

## **September 28, 1961**

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

### **Citation:**

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### **Summary:**

A conversation about the situation in Brazil. Cuba's diplomatic relations to other countries around the world are also discussed, especially as they relate to the recent U.S. blockade of Cuba.

### **Credits:**

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### **Original Language:**

Chinese

### **Contents:**

Translation - English

Time: 9:30PM -11 PM, 28 September 1961

Venue: Qingzhen Hall in Zhongnanhai

Present: Cuban Side: Head of the Delegation of Representatives of Integrated Revolutionary Organization Maj. Sanchez, Ambassador to China Pino Santos, Ambassador to Mexico [Jose Antonio] Portuono, Ambassador to Czechoslovakia Raúl Roa Kouri.

Chinese Side: Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Chen Yi, Luo Ruiqing, Zeng Yongquan, Shen Jian, Li Qixin

Interpreter: Chen Yongyi

Recorder: Chen Guang, Liu Xiliang

[...] [sic]

Mao: The Brazilian vice-president [João Goulart] told me, the US demanded an intervention in Cuba by the Organization of American States who, however, failed to carry it out. He raised an example. Between Brazil and Argentina there is Paraguay. The Paraguayan government made tremendous efforts in organizing an anti-Cuban demonstration, only to assemble ten thousand people in the end. However, the next day, 100 thousand people voluntarily walked in the streets and demonstrated in support of Cuba. This is the story from the Brazilian vice-president.

Do you know this?

Dorticos: We were informed, more or less.

Mao: Vice-president Goulart has now become the president of Brazil.

Dorticos: Brazil has undergone a serious crisis which left the people's movement in a grave situation.

Mao: What is the situation now?

Dorticos: As far as we know, Brazil has seized victory from the struggle against imperialism and counter-revolutionaries. Yet this victory is inconclusive. People should stay vigilant.

Zhou Enlai: [...] [sic] The heads of the army, the navy, and the air force of Brazil were all replaced. It appears [that Goulart employed a] step-by-step strategy.

Mao: Ah! It seems that Goulart does have a trick up his sleeve. Very good tactics.

Dorticos: We believe that after the counter-revolutionary forces within the Brazilian military made certain gains, they had to retreat in the face of the resistance of the Brazilian people and the Latin American people's vocal support of the Brazilian people.

Mao: What about the congress?

Zhou Enlai: The Brazilian congress appears to be on Goulart's side.

Mao: The situation favors you. Brazil is such a big country, and then there is Mexico. Perhaps there are other countries friendly to you?

Dorticos: The imperialist conspiracy to isolate us has failed, but the imperialists do

not give up.

Mao: [They will try to] isolate you again. To them, the struggle hasn't stopped. Neither has it to us.

Dorticos: This is a long-term struggle.

[...] [sic]

Dorticos: Cuba is inexperienced.

Mao: You have not had as much time. But you have more intellectuals, which means that you would perhaps achieve more in a few years.

Dorticos: We have the aid of the socialist camp, and could draw on the lessons of the socialist countries. But we are in dire need of intellectuals, professors, architects, and other professionals.

On top of it, another headache for us is that many doctors, architects, intellectuals-some had the daylight scared out of them by imperialists and others surrendered to the imperialist bribery-abandon our country. In Cuba, in fact, there are no national bourgeoisie intellectuals who could be counted upon now.

The national bourgeoisie is closely connected to imperialism. Because of the direct imperialist pressure, our efforts to win over the national bourgeoisie were compromised.

Mao: [Are there] people from the national bourgeoisie staying in Cuba?

Dorticos: Yes. But they did not participate in the management work, nor did they play any coordinating roles. The national bourgeoisie in exile are now dwelling on an illusion, hoping American imperialists would sooner or later restore their control of Cuba. At the same time, the imperialists are sustaining this illusion, indeed, for their own sake.

Mao: Therefore you will face an ever more difficult situation in construction. You too need to train your own intellectuals.

Dorticos: This is indeed one of the immediate goals on which we are putting tremendous efforts. Because we understand that without a sufficient number of intellectuals, no progress will be achieved in socialist construction.

In our land reform, particularly in its early stage, officers among the insurgents took the full responsibility. They were firm adherents of the revolution, but none of them know agriculture.

Mao: The same case here: [our officers are] capable of conducting revolution but incapable of construction.

Dorticos: They [officers among insurgents] are skilled in confiscating properties from imperialists and landlords, but just incompetent in construction. They need to be replaced. We are training agricultural technicians and cadres for people's farms and cooperatives. Besides, Cuba is a country of mono-agriculture. We are short of experts to diversify our agriculture.

Mao: A new phenomenon. It is entirely a new question.

Dorticos: We are specialized in raising sugarcane, and also tobacco, of very high quality.

Mao: Take your time in learning other things. You will master them. Setbacks in the process of learning are expected. But setbacks could also be good. They are like setbacks in your revolution. No setbacks, no successes. If it comes to the topic of setbacks in our revolution, there are plenty. Experience comes from nowhere but setbacks. Construction is also like that. No success arrives in this world without the companion of setbacks. But the general trend is that we are advancing and the enemy is falling behind. Isn't [Fulgencio] Batista an obvious case of falling behind? Isn't Jiang Jieshi too? All things in the world share the same logic of development: that which is new advances, that which is reactionary in general falls behind.

I have met many Cuban friends with whom the conversation was a pleasure for me. They were vigorous. Indeed, they were just the people you mentioned in the land reform. Although they do not know how to construct now, they will one day. Enthusiasm is the first must-have. It just cannot be done without enthusiasm. With enthusiasm, people always find their way to understand things that they don't know now. Why shouldn't one master the economic construction when one could master the revolution? I just don't believe it. But with 12 years passed we still could not master it, but you only have had two years.

Dorticos: Two years plus a few months. Sometimes, economic construction was interrupted by foreign intervention, and meanwhile we also had to learn to defend ourselves. Revolutionary government did not know how to run a country at the very beginning!

Mao: True! How to run a country, how to be a president, how to be an ambassador, and how to be a labor minister - we did not have any experience! Once you do it, you get the experience.

Dorticos: During revolution, people, highly self-motivated and acting at their best, proved to be fast learners.

[...] [sic]

Mao: Fraternal countries shall be less diplomatic and more sincere [towards each other].

Dorticos: Good point.

Chen Yi: We too actually don't know how to practice diplomacy.

Dorticos: We don't know either.

Mao: (smiling) No idea of diplomacy. One ought to be diplomatic towards Western countries, for they don't speak to you sincerely.

Dorticos: Our intercourse with the People's Republic of China is comradely.

Mao: Therefore, Comrade Shen Jian shall train the staff of our embassy to act friendly towards Cuba.

Dorticos: Our relationship with Ambassador [Shen] resembles the one between comrades or friends. This could be guaranteed.

Mao: Excellent. I feel relieved. An embassy, so far away, with several oceans [separating it from the homeland].

One more thing, did you invite Britain's Marshal [Bernard Law] Montgomery?

Dorticos: Yes. It is for this reason that our ambassador visited Montgomery in Beijing.

Mao: Did he agree?

Santos: He accepted the invitation. But [we are] not sure [if he will come]. [Even if he comes, he] won't stay long.

Mao: He asked me twice whether it is appropriate for him to visit to Cuba. I asked him: have you agreed yet? He said that he agreed. I asked him: when will you set off? He said next year.

Santos: He told me that [he would come] this December.

Mao: Next year, according to what he told me. But it is also all right with me if you try persuading him to go next year. I'm supporting him in visiting Cuba. I said, "What will you lose if you visit Cuba? You will upset the US, no matter whether you choose to visit or not. After all, the US does not like you. It's therefore better to visit Cuba."

Dorticos: How did he respond?

Mao: He concurred that, of course, the US would not like him anyway. I said: it is not a question concerning Cuba alone, but Latin America as a whole. Cuba does not oppose you the British.

Last year, [on 19 November 1960,] I talked with Comrade [Ernesto "Che"] Guevara who mentioned that the way you confiscated foreign companies from Canada and the UK differed from that of the United States.

Dorticos: Yes, we treated different countries differently.

Mao: Right. Even to imperialist countries, we should be differentiating.

Dorticos: For example, on confiscating foreign banks, we gave no redemption to American banks. But we negotiated with Canadian banks and paid for [their losses].

Mao: Good! Differentiate between them.

Dorticos: We have both diplomatic and trade relations [with Canada].

Mao: What about Britain?

Dorticos: [We] have diplomatic relations.

Mao: This is good! With Britain, France, West Germany, and Japan, [Cuba] could develop diplomatic relations. Are you trading with Japan?

Dorticos: Yes. Apart from socialist countries, Japan is one of the major importers of Cuban sugar. The US pressured Canada, Britain, and Japan. The US pressured

particularly Britain and Japan to oppose us. In spite of this, we keep our trade relations.

Mao: Pressure alone never works. Pressure is not persuasive. Didn't [the US] rely on pressure alone in the case of Brazil? [I] don't believe it [will work].

Montgomery [belonged to] one faction within the British Conservative Party. I asked him: Do you belong to the Conservative Party? He said yes. I said: Do you have anyone within the Party listen to your ideas? He said that he has. I said: You are probably the leftist within the Party. He said: yes. I said: I wish for your faction to grow big. He responded that he would have to work on it when he goes back. I asked: Do you stand a chance to be prime minister? He said: no.

Dorticos: Did he speak from his heart?

Mao: I'm afraid so. He is a soldier, he criticizes politicians, and he treats [British Prime Minister Harold] Macmillan as a politician to criticize. He said that the Western world is chaotic and with no leader. He said that disarmament will not succeed, but war is also not worth fighting. Britain has neither the atomic bomb nor the hydrogen bomb, and it would not dare to fight [sic; Britain actually detonated its first atomic bomb in 1952 and its first hydrogen bomb in 1957-ed.] It would not obtain peace, even if it dared to fight-[this scenario] is dangerous-so it cannot fight. How to solve the problem then? [According to Montgomery,] one solution is to recognize East Germany, which means to recognize the existence of two Germanies; the second solution concerns China, to be more precise, Beijing; the third approach is for all countries to withdraw their military bases abroad.

Dorticos: These ideas are bound to make the US dislike him anyway, even without a visit to Cuba.

Mao: There is one of his ideas that could be exploited to your advantage, helping you reclaim Guantanamo [from the United States]. Therefore, you could make further contact with him via your embassy in London when he returns to Britain.

Dorticos: Some contact will surely do good.

Mao: He is a member of the Upper House, a lord, and also with the title of marshal.

Santos: He told me that he will be on a business tour to Central America this December, in which case he will drop by Cuba, though only for 24 hours.

Mao: He said that it will be next year.

Zhou Enlai: He also told me that he would visit Cuba next year. He said that he would go to Japan, then to Canada, afterwards to the Central American and Latin American countries, and next year to Cuba.

[...] [sic]