

October 2, 1961

**Memorandum of Conversation between Mao Zedong
and Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticos in Beijing**

Citation:

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Summary:

A conversation about the situations in Venezuela and Peru in regards to their foreign relations with Cuba. Both countries also offer a comparison to the overall situation in both Latin and Central America.

Credits:

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Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

Time: 4PM - 5:30 PM, 2 October 1961

Venue: Building Six, Diaoyutai State Guesthouse.

Present: Chinese Side: Zhou Enlai, Shen Jian; Cuban Side: Ambassador to China Pino Santos, Ambassador to Mexico [Jose Antonio] Portuono, Ambassador to Czechoslovakia Raúl Roa Kouri

Interpreter: Chen Yongyi

Recorder: Wu Mingqi

[...] [sic]

Chairman Mao: What is the situation in Venezuela?

Dorticos: Very bad. The Venezuelan government is leaning, day by day, towards reactionaries and imperialists. The leftists—the communists and the Revolutionary Left Movement split from the ruling party, the Democratic Action Party—are politically influential, but often have to operate underground. President [Romulo Ernesto] Betancourt [Bello] relies mainly on American financial support. Because of the political inexperience of Venezuelan peasants, President Betancourt has gained some popularity from the peasants in the rural areas. In cities, particularly in Caracas, there emerge people's resistance towards government and the presidency which escalates and compels Betancourt to look for measures of suppressions.

Chairman Mao: Have you seen Venezuela's [Carlos Román] Delgado [Chalbaud Gómez]? I've seen him. He is over 60, a man of curiosity. Do you know him?

Dorticos: Not personally. [But I do] know he belongs to the leftists of the Democratic Action Party. The leader of the leftist revolutionary movement is Domingo [Alberto] Rangel. He used to lead the Youth Movement of the Democratic Action Party. He has maintained an agreeable relationship with the Venezuelan communist party.

Chairman Mao: Could the Revolutionary Left Movement operate only underground?

Dorticos: No, it is legal, except some of its activities do have to go underground due to government suppression. Venezuela is on the verge of revolution. Uprisings of a revolutionary nature could be expected at any minute in Venezuela which is the country where Latin American communist parties call for uprisings to take place. Venezuela is preparing for this scenario. Besides, Venezuela is also facing the problem of reactionary military personnel.

Chairman Mao: A government like Batista's.

Dorticos: But it wears a democratic face, also talking about land reform. Betancourt was a Marxist, but now he is regretting having been a Marxist. When young, he was a member of the Venezuelan communist party.

Roa: He is a founder of the Costa Rican communist party.

Dorticos: It couldn't be worse than to be a regretful communist.

During my visit to Latin American countries one year ago, I went to Venezuela. Some incidents occurred on my arrival in Caracas. Betancourt could not come to receive us, because the airport was filled with slogans against him chanted by people, all terrible slogans. I and foreign minister [Raúl] Roa together met Betancourt in his presidential compound. At the time we could hear chanting through the window: "long live the

Cuban Revolution; down with Betancourt.” I felt sorry. Betancourt said: you come to create troubles for us. This is not my fault, I replied. Betancourt continued: this situation only happens in Caracas; elsewhere in the country, people still support me.

Now, [Maros Perez] Jimenez retains some influence in the army, attempting to stage a coup d’état to overthrow Betancourt. He [Betancourt] is facing challenges on two fronts, which is why he looks to Washington for help.

Chairman Mao: What is the situation of Peru?

Dorticos: Very bad.

Chairman Mao: Is Peru going to put up with a Cuban exile government set up inside their country?

Dorticos: This is what [Jorge Antonio Fernandez] Pereda proclaimed in the US.

Chairman Mao: Where is the exile government now?

Dorticos: It is said that [the exile government] will be established within the next few days. But no news of its establishment has yet arrived. Each faction is scrambling [for power] at the other’s expense, unable to reach an agreement. One major reason, among many, is that everyone wants to be the president. Recently the imperialists have intensified their propaganda activities in America, which, especially after I left Cuba, have become ever more ruthless.

Chairman Mao: The purpose of establishing an exile government is to sabotage [Cuba] and to unite all reactionaries. Have all Latin American countries recognized you?

Dorticos: Many countries severed their relations with us. Almost all Central American countries did this. Peru of South America severed diplomatic relations with us, so did Paraguay. Imperialism forced puppet governments to break off relations with us. The Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Haiti, Peru, and Paraguay—we have no diplomatic relations with them anymore.

Chairman Mao: But you still have relations with big countries, Mexico, Brazil, and with Panama too.

Dorticos: We have relations with Panama, but only strained relations. We have very good relations with Mexico. We have relations with Venezuela, but again, strained ones. We have relations with Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and etc., to some extent. We also have relations with Canada.

There is information that the Philippines government is preparing for a severance of relations with us. The US pressured it.

Chairman Mao: They listen to the US. Some countries, for instance, Central American countries, could possibly recognize the exile government.

Zhou Enlai: The same strategy has been used [by the US] in Asia. The US hides itself in the dark and forced some countries [to recognize exile governments].

Dorticos: This is what the US wants. Consider the Bay of Pigs Incident, in which the plan was to first occupy a region in the south of Cuba, then separate it from the rest

of the country, and finally establish a government which would receive recognition from the US and other countries. We seized from invaders the documents that had all details of the plan.

The Giron Beach and Long Beach are in an area of quagmires. Only two highways and one, perhaps two, lanes lead to that place. They wished to secure the foothold by concentrating their force at the two highways, therefore, holding us off and fortifying the place. With supplies from sea and air, [they planned to] construct the runway right away after they had landed.

Chairman Mao: But their construction proved not fast enough.

Dorticos: Within 72 hours they were vanquished. Under the personal command of Fidel [Castro], a counter-attack was soon organized and no chance was given to them to retain their foothold.

Chairman Mao: Were there inhabitants?

Dorticos: There were. Some were captured [by invaders].

Chairman Mao: Were there also militias?

Dorticos: Near [the landing area] was only a platoon from Cienfuegos City. They were the first to initiate the resistance, only with some light weapons though.

News [of the invasion] came to us at 3 o'clock in the morning. Militias of Matanzas were then all dispatched. The air force started to attack at the first light of dawn, which was of decisive significance. They had one battalion ready for landing; yet under attack from the air, landing became hopeless and [they could] only run for their lives. Some of their ships were armed with cannons targeting the highway and ready to block us. We had a small air force while the enemy's was large, but our men fought gallantly. We lost many men. If the tactical plan had been better prepared, our sacrifice could have been less. Nevertheless, we expected the battle would be ended as soon as possible, and many of us were inexperienced.

Chairman Mao: This time many people acquired experience.

Did you sink any enemy warships?

Dorticos: [We] sank one, but the rest escaped. Both our pilots and anti-aircraft units shot enemy planes. Next day, the US air force sent down 'Sabre' fighters, attempting to cover [the invading force], but soon flew away before the real battle started. Based on the bickering within the US Congress and [John F.] Kennedy's own words, later [we realized that the withdrawal of 'Sabre' fighters] was because Kennedy at the last minute called off the idea of direct involvement of the US air force.

Now we need to cope with a [possible] new and ever bigger invasion.

Chairman Mao: True. It seems that the US did have extra worries. It was afraid of an entrenched war in which you tended not to yield anyway. Meanwhile, it also sensed that the international situation was turning to its disadvantage.

Dorticos: We believe the real reason for the US not daring to publicly invade us was that it could not conquer our country within a short time, making it an established fact.