

**September 1, 1979**  
**Soviet Ambassador to Cuba Vorotnikov,**  
**Memorandum of Conversation with Raul Castro**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

Raul Castro discusses with the Soviet Ambassador in Cuba the position to be adopted by the Cuban and Soviet governments with regard to the presence of Soviet soldiers in Cuba. Raul Castro also informs the Soviet Ambassador of the discussions that took place between Fidel Castro and Josip Tito in Havana during the meeting of the non-aligned countries.

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION with the second secretary of the CC CP of Cuba, deputy chairman of the State Council and Council of Ministers, minister of FAR [Revolutionary Armed Forces] of the Republic of Cuba

Raul Castro

1 September 1979

On September 1 Raul Castro visited the embassy. He anxiously described the extensive Western, primarily American, anti-Cuban media campaign, timed to coincide with the VIth conference of the heads of states and governments of non-aligned countries. The theme of the increased Soviet military presence in Cuba and the stationing there of ground troops was particularly exaggerated. What is being referred to specifically is an infantry brigade numbering 3,000 soldiers. In recent days American officials have supported this campaign. R. Castro noted the statement by the State Department spokesman Hodding Carter in which he dwelled on the supposedly "recent discovery of Soviet combat units in Cuba," and demands by Senators Stone and Church to conduct an investigation into the question of the Soviet military presence on the island. Furthermore, R. Castro recounted that on September 1 Wayne Smith, the new head of the USA Interest Section in Havana visited the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In his conversation with the deputy minister of foreign affairs of Cuba, P[elegrin]. Torras, he stated that he was authorized to convey the American government's "concern" about the "evidence" of the presence in Cuba of a brigade of Soviet troops. P. Torras replied that the Cuban side would not accept this line of questioning and that American diplomats are fully aware - although the USA fails to understand it - that Cuba is a sovereign state and should be addressed as such, or else it will be impossible to achieve mutual understanding between the two countries. W. Smith hastened to explain that he received instructions only to communicate "concern" and did not require an answer to his statement. He added that the State Department considered it inappropriate to react to the statements by Senators Stone and [Idaho Dem. Frank] Church through bilateral diplomatic channels, without recourse to public debate. The American diplomat also expressed his regret that his first meeting with P. Torras took place on this unpleasant occasion.

In connection with these actions by the USA and considering that this question could emerge at any moment at the Conference of the NAM [non-aligned movement], F. Castro authorized R. Castro to come to an agreement with the Soviet side on a possible reply. The Cuban leaders proposed the following reply: "For the past 17 years a symbolic Soviet combat unit, created as a training center where Soviet military specialists train officers of the FAR [Revolutionary Armed Forces] to use and maintain new military equipment, has indeed been located in Cuba." R. Castro emphasized that they proposed this version out of principled convictions and experience with previous confrontations with Americans regarding the Soviet military presence on the island, and consider that we should not camouflage the real state of affairs but, at the same time, should not make a concession to the Americans, who could easily interpret attempts to negate the presence of a training center on Cuba as a repudiation by Cuba and the USSR of their right to create such a center and send necessary military personnel there. R. Castro added that the Americans have known about this brigade for a long time and that he was struck by the cynicism with which they affirm that it was "recently" detected. He also noted that they had no doubts that the VI conference of the NAM in Havana was one of the domestic and foreign policy reasons for the outbreak of the anti-Cuban campaign.

He further described the proceedings of the meeting of the foreign affairs ministers of the countries of the NAM. On September 1, by the end of the session, the agenda for the Conference of heads of states and governments was practically approved. The inclusion on the agenda of the problem of Western Sahara was the only point on which there was serious discussion. The representative from Morocco spoke against the inclusion of this topic on the agenda because he contended that this was a colonial issue, which had been decided under the auspices of the UN a long time ago, and in consequence of which an agreement with Spain et al. had been signed. Some countries supported him, however, they were in the minority; of the 31 delegations speaking out on this topic, only four urged that Western Sahara not be included on the agenda for the summit conference.

R. Castro considered the dinner given by F. Castro in honor of [Yugoslav leader] J.B. Tito on August 30 to be strictly a formality. The negotiations which took place between F. Castro and J. B. Tito on the next day, however, were useful in his view. The Non-Aligned Movement was unable to achieve mutual understanding on many issues, and on the issue of Kampuchea each leader merely stated his point of view. At the same time J.B. Tito's effort to avoid open confrontation with Cuba and other socialist countries was noticeable and the general tenor of the discussion was rather calm. In a private conversation with F. Castro, the Yugoslav leader tried to convince him that Yugoslavia's policies could not be considered anti-Soviet at all, and, in particular, stated that he did not allow anti-Soviet books to be published in Yugoslavia, assuming he knew of their content in advance.

R. Castro also said that J. Tito's entourage, particularly, [Yugoslav Foreign Minister Milos] Minic, was noticeably more "cocky" in his approach to Cuba and the USSR, than he (Tito) himself. During the negotiations Minic tried to outdo Tito and give his own answer or make his own attempt to interpret Tito's words. Thus, for example, Tito agreed to publish a joint Yugoslav-Cuban communique in the press, but then Minic started saying that this would be difficult to accomplish, and as a result it was never drafted.

J. Tito also met with [Ethiopian leader] H. Mengistu. The latter openly posed a whole series of questions about Yugoslavia's policy towards the NAM; however, Tito evaded direct answers to them and talked his way around them with general arguments and appeals to maintain the unity of the Movement.

It still remains undecided whether or not J.B. Tito will speak at the opening ceremony of the Conference of heads of states and governments or during the working session. Yugoslavia claims that, since he is the only founder of the Movement who is still living, he should speak at the opening of the Conference. However, irrespective of how this will be decided, J. Tito will speak in any case, in all likelihood after F. Castro.

During the visit of the Minister of Defense of Nicaragua to the USSR, R. Castro emphasized again that improving military cooperation is not an issue, and that they only intend to influence Bernardino L[arios]. Montiel on political and educational issues. R. Castro related that at one time F. Castro had advised the Sandinistas to appoint one of the former Somoza officers who went over to the revolutionary side as minister of defense. The front's leadership selected B.L. Montiel who gives the impression of an honest and candid individual, but who does not have any fixed political positions. He is mostly "for show"; the army is being built without his knowledge and all real power in this area belongs to the commander-in-chief of the people's Sandinista army, Humberto Ortega. B.L. Montiel senses this and tried to send in his resignation. To prevent his resignation and give him the appearance of authority, the leaders of the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) organized a trip to Cuba for the minister and asked for the cooperation of the Cubans in the organization of trips for B.L. Montiel to other countries. The first reaction of the Cuban friends was that it would not be appropriate for him to travel either to the GDR or to the USSR. They said this to H. Ortega. He answered that he shares their fears, but

explained Montiel current situation and said that he was already promised trips to Cuba, Arab states, and Europe, and once again affirmed that what was proposed was only an unofficial, private, exclusively "informational" visit. After this second request by H. Ortega, considering that they themselves suggested to the Sandinistas that they make the former Somoza officer defense minister, the Cuban leaders decided to turn to the Soviet side on this matter.

R. Castro also commented that the Nicaraguan foreign minister, Miguel D'Escoto, who was also in Cuba, was a former Jesuit priest, but apparently one of a small number of "red priests" in Latin America. He is educated and has a grasp of many issues, but his political views cannot be called clear and well-founded. However, he has conducted himself very well at the session of the OAS on Nicaragua and now at the conference of ministers of foreign affairs of the NAM in Havana. His appointment to the position of minister of foreign affairs of the FSLN also followed the advice of F. Castro to include several priests in the government. The minister of culture is a second priest in the government.

I thanked R. Castro for the information he conveyed.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR  
TO THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA  
(V. Vorotnikov)