3. Il. 130-135, AVP RF. Obtained by James G. Hershberg and translated by Gary Goldberg. Accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/188125>.]

from the journal of
S. M. KUDRYAVTSEV

Top Secret. Copy № 1
22 March 1961
№ 87

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
with Prime Minister of the Republic of Cuba
Fidel CASTRO

12 March 1961

I met with Fidel Castro on Sunday evening at [my] apartment.

1. At the start of the conversation the discussion was about the foreign policy situation of Cuba which has developed in recent days and the domestic situation in the country.

Fidel Castro spoke about these questions in quite optimistic tones, stressed that, in his opinion, the threat of an invasion of the forces of external counterrevolution is receding into the background, but the hostile policy of Kennedy with respect to the Cuban revolution is encountering ever-growing resistance from both the broad public as well as a number of governments of the countries of Latin America.

Measures recently carried out by the revolutionary government to strengthen the defense of Cuban territory, nip a number of counterrevolutionary plots in the bud, and the approaching conclusion of the clearing operations to liquidate counterrevolutionary forces in the mountains of Escambray – all this, stressed Fidel Castro, has strongly demoralized both the internal as well as the external counterrevolution. This is demonstrated by a number of the following facts. In recent days the external counterrevolution has begun to make efforts to form an exile government. As is well-known, the external counterrevolution clamored much in October of last year and also at the end of [January or February?-ed.] of this year about their plans to create a Cuban “government” on Cuban territory or, at least, on the Isle of Pines. Now, stressed Fidel Castro, the counterrevolution is not talking any more about this and prefers to form an exile government either in the USA or in Guatemala. A conclusion can be drawn from this one fact alone that the external counterrevolution does not hope any more for an opportunity to reinforce its assault parties on Cuban territory and does not count on the ability to create a puppet government inside Cuba itself.

Fidel Castro continued, we have no doubt that in the event the external counterrevolution under American pressure nevertheless tries to land assault groups on Cuban territory they will be immediately defeated. The defensive measures carried out by the revolutionary government in recent months, the general growth of the combat effectiveness and the organizational level of the people's militia and the revolutionary army, and their combat spirit and readiness for self-sacrifice are a guarantee of this. Finally, the revolutionary enthusiasm of the Cuban people as a whole, who are ready to sustain any casualties in the name of saving the revolution, is a guarantee of this.

Fidel Castro continued, the revolutionary consciousness of the masses has risen considerably in recent months, and the constant threat from American imperialism and the forces of external counterrevolution help the revolutionary government rally the people to the defense of Cuba.

Fidel Castro stressed, the consolidation of the position of the revolutionary government inside the country as a whole and the further deepening of the revolution, moreover, cannot fail to aggravate the class struggle inside the country. That is why right now we are witnesses to a certain stepping up of the struggle of the external counterrevolution against us. This new outburst is rather a gesture of a blind desperation, rather than a sign of strength, and is occurring as a result of the constant pushing from without and the empty promises given by both counterrevolutionary organizations located outside Cuba as well as by the Americans themselves that the USA will supposedly support the actions of the internal counterrevolution. Faith in these promises of support from the US has recently begun to weaken, and the internal counterrevolution increasingly reacts to such persuasions increasingly coldly.

Fidel Castro noted, the following in particular tells of this. At our instruction, small "counterrevolutionary groups" have been created in a number of points of the country, part of which take refuge in the mountains under the "guise" of rebels and maintain communications with the external counterrevolution. The task of these groups is to identify counterrevolutionary elements inside the country and then liquidate them. It is characteristic that recently it has become much more difficult for these groups to recruit counterrevolutionaries. Many of those recruited declare that the revolutionary regime is stronger and that right now it is senseless to risk their necks, especially as the USA is only speaking of support.

On the whole, Fidel Castro said further, the internal counterrevolution is in a state of disarray, and its chiefs are trying to encourage them with desperate acts, but the main thing is to show the USA that the counterrevolution is still alive and [they] ought not to forget about it. Some days ago, Fidel Castro noted further, with the aid of one of our "counterrevolutionary groups" we managed to lure two aircraft of the

counterrevolutionaries to Cuba, one of which was shot down into the sea and the other, after it threw out American weapons in the region of the Organos Mountains, was hit and forced to land in Jamaica.

At the present time, continued Fidel Castro, a large quantity of modern American weapons has fallen into our hands which were dropped and are being dropped right now on the territory of Cuba from American aircraft, and also from aircraft belonging to the Cuban counterrevolution. These weapons are enough to arm an entire regiment. It is probable that on 14 or 15 March the Cuban government will organize an exhibit of the captured American weapons. This exhibit will exert a demoralizing influence on the internal counterrevolution. Moreover, it will corroborate Raul Roa's speech in the General Assembly about the new aggressive actions of the USA against Cuba.

In Fidel Castro's words, one of these days the government intends to send a new note to the governments of the countries of Latin America to which will be attached photographs of the captured American weapons and new facts of the aggressive actions of the US against Cuba will be cited. This note will again declare Cuba's solidarity with the countries of Latin America and stress [its] readiness to develop and strengthen Latin American cooperation.

Fidel Castro stressed, with respect to the countries of Latin America we intend to pursue a more flexible policy in the future, skillfully using their differences with the US, and striving to draw those countries to our side who are ready to cooperate with Cuba. The Cuban government is quite satisfied with the firm favorable position of [Brazilian President] Janio Quadros with regard to Cuba; everything will be done from the Cuban side to strengthen and develop our relations with Brazil. The President of Ecuador, Velasco Ibarra, who bravely denounces the insidious intrigues against Latin America, takes a good position with respect to Cuba. Mexico and Uruguay are taking a good position. Even Argentina is now beginning to search for a way for a new approach to Cuba, fearing being remaining alone. On the whole a new tendency in support of Cuba is taking shape right now in Latin America, and we are confident, stressed Fidel Castro, that Kennedy will now hardly be able to force the governments of all the Latin American countries to unconditionally support his hostile line toward Cuba.

If Kennedy agrees to the creation of a Cuban government in exile, which is obviously part of his plans, noted Fidel Castro, then for our part we will declare our right to form revolutionary governments in exile in Cuba of such countries as, for example, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, etc. The activity of the governments we have created, stressed Fidel Castro, which will be genuinely revolutionary governments, will be much more dangerous for the USA than the activity of the Cuban counterrevolutionary government is for Cuba.

In my 13 March speech, noted Fidel Castro, I will obviously make a statement about the conclusion of the operations in the mountains of Escambray, where we have taken about 400 people prisoner and killed about 40. There remain practically no more than 40-60 counterrevolutionaries in Escambray right now, who in time will be hunted down and handed over to court. The leaders of the insurrection in Escambray will be shot, but the people who joined them out of fear and opportunism will be sent to camps for re-education. Fidel Castro declared, our statement about the elimination of the counterrevolutionary breeding grounds in Escambray will inflict a new blow to the internal and external counterrevolution. It will demoralize the counterrevolutionaries even more and, at the same time, strengthen the morale of the people and thus the domestic political situation in the country as a whole.

2. [not copied]

3. In the course of further conversation at his own initiative Fidel Castro touched on the question of his plans to visit the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Fidel Castro said that he very much wants to visit the Soviet Union, of which he had read much and heard much good and interesting from his colleagues in the government who have already been there. Fidel Castro noted, I even somewhat envy my ministers who have already been in the Soviet Union or will make such trips in the near future. Moreover, I feel somewhat uncomfortable in connection with the fact that I speak much about my plans to visit the USSR and again and again I put off a final decision on this question. I would like to openly admit, stressed Fidel Castro, that I am somewhat afraid of leaving Cuba for a long time. I do not exclude that my absence might be used by the Americans to organize some provocation against Cuba. Fidel Castro noted, the constant tense situation created around Cuba by Kennedy forces all of us, and especially me, to be on our guard all the time. We still have not yet created such a state apparatus which could act without trouble in the event of the absence of the prime minister if, for example, an extraordinary situation arose at this moment. Therefore, before I can leave Cuba for some time to pay state visits I have to finish a reorganization of the state apparatus, strengthen the armed forces of the country and the people's militia, train them militarily and politically, and more or less put an end to the counterrevolution. All this requires a certain [amount of] time, and therefore evidently it will be difficult for me to be absent from Cuba this year. Fidel Castro stressed, I would like for you to understand this correctly. Things are going not badly on the whole, but much more still needs to be done. Before making a final decision on the trip, Fidel Castro said in conclusion, I have to have full confidence in the fate of the country.

From this part of the conversation with Fidel Castro it was felt that he was speaking frankly and sincerely and that he first and foremost is seriously worried

about possible provocative actions of the Americans at the time of his absence from Cuba.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA
(S. KUDRYAVTSEV)

On the evening of 13 April, only a few days before the Bay of Pigs operation began, despite considerable Cuban intelligence on the émigré forces, Fidel Castro seemed confident that the danger of a counter-revolutionary invasion had receded. This misjudgment corroborates Cuban evidence revealed at a March 2001 conference in Havana on the Bay of Pigs suggesting that Cuban intelligence (G-2) had considerable information on the invasion preparations, but lacked precise tactical information on the date or landing site of the projected operation.⁸ Castro also expressed pleasure that some Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Ecuador, were resisting US pressure to endorse strong anti-Cuban measures, and sent congratulations to Khrushchev on a major Soviet achievement: the day before, 12 April, cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin had orbited the earth, becoming the first human in space.

From the Journal of S.M. Kudryavtsev, 'Record of a Conversation with Prime Minister of the Republic of Cuba Fidel Castro Ruz, 13 April 1961'

[Source: AVP RF, F. 0104. Op. 17, P. 118, D. 3. ll. 170-176. Obtained by James G. Hershberg and translated by Gary Goldberg. Accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/188140>.]

from the journal of
S. M. KUDRYAVTSEV

Top Secret. Copy № 1
28 April 1961
№ 149

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
with Prime Minister of the Republic of Cuba
Fidel CASTRO RUZ

⁸ See James G. Hershberg, intro., "Before the Bay of Pigs--What Did the Cubans Know? Cuban Intelligence Reports, January-May 1961," *CWIHP Bulletin* 17/18 (fall 2012), pp. 167-70.

13 April 1961

1. I met with Fidel Castro this evening and in accordance with instructions [I] had I informed him of the content of a conversation Cde. N. S. Khrushchev had with US Ambassador [to the Soviet Union Llewellyn E.] Thompson in which he touched upon the aggressive actions of the US against Cuba.⁹

Having listened closely, Fidel Castro said that first of all he would like to ask me to pass his sincere gratitude to Cde. N. S. Khrushchev for the brilliant and firm defense of Cuba from the aggressive pretensions [and] efforts of American imperialism. We never doubted, stressed Fidel Castro, that the Soviet Union would always be on the side of Cuba and support it at a difficult moment. We are confident that this statement of Cde. N. S. Khrushchev's will undoubtedly exert a sobering effect on the US government, and we do not exclude that Kennedy's statement that the USA does not intend to carry out a military intervention against Cuba was a consequence of this firm warning from Cde. N. S. Khrushchev.

We believe in the Soviet Union, we believe Cde. N. S. Khrushchev, stressed Fidel Castro, and no American propaganda will deceive us which tries to instill in us an uncertainty about the possible position of the Soviet Union in the conflict between Cuba and the USA.

Then Fidel Castro said that he especially liked the place in the conversation where Cde. N. S. Khrushchev drew a parallel with Iran and in that example convincingly showed all the absurdity and impermissibility of the aggressive actions of the USA against Cuba. Fidel Castro stressed, in the person of Cde. N. S. Khrushchev Cuba and the revolutionary government have a loyal friend, and we are very appreciative of this aid and support.

Fidel Castro noted, information about such questions in a confidential manner touches us a great deal and is of great importance to us. These statements of Cde. N. S. Khrushchev will serve for us, the leaders of the Cuban government, as a good orientation and they will instill in us still greater confidence in the final victory of our just cause.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, Fidel Castro said that I would like to assure Cde. N. S. Khrushchev through you that our revolution is enduring. This revolution is strengthening and deepening with each day, and on the whole our matters are going well. Right now we have become considerably more organized,

⁹ The date of the Khrushchev-Thompson conversation is not specified, but it was apparently a 1 April 1961 conversation that the US ambassador described in a telegram to Washington reproduced in US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, vol. V: *Soviet Union* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1998), doc. 51.

better prepared militarily, and more prepared in a political sense. Now neither external nor domestic enemies are frightening [*strany*] to us, although they are many. We are confident that these enemies will be crushed in the event of aggression or some other acts inside the country. The revolution firmly relies on the broad support of the popular masses, who will selflessly defend their achievements, just as the Soviet people did at one time.

Fidel Castro then asked [me] to pass Cde. N. S. Khrushchev, besides the open telegram he sent, his personal cordial congratulations on the occasion of the brilliant victory of Soviet science. The flight of a Soviet man in space made a strong impression on the Cuban people. Cubans rejoice at this success and speak of him as if they were part of this great achievement of the Soviet people. This achievement will undoubtedly have great significance for the cause of peace, and Fidel Castro said I would like to name Major Gagarin the cosmonaut of peace.

In the course of further conversation Fidel Castro stressed that, in his opinion, the Soviet government has acted very wisely making a new call for disarmament and peace on the day of such a brilliant victory of Soviet science.

[Points 2-4 not copied]

5. In the course of further conversation some questions of the domestic and foreign policy situation developing around Cuba were examined.

Fidel Castro evaluated the situation in quite optimistic tones, stressing that circumstances right now are developing in favor of revolutionary Cuba. Fidel Castro noted, the threat of an invasion of Cuba by the forces of the external counterrevolution, which hung over the country in the first days of April, has considerably lessened and is gradually receding into the background. According to information available to the Cuban government and also various symptoms in current conditions the forces of the external counterrevolution will hardly decide to organize a massive invasion when the revolutionary government has a well-trained army and people's militia. Fidel Castro said, there will obviously not be an invasion such as was contemplated in October of last year, in January, and finally in March of this year. Kennedy understands that the defeat of the counterrevolutionary detachments by the forces of the people's militia might have irreparable consequences both for the counterrevolution itself as well as for the prestige of the USA in Latin America. Fidel Castro continued, based on this, we think that the domestic situation in Cuba is strong and stable and is strengthening with each day. Kennedy cannot fail to know that right now the revolutionary army and people's militia represent a serious combat force which is capable to destroying any assault parties of the forces of the external counterrevolution, however large they are. Fidel Castro continued, the revolutionary government is forming the conviction that the US State Department and external

counterrevolution are beginning to change the tactics of the struggle against Cuba. At the present time the main reliance is being made not on an invasion of large landing parties, but on infiltrating small groups of 15-20 men each in various points of the country, mainly in mountainous regions. Fidel Castro said, the main task of these groups, as is now becoming clear, includes a gradual accumulation of strength, and primarily the accomplishment of acts of terrorism, various [acts] of subversion, acts of sabotage, etc. We have already detected the appearance of such groups on Cuban territory who have arrived from the USA. A number of saboteurs and terrorists have been arrested.

We are absolutely convinced, stressed Fidel Castro, that the Americans and the forces of the internal and external counterrevolution will act in the near future in just this very respect. The internal counterrevolution has become more organized right now, is more skillfully directed from the outside, and is striving to inflict blows on us primarily in the economic sphere. Recently the internal counterrevolution has managed to set fire to several large stores and warehouses with goods and food. Today, 13 April, the counterrevolutionaries set fire to El Encanto, the largest store in Havana. The total losses from subversion and sabotage in the past several days is already reckoned in tens of millions of pesos. The Cuban revolutionary government fully realizes that all the actions of Kennedy and the internal and external counterrevolution controlled by the US government are directed at causing a breakdown of the economy of the country and to thus cause a growth of dissatisfaction of the broad masses with the policy of the revolutionary government.

Fidel Castro stressed, the revolutionary government, of course, is taking steps to combat the internal counterrevolution. However for now the possibility of subversion and acts of sabotage cannot be completely excluded. Fidel Castro stressed, we have decided to act against the internal counterrevolution decisively. Subversives, terrorists, and saboteurs will be mercilessly eliminated. The people understand such a need right now and even think that in a number of cases our government is acting too leniently with regard to the counterrevolutionaries.

Then the discussion turned on Kennedy's statement that the USA supposedly does not intend to make a direct military intervention against Cuba. Fidel Castro said in this connection that this statement has positive importance only in the respect that to some degree it demoralizes the internal counterrevolution which, as is well-known, pins all its hopes on the arrival of American soldiers in Cuba. In reality, Fidel Castro continued, Kennedy will take the previous hostile line with respect to Cuba. Yes, this is what properly follows from his statement. Fidel Castro noted, it seems to me that this statement is a peculiar smokescreen to outwardly not compromise the USA before the world and the peoples of Latin America, and in case of necessity to depict the whole matter as if the fight is not between the USA and Cuba, but between Cubans of different political tendencies. In reality Kennedy, Fidel Castro continued, will continue

the previous hostile line with respect to Cuba. Obviously, they will take steps to further intensify the economic blockade and give even broader aid to the external and internal counterrevolution. We are confident that the subversive activity against our government will be carried out as before. Kennedy hopes that he will be able to smother the Cuban revolution with the aid of this tactic. However, Kennedy is deeply mistaken.

Fidel Castro stressed, the Cuban revolution is developing successfully, and the political consciousness of the masses and their enthusiasm are growing, in spite of all the difficulties. Fidel Castro noted, I am especially happy that right now a consolidation of all the leftist forces in the country is occurring. A process of the merging of these forces is actually going on. At the same a peculiar polarization of forces is occurring -- an alignment and some retreat from the revolution by the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie elements. This is a natural process, of course, and it does not frighten us. Fidel Castro noted, the bourgeoisie cannot be made revolutionaries.

The main thing, Fidel Castro stressed in conclusion, is that we have firm support in the people. The peasantry and working class support the revolution right now, and every day the union of the working class and the peasantry becomes stronger, and this is the guarantee of our victory. Domestic political difficulties do not worry us right now as much as the economic difficulties created by the American blockade. Fidel Castro said, on the whole agriculture and industry are operating successfully, and the country will be supplied with all the necessary kinds of food and manufactured goods with the exception of fats and soap. Rationing will unavoidably have to be temporarily introduced. Fidel Castro stressed, in our opinion it will only further harden the people and teach them to deal with the difficulties with which they will have to cope more than once in the difficult and stubborn battle with the forces of American imperialism.

The rest of the conversation with Fidel Castro touched on several general questions.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA
(S. KUDRYAVTSEV)

On 22 April, after the Cuban government had crushed the Bay of Pigs invasion and launched a massive crackdown against real or perceived anti-regime forces, the Soviet ambassador met with Fidel Castro and President Osvaldo Dorticós, inviting them to breakfast. It is not clear whether they met once or twice, but Kudryavtsev recorded two separate memoranda of conversation.

From the Journal of S.M. Kudryavtsev, 'Record of a Conversation with Prime Minister Fidel Castro Ruz and President Osvaldo Dorticos Torrado, 22 April 1961'

[Source: AVP RF, F. 0104. Op. 17, P. 118, D. 3. ll. 216-218. Obtained by James G. Hershberg and translated by Gary Goldberg. Accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/188141>.]

from the journal of
S. M. KUDRYAVTSEV

Top Secret. Copy № 2
26 April 1961
№ 149 [SIC]

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
with Prime Minister Fidel CASTRO RUZ and President Osvaldo DORTICOS TORRADO

22 April 1961

I met today with Fidel Castro and Dorticos. In accordance with instructions [I] had I passed them the text of a message of Cde. N. S. Khrushchev in reply to Kennedy's message of 18 April.¹⁰

President Dorticos read the text of this message aloud, and Fidel Castro repeatedly interrupted him with individual approving remarks.

After reading the text of the message of Cde. N. S. Khrushchev Fidel Castro said that this is a remarkable document which will have enormous significance for the cause of peace. The argumentation contained in this document, continued Fidel Castro, is unusually strong and convincing. The tone of the message is first and in addition calm and confident, which advantageously distinguishes it from the hysteria of Kennedy. Fidel Castro stressed, I am confident that this new message, just like the first message of Cde. N. S. Khrushchev, will raise the prestige of the Soviet Union by an enormous degree and will be evaluated by all peoples as a document of peace.

We are extremely grateful to Cde. N. S. Khrushchev for this new support to Cuba, stressed Fidel Castro. It will undoubtedly force Kennedy to think seriously before deciding on any new adventure against Cuba. This message will undoubtedly exert its own influence and strengthen those circles in the USA which support a more reasonable policy. It will also find a very positive response in a more reasonable policy.

¹⁰ For Khrushchev's 22 April 1961 letter to Kennedy see US Department of State, *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. VI: Kennedy-Khrushchev Exchanges* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1996), doc. 11; for Khrushchev's prior message to JFK and JFK's reply, both 18 April 1961, see *ibid.*, docs. 9 and 10.

President Dorticos also spoke highly in approximately the same words about the message of Cde. N. S. Khrushchev, stressing the deep and dialectic character of the analysis of the situation which Cde. N. S. Khrushchev gave in this document.

Fidel Castro and Dorticos especially liked the place in the message where it said that if Kennedy considers himself justified to take such steps against Cuba, as the US government did recently, then it ought to admit that other countries have no less grounds to act in the same fashion with respect to countries on whose territory military preparations are actually being made which represent a threat to the security of the Soviet Union. Fidel Castro and Dorticos stressed in this connection that such a response hit the nail on the head.

In the course of further conversation it was arranged that the message of Cde. N. S. Khrushchev will be immediately published in the Cuban press as soon as it was placed in our press and broadcast over Soviet radio.

Then, in accordance with instructions [I] had I passed Fidel Castro cordial congratulations of Cde. N. S. Khrushchev on the occasion of the victory won by the Cuban people over the interventionists.

Fidel Castro was very moved by these congratulations and asked that Cde. N. S. Khrushchev be passed his cordial and sincere gratitude.

Fidel Castro stressed that the firm support given Cuba by Cde. N. S. Khrushchev at the moment of the attack on it by counterrevolutionary bands exerted a decisive influence on the Americans, and after this warning they decided not to expand aid to the interventionists or use their aircraft and other resources more broadly.

It was felt from this part of the conversation with Fidel Castro and Dorticos that they were genuinely quite satisfied with Cde. N. S. Khrushchev's message in reply to Kennedy and see it as strong and effective support to Cuba.

Then, in accordance with instructions [I] had I informed Fidel Castro about the granting of the Cuban government's request regarding sending weapons and combat equipment, and specialists, and the proposed delivery of aircraft and also air defense equipment. Fidel Castro asked in this connection that Cde. N. S. Khrushchev be passed his sincere gratitude for the aid to Cuba and the rapid granting of the requests concerning these questions which the revolutionary government had appealed for at one time.

In the course of further conversation Fidel Castro said that, in his opinion, the danger for Cuba had still not passed, and therefore he would request all possible

steps be undertaken so that the weapons, combat equipment, and aircraft be sent in the shortest possible time. It would also be advisable, if possible, to more rapidly send the specialists to Cuba, who would immediately be able to start work on arrival. It would not be at all bad, noted Fidel Castro, if specialists in questions of combined-arms tactics were also included in the aforementioned category of specialists. He continued, combat operations to eliminate the interventionists have shown the weakness of the revolutionary army and people's militia, primarily in questions of tactics and troop command.

Then Fidel Castro stressed that he would like to ask the Soviet government to send aircraft and air defense equipment to Cuba in as short a time as possible. The Cuban air forces have no more than 15 pilots in all. However, the Soviet flight instructors who should arrive in Cuba among the other specialists might quickly instruct the available Cuban pilots and thus they could quickly fly on Soviet aircraft. In addition, if possible it is desirable to accelerate the training of 25 Cuban pilots who are now studying in the Soviet Union.

Fidel Castro stressed, for our part we will take every step to carefully conceal the aircraft from the enemy, and I would like to assure the Soviet government that these aircraft will not be harmed. It is also extremely important to strengthen the country's air defenses, to begin with, even at the expense of anti-aircraft artillery.

Fidel Castro further noted that Czechoslovakia also intended to help Cuba with weapons and combat equipment, and the Cuban government had decided to accept this aid.

In conclusion Fidel Castro again asked me to pass his sincere gratitude to Cde. N. S. Khrushchev for the aid and support to Cuba in the difficult days for it.

The rest of the conversation with Fidel Castro and Dorticos touched on several general questions. Fidel Castro told in detail about the combat operations to eliminate the amphibious forces of the external counterrevolution which had invaded, and the revolutionary army and the people's militia displayed great heroism and selflessness in these battles.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA
(S. KUDRYAVTSEV)

From the Journal of S.M. Kudryavtsev, 'Record of a Conversation with Prime Minister Fidel Castro Ruz and President Osvaldo Dorticos Torrado, 22 April 1961'

[Source: AVP RF, F. 0104. Op. 17, P. 118, D. 3. ll. 219-222. Obtained by James G. Hershberg and translated by Gary Goldberg. Accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/188142>.]

from the journal of
S. M. KUDRYAVTSEV

Top Secret. Copy № 2
9 June 1961
№ 186

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
with Prime Minister Fidel CASTRO RUZ and President Osvaldo DORTICOS TORRADO

22 April 1961

I invited Fidel Castro and President Dorticos to breakfast.

1. Referring to instructions of the Soviet government I informed them about the granting of the request of the Cuban government concerning the question of the special deliveries on the basis of the agreement reached in Moscow in the course of the talks with the mission of Flavio Bravo.

Fidel Castro and President Dorticos asked that their sincere gratitude be passed to the Soviet government for the rapid and effective solutions of these so important questions for the strengthening of the defense of Cuba. When doing this Fidel Castro assured the Soviet government that the Cuban government would take all necessary steps to keep the special equipment from possible bombing by the enemy. Fidel Castro further provided assurance that he would give the necessary orders to the General Staff and other Cuban military authorities to ensure the proper acceptance and storage of the special deliveries.

2. Several questions associated with the development of the foreign policy and domestic situation in Cuba were touched upon in the course of further conversation with Fidel Castro and Dorticos.

Fidel Castro said, the attack of the counterrevolutionary bands on Cuba, as can now be established on the basis of the operations which have taken place, was well and carefully planned in the military sense. The Pentagon's military plan to carry out this operation was also well thought-out and drafted from the purely military point of

view. The Pentagon's plan provided for launching a lightning strike, and in the event of its failure consolidation in this inaccessible sector of territory and the waging of a lengthy war of attrition against Cuba, mainly with the aid of aircraft. In developing the plan of intervention against Cuba the USA proceeded from the position that at the first clash the revolutionary army and people's militia would scatter and a mass revolt against the revolutionary government would arise throughout the entire country. This, however, was the Pentagon's main miscalculation.

The interventionists were supplied with a large quantity of modern weapons, enough weapons for up to 10,000 men. The USA counted on people from the internal counterrevolution to come running toward the counterrevolutionaries. Six battalions in all, one of them a parachute battalion, were landed under air cover. The total strength of the assault group was about 1500 men. From the statements of the prisoners it follows that these were the main forces which the external counterrevolution had at this time. Right now, in all probability, small detachments of counterrevolutionaries were left in the US and other Central American countries which are no great danger to Cuba from the military point of view.

Fidel Castro continued, the General Staff of the army and the people's militia developed a plan to surround the amphibious force which had landed. When this was done the main task was not to allow the interventionists to penetrate into the interior of the country, to the north, and also to the east, to the region of Escambray. A mission was assigned at the same time to cut off this enemy grouping from the sea, not allow it to be evacuated. Fidel Castro continued, a large role in the destruction of the enemy assault force was played by the revolutionary air force which, although it numbered only 10 aircraft in all, nevertheless sank four ships of the interventionists and several barges with weapons and ammunition. In addition, the path for their retreat was actually thus cut off. Ten enemy aircraft were shot down in battles.

The enemy group was quickly suppressed and demoralized as a result of the air strikes, mortar, and artillery fire. Thanks to the successful encirclement operations none of the interventionists managed to break through to Escambray nor to be evacuated by sea. Right now the interventionists are surrendering en masse and the number of prisoners already exceeds 400. The revolutionary army and people's militia have lost in battle over 100 men killed and about 200 wounded.

Then Fidel Castro said that right now the question is being raised in the UN of showing mercy to the interventionists. He said, we can show such mercy only on one condition: the UN gives guarantees that counterrevolutionary bands will not be sent to Cuba any more, that the US will stop arming, training, and supporting them, and also that Cuban counterrevolutionary organizations who have found shelter on their territory will disband. Corresponding instructions in this direction have been given to Raul Roa.

The defeat of the interventionists, stressed Fidel Castro, has inflicted an irreparable blow to US prestige, and in Latin America most of all. The annoying speeches of Kennedy demonstrate that he wants to intimidate or, rather, maintain the fear of the USA by Latin American peoples. However, now the situation has radically changed. We think that if Kennedy tries to raise the Cuban question in the Organization of American States right now and demand agreement to perform a collective intervention against Cuba, this would lead to the collapse of the OAS. Brazil, Mexico, and Ecuador will now even more surely support Cuba.

Fidel Castro stressed, now it can be established that the foreign policy positions of Cuba have considerably strengthened as a result of the victory. The domestic situation of the country will now be even stronger. The victory of the revolutionary forces has resulted in an extraordinary consolidation of the entire Cuban revolution. The internal counterrevolution was dealt a number of blows in these days from which it will be difficult for it to recover. On the whole we can now look at the future more confidently and calmly. Of course, there remains the danger of direct intervention from US forces. The aircraft of the US Air Force fly over all Cuban military bases, evidently for purposes of intelligence [collection], and American destroyers continue to cruise along [our] coasts.

Fidel Castro stressed, we well understand our responsibility to the world. Therefore the revolutionary army and people's militia have been given all the necessary orders not to give the Americans any pretext for provocations. We have decided not to demobilize, and the country will be in a state of combat alert until the situation is finally clear.

Fidel Castro stressed, we hope that the firm warning given by Cde. N. S. Khrushchev in his messages to Kennedy will exert a sobering influence on the US government.

President Dorticos, who took part in the conversation, also expressed himself in the same terms.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA
(S. KUDRYAVTSEV)

Assassination Plotting, June 1961: A Soviet Warning

One of the most controversial, and perennially intriguing, aspects of the US-Cuban confrontation in the early 1960s is the topic of assassination plotting against Fidel Castro by the

Central Intelligence Agency during the Kennedy Administration. The subject recently received a renewed surge of attention with the staged release in late 2017 and early 2018 of thousands of formerly classified (in part or in full) documents opened as a result of the 1992 John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act. That legislation was inspired by the controversial Oliver Stone movie “JFK” (1991), which posited the idea of a conspiracy to murder the president involving the CIA, Lyndon B. Johnson, and assorted shadowy characters.

Long missing from the story, however, has been much sense of how the topic entered Soviet-Cuban exchanges at the time, and the level of knowledge of the assassination plots in Moscow (many Cuban figures, from Fidel Castro on down, have commented regarding their own knowledge of various plots).

On 24 June, 1961, the document reproduced below indicates, Moscow’s ambassador in Havana informed Fidel Castro about “the plans of the external counterrevolution and American intelligence” regarding assassination plots against Cuban leaders. After thanking Kudryavtsev for the information, Castro, in turn, promised to commission Minister of the Interior Ramiro Valdés Menéndez, a top intelligence aide in the Cuban government, to urgently investigate the “names” provided and “possibly arrest” the organizers of the assassination attempt being prepared. Alas, the document provides no details on precisely which assassination plotting the Soviets had uncovered—and US sources do not clarify which of the many anti-Castro schemes was foremost at that moment. The CIA’s internal 1967 report on assassination plotting against Castro referenced the “Gambling Syndicate Operation” as the main effort from “August 1960-May 1961,” including in the months surrounding the Bay of Pigs operation, but it is not clear whether the Soviet report involved these particular plots or others involving the intelligence agency and anti-Castro Cuban activists.¹¹

¹¹ CIA Inspector General, Memorandum for the Record, Subject: Report on Plots to Assassinate Fidel Castro, 23 May 1967, at <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0005/7324009.pdf> or <https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/releases/104-10213-10101.pdf>

From the Journal of S.M. Kudryavtsev, 'Record of a Conversation with Prime Minister of the Republic of Cuba Fidel Castro Ruz, 24 June 1961'

[Source: AVP RF, F. 0104. Op. 17, P. 118, D. 4, Il. 105-106. Obtained by James G. Hershberg and translated by Gary Goldberg. Accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/188148>.]

From the journal of
S. M. KUDRYAVTSEV

Secret. Copy № 2
12 July 1961
№ 224

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
with Prime Minister of the Republic of Cuba Fidel CASTRO RUZ

24 June 1961

I met with Fidel Castro at my apartment and in accordance with instructions [I] had I informed him of the plans of the external counterrevolution and American intelligence being drafted regarding the organization of attempts on the lives of the most prominent state figures of Cuba.

Listening to me closely, Fidel Castro said that he would like to ask me to pass on his gratitude to the Soviet government for this confidential information and the concern about him. Fidel Castro continued, this report deserves attention especially as it contains a number of names and details. He will immediately charge Minister of Internal Affairs Ramiro Valdes with personally dealing with the investigation of this matter.

The plan of attempts on the lives of the leaders of the Cuban government hatched by American intelligence and the Cuban counterrevolution have long been known in general outline. The internal and external counterrevolution essentially have no other way out left, and they are hanging on to the idea of assassination as the only and last means to smother the Cuban revolution. They actually hope that the murder of the main leaders of Cuba will cause chaos in the country and make it easier for them to carry out a plan of intervention. But, Fidel Castro stressed, American intelligence and the external counterrevolution are mistaken, mainly in that the Cuban revolution will not perish as a result of the removal of a particular political leader. Our revolution, continued Fidel Castro, has put down deep roots, and such acts of terrorism might first of all be turned against their organizers.

In the course of further conversation Fidel Castro stressed that these words of his do not at all mean that he personally and the other leaders do not attach importance to their security protection. Concerning the question of revealing some information I had reported to him in accordance with the aforementioned instructions, Fidel Castro said that he thinks that no publication ought to be made for the time being. He thinks that this can only make a mess of the matter. Of course, he and Ramiro Valdes will take every step for the names reported to him not to be known to anyone. He and Ramiro Valdes will keep all this a proper secret. The Cuban MVD [Ministry of Internal Affairs] will conduct a careful investigation and possibly manage to arrest the organizers of the assassination attempts being prepared. The protection of Cuban leaders will be increased and every step will be taken to ensure their safety.

Speaking further about Kennedy's policy with respect to Cuba Fidel Castro stressed that at the present time the US and the Cuban counterrevolution are relying on the development of terrorism in the country, acts of sabotage and subversion, in order to make it easier for the new intervention against Cuba that they are preparing. However, he, Fidel Castro, thinks that after the failure of the [US Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai E.] Stevenson mission with which he travelled throughout the countries of Latin America to organize an intervention against Cuba with the forces of the countries of Central America and Cuban counterrevolutionaries, it will be very hard for the United States, even in the event that they decide to support such an intervention with their air force and navy. An assassination attempt on the leaders of the Cuban state and a subsequent intervention against Cuba, Fidel Castro said in conclusion, can cause a revolutionary explosion in Latin America and immense consequences for the US itself.

The rest of the conversation touched on some general questions.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA
(S. KUDRYAVTSEV)

James G. Hershberg is Professor of History and International Affairs at George Washington University; former Director of the Wilson Center's Cold War International History Project; and author of *James B. Conant: Harvard to Hiroshima and the Making of the Nuclear Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993) and *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam* (Washington/Stanford: Wilson Center Press/Stanford University Press, 2012). He is currently working on a study of Cuba, Brazil, and the Cold War.