

July 4, 1967

A Report from the Mexican Embassy in Havana, 4 July 1967

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Summary:

A visit of Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin from 26-30 June 1967 prompts this report from the Mexican Embassy in Havana to the Secretary of Foreign Relations in Mexico City. They discuss: the position assumed by the Cuban Government and Communist Party in relation to Latin America, the Middle East and Vietnam, the internal administration of Cuba and the political operation in Cuba.

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Re: Visit of Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin from 26-30 June 1967

Havana, 4 July 1967

Secretary of Foreign Relations, Mexico City

On the 26th of last month [June], in a way surprising to the public and without prior notice of any kind, Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin arrived in this city, after his visit to the United Nations Headquarters in New York and his interview with President Johnson in New Jersey. He was received at the airport by President Osvaldo Dorticos, Premier Fidel Castro, the Minister of Armed Forces Raul Castro, two or three more officials of the Government and of the Communist Party and [Raul] Castro's wife, Vilma Espín,¹ president of the Federation of Cuban Women. Her attendance may have been a response to the wish that a lady be present during the reception to pay attention to Mr. Kosygin's daughter, who formed part of his delegation.

To repeat Churchill's statement, it could be said about the Soviet leader's visit that it was a mystery wrapped in a secret and kept in a sphinx. Nothing, indeed, has emerged up to now concerning what was discussed with the leaders of the Cuban Government and Communist Party, and although rumors and conjectures are heard in the streets, nothing is concretely known about the matters raised or discussed.

On the other hand, the cold attitude of the Cuban authorities and local press toward the important person, the apparent ignorance about his daughter's stay in Havana, a certain tense formality that could be seen in Dr. Castro Ruz when they took photos of him and the visitor, have all stirred up suspicions that the encounter was not entirely favorable to the Cuban leader.

Not only among Western diplomatic circles, but also in those of the socialist world, it is believed that the matters discussed in perhaps a not very cordial way between the Russian and Cuban statesmen were the following:

First - the position assumed by the Cuban Government and Communist Party in relation to Latin America, where they promote a guerrilla movement against the governments of various countries. In this regard, Kosygin expressed the total disapproval of his government with what Cuba had done, and warned Mr. Castro of the risks of persisting in such a policy for relations in Moscow and Havana. Perhaps the Soviet Union would rather maintain cordial relations in the political and commercial arena with Latin American countries than arouse their enmity and endanger commercial exchange with them.

Second - the Middle East and Vietnam. Kosygin said to Mr. Castro that the position adopted by Cuba in relation to problems in the Middle East and Vietnam is disagreeable to the Soviet Union, since it goes to extremes to urge that the Kremlin not accept it. By seeming more Catholic than the Pope, Castro is possibly seeking to acquire prestige among the forces of the so-called Third World and become its leader, a very inopportune situation for the Soviet Union, presently quite worried about situations that they face in the case of China and Vietnam, Cambodia, etc. in southeast Asia.

Third - internal administration of Cuba. The Russian leader warned Mr. Castro of the serious concerns of his government about the chaotic state of affairs into which the communist administration of Cuba had put the country, and the obvious waste of aid that the Soviet Union had given it. In this respect, it is worth noting that although a commercial agreement exists between the two nations concerning sugar, of course favorable to the Soviet Union, the latter felt obligated to lend help to the government of Havana to keep it moving, though in precarious conditions the [Soviet] national economic machinery exceeds the advantages that its commercial treaties allow it to

attain.

Fourth - political operation in Cuba. Mr. Kosygin expressed to Mr. Castro that his government fears that the constant repression and violence employed against enemies of his regime and even persons innocent of any possible political charge will end up provoking a violent popular reaction and even the defection of part of the army, among whom signs of restlessness are already cause for concern, as the Cuban people suffer more and more from the horrific shortage of all kinds of nutritional items, clothing, etc.

The views and conjectures above do not rest on a firm base, however, they are a general expression of the ideas and judgments awakened in the minds of Western diplomats and of communist countries by the strange reception and circumstances that motivated Mr. Kosygin's trip.

Cuban government officials remain discreet and cautious when talking about the meaning and importance of the Soviet leader's visit. It is possible, however, that Premier Castro might allude to it during his speech to be given in Santiago de Cuba on July 26. Until then, the island will continue to be in an environment of uncertainty and expectation.

To bid farewell to the visitor, we as chiefs of mission were invited to the airport and were able to observe a demonstration by workers and students along the road that connects the airport to the city with a few thousand people. This demonstration was the only act of public importance carried out in honor of Mr. Kosygin.

Lastly, and because it is of interest, I wish to state that this morning the representative of the Associated Press in Cuba, Mr. Miller, came to visit me, and told me that when he wanted to notify his organization of the visit, his message was rejected by Western Union on Friday morning, but surprisingly that same afternoon, governmental authorization for his dispatch was granted. The fact is important since Mr. Miller noticed the coldness of Mr. Kosygin's reception and the almost mysterious circumstances in which his trip took shape. It should be asked, then, why the Cuban censor opposed the dispatch of the cable on Friday morning, then accepted it unchanged in the afternoon. He either did this on his own impulse, or perhaps received instructions from higher up to proceed in such a manner. These are questions with difficult answers, but ones that give way to new issues.

I hereby take the opportunity to reiterate to you assurances of my most attentive and distinguished consideration.

EFFECTIVE SUFFRAGE, NO RE-ELECTION.

The Ambassador Fernando Pámanes Escobedo

[1] Though the text reads "Vilma Kapín," I cannot find any other source which refers to her by this name, although Espín seems widely accepted.