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**From the Journal of A.I. Alekseyev, 'Record of a
Conversation with Fidel Castro Ruz, Prime Minister
of the Republic of Cuba, 15 January 1963'**

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Summary:

Alekseyev describes a conversation with Fidel Castro regarding military and trade negotiations, prospects for Kennedy's policy toward Cuba, and a harsh letter from Khrushchev.

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from the journal of
A. I. ALEKSEYEV

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

13 February 1963

At Fidel Castro's invitation today at 0200 I visited him at [his] apartment and delivered a letter of Cde. N. S. Khrushchev on the question of military talks, and also orally presented a memorandum on Cuban-Soviet trade negotiations in Moscow. In spite of the late hour, our conversation lasted more than two hours.

Castro declared that he considers holding talks on military questions timely and thinks that they would best held in Havana. He is afraid that the trip of Raul Castro to Moscow will give American propaganda a new excuse to unleash anti-Cuban hysteria. However, Castro did not make a final decision, but said that he would discuss this question with Raul Castro, who is to return from a province the next week. Castro spoke approvingly of the dispatch of a unit of our military specialists which has just begun, considering that this will weaken the position of the militarist circles of the US and strengthen the position of Kennedy. For the first time he expressed a realistic point of view about the great differences between the hawkish American circles and the official representatives of the US. He also said that, although he doesn't trust Kennedy a bit, nevertheless he considers his position more reasonable and to Cuba's advantage. He understands that Kennedy's position was caused by a fear of the Soviet Union and thermonuclear war, and therefore he ties the question of intervention in Cuba with questions of war and world peace. However, Castro thinks that Kennedy might yield to the militarists sooner or later if he understands that he won't be able to stifle the Cuban revolution by other means. Castro is especially afraid of the election campaign in the US, when one party or another will decide the question of Cuba.

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In Castro's opinion, the existence of large differences between the countries of the NATO camp gives Cuba an opportunity to count on a respite and relatively peaceful development for some time. Nevertheless, he repeated his old thesis about a possible danger of an unleashing of a local war against Cuba by the forces of American satellites. Castro sees the development of the revolutionary movement in Latin America as a counterweight to this possibility.

I noted to Fidel Castro that the US, considering its interests in other parts of the world, where the balance of forces is not in their favor, will hardly decide on this step since they know that the Soviet Union will not remain indifferent in this matter.

Regarding the questions of the Caribbean Crisis and our differences in the assessment of these events, Castro offered a new thesis, that both sides were right in their own ways. The Soviet Union saved the world [mir, which could also be translated as "the peace"] and in this moment actually protected Cuba from an invasion. Cuba, thanks to the firmness of its policy, forged the unity and strengthened the fighting spirit of the people still further, and also raised the prestige of the revolution before the peoples fighting for their independence. He said that a period has come when the Cuban leaders will be faced with the question of improving the country's economy in

all its entirety so that Cuba can become an example for the peoples of Latin America.

Castro expressed the great appreciation of the Cuban leadership and the people to the Soviet government for its unselfish aid, and gave assurances of the sanctity of the fraternal feelings and the friendship between our countries. He said, we are especially appreciative to the Soviet government for its patience and unobtrusiveness toward us, which in psychological terms is more important than any economic aid, since the true nature of socialist relations between a small and large country was manifest in this.

Choosing a suitable moment I presented Fidel Castro with a report of our government in connection with the trade talks which had concluded in Moscow.

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Before I began to present this report we had a very warm and friendly conversation which touched on a number of questions. Castro was in an elevated mood and often joked about the period we had recently experienced. He talked about the great impression which the letter of Cde. N. S. Khrushchev of 31 January made on him and all the Cuban leaders.

Touching on the question of a trip to the Soviet Union, he said that he agrees to it in principle, but stipulated that inasmuch as he doesn't feel completely well, he would first like to be treated and rest in order to go to the [Soviet] Union completely healthy.

I told Fidel that we can draw up a visit program as he desires, and he can be treated and rest there [u nas].

Castro asked what means of transportation [would be] best used for the trip, and expressed a desire to go by steamship where he could rest well.

I told him that there would be no difficulties for a trip on a steamship, but it would be better to rest in one of our sanatoria under the observation of doctors for those two weeks which would pass on a trip by steamship, which would be of more use to him. Castro agreed with this.

Then at his own initiative he began to speak of the appreciation of the Cuban people and its leadership for our enormous unselfish aid and patient attitude with them.

Castro said that in all the conversations which he has had the occasion to hold with representatives of capitalist countries he always talks about the nature of the relations with the Soviet Union based on complete equality and mutual understanding, the lack of any attempts at interference in the internal affairs of Cuba by Soviet representatives, and generally about the advantage of economic ties with the USSR. This always makes a strong impression, he said, inasmuch as I compare this policy of the USSR with the policy of the US based on pressure and crude interference in the affairs of small countries.

Castro said that he had just held two such conversations with Brazilian Ambassador Camara Canto, who asked whether the USSR was pursuing the goal of using Cuba as a base for subversive activity in the countries of Latin America.

Castro said that interlocutors from capitalist countries listen to his statements since they incorrectly think that we allegedly have certain differences with the USSR. He noted in connection with this that, in his opinion, his statement of 1 November 1962 about the existence of differences with the Soviet Union on the Caribbean Crisis and their settlement through talks between the governments had strengthened the

position of the Cuban revolution in the eyes of the peoples of Latin America and not only did not belittle the role of the USSR, but even raised its prestige.

Castro listened to the first part of the report of our government without any special reaction but, as soon as I began to name the figures of aid being given Cuba, Castro pricked up his ears and began to listen closely, and as soon as it struck me I understood what was at the end of this document. Castro took the text of the translated report from me and again closely read it with a concerned look. Castro expressed regret that this report had come to him after two such warm letters from Cde. N. S. Khrushchev.

Then he said that he understands the Soviet government's concern and that the Cuban leaders, actually occupied with other matters, and have not made any serious steps to eliminate the consequences of this crisis in their propaganda. Castro gave assurances that both the entire Cuban leadership as well as the overwhelming majority of the people not only have not lost faith, but were imbued with a still greater feeling of gratitude to the USSR.

He continued, it is clear to all of us that your people are bearing great sacrifices in helping us, but none of us has even raised the question that the Soviet Union is helping us from mercenary interests. It is clear that our revolution can only move forward with the aid of the Soviet Union. We understand that the friendship with the Soviet Union ought to be propagandized much more broadly, but this cannot be done bureaucratically [po-kazennomu], but such moments need to be chosen when this propaganda will reach the people's hearts. I can only say that fears of our supposed underestimation of the Soviet aid and the efforts of the Soviet people do not reflect the real state of things.

This is possibly based on individual isolated cases and insufficiently objective information based only on the press and rumors. Here Castro cited an example that Czechoslovak Ambassador Pavlicek had recently expressed a complaint to Raul Castro about the role of the Soviet Union being hushed up by our press, obviously incorrectly thinking that this was a conscious policy of our government. Castro noted, in general the representatives of a number of socialist countries are more impatient with our blunders than you Soviet people, who understand us better and trust us.

I told Fidel Castro that, knowing his nature, I frankly feared his negative reaction to this report, but right here I assured him that it was caused not by dissatisfaction but by our exceptional desire to bring to the attention of the Cuban leaders the motives for our aid and the sincerity of the feelings for them.

Castro replied that he did not take the report as a reproach, but sees in it the purity of our intentions in the elimination of whatever disagreements there were between us. He also said that it is better if sincere relations exist between us and we say everything to one another frankly, which will strengthen our friendship still further. [He] asked that [I] come to him without hesitation if we have any doubt or a misunderstanding arises about any questions.

The meeting ended in an atmosphere of warm cordiality, and he escorted me to the car.

USSR AMBASSADOR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA (A. ALEKSEYEV)

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