

February 11, 1961

**Cable from the Chinese Embassy in Cuba,
'Memorandum of Conversation between China's
Ambassador to Cuba, Shen Jian, and Cuban Prime
Minister Fidel Castro'**

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Summary:

A diplomatic meeting between Fidel Castro and Shen Jian (from China) in which they discuss the Cuban revolution, US-Cuban relations and imperialism.

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Contents:

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Secret

Should be destroyed when finished

Time: 4 PM

Venue: Chinese Embassy in Cuba

(For the matter of [realizing] Prime Minister Zhou Enlai's [idea of] inviting Castro to visit China, Ambassador Shen asked the Protocol Department to arrange a visit for Castro. Prime Minister Castro, however, insisted on coming to see the Ambassador and [subsequently] had close to a one-hour long discussion with Ambassador Shen. After the talk, Ambassador Shen, Attaché Huang [Wenyou], and Attaché Fang, accompanied by Prime Minister Castro, visited several training classes held by the Cuban government.)

Castro: [I'm sorry that] I was busy and therefore unable to attend the reception dinner you held for the Chinese delegation (referring to the delegation led by Deputy Commissioner Guo Moruo [a prominent Chinese author as well as government official]).

Shen: I knew you were busy. In accordance with the protocol, I should visit you first.

Castro: We are friends and don't need those diplomatic protocols.

Shen: Now I'm presenting to you a letter from Prime Minister Zhou Enlai who invites you to visit China. The Chinese government and Chinese people all look forward to your visit to our country. This is a copy, and the original will arrive soon.

Castro: (Reading the transcript of the invitation) Thank you very much. I should find a separate occasion to reply. I have [always] hoped to know the People's Republic of China. The Cubans who have been to China all think that China is wonderful. Will those Chinese agricultural experts whom I requested arrive soon?

Shen: Six agricultural experts will soon depart. Two rice transplanters will also arrive before long.

Castro: When will the Chinese magazines arrive in Cuba according to [our] agreement?

Shen: It's mainly a transportation problem, because Cuba is distant from China. If [Cuba] has special needs, [we] could try making technological improvement [sic]. If there are magazines in particular you want to read, please tell me the names of the books, and I could try using other quicker ways to transport them to Cuba.

Castro: I'm very interested in the Chinese magazines, in particular, on planting and the achievements of China in this regard, etc. I once read these in a magazine given by Bei people [sic]. I'm [also] interested in China's Spanish publications.

Shen: Our Spanish publications are not many, because our translation staff is very few.

Castro: A few days ago, I received a book on modern Chinese history. Now I'm reading it.

Shen: There is one thing I want to tell Maj. Raúl Castro. As I'm seeing you today, I

should take this opportunity to tell you about it. Regarding Cuba sending 125 persons to China to learn piloting, our country has everything ready now and wishes to know when the Cuban personnel will depart [for China].

Castro: We are still selecting people, picking only the best people, young and with good eyesight. We are making selections in a pool of several hundred people, which makes [the selection process] slow. It's reckoned that [we] are half way through now. Among those selected, some people are from the Volunteering Youth Guards [zhiyuan qingnian dui] who have received rigorous tests. We want to send the best selected people to learn piloting and let the rest [of the selected] learn mechanics. We plan to send people who have already been on the short list to China. [We're] trying to send the first group this month. What route to China will these people take?

Shen: We have no plane to Cuba, therefore it has to be solved by Cuba.

Castro: Then [they] should take the way via Prague.

Shen: We have no problem [with this]. We have always given our full support to the Cuban revolution. We would love to do our best to hand technologies to Cuban friends.

Castro: I thank China for all it has done in the past for us.

Shen: This is what we should have done. The Cuban revolution is a great support to China and also a big encouragement to the entire world.

Castro: In a few years, Latin America will have big changes and things that occurred in China will also take place here. Recently we faced many problems. Every time Latin America had a revolution, they then blamed Cuba. We're facing all sorts of aggression from imperialism. Some Latin American governments, when having an internal crisis, will invade Cuba at any time. We must be prepared at every minute. In a period between the next six and eight years, we will often take up arms.

Shen: This is very important. There is a lot in common between the Cuban revolution and the Chinese revolution, accordingly, there will be similarities in problems we encounter and face. What you said is exactly our situation in Asia. China will be blamed for every revolution that happens in an Asian country. We don't care about these kinds of accusations. [After all,] people will wage revolution [sooner or later]. It's a good thing for people to rise and wage revolution.

Castro: For Cuba, [US President John F.] Kennedy's speech is extremely aggressive. He has attacked Cuba five times within twenty days [since becoming president on 20 January]. This is good because he exposes the US opposition to Cuba and proves that the US is the one that provokes, not Cuba. The mask of Kennedy's policies is being torn apart day by day. They [the Americans] have great [intrinsic] conflict: on one hand, they want to earn sympathy from Latin America; on the other hand, his [Kennedy's] position towards Cuba stands in the way of achieving the above-mentioned aim. The US could not solve [its] problems in Latin America by economic means, [because] primarily, it is not willing, and secondly, it can't. Kennedy talked a lot about private investment, whereas Latin America has no interests at all in it. His 500 million US dollars couldn't even solve one Latin American country's problems. Kennedy chose the worst way. In fact, if he wants to play shabby tricks, he should have eased relations with Cuba. [On the contrary], he uses money to raise Cuban counter-revolutionaries. [Likewise,] we could also give help to political exiles of each country.

Shen: The US gave six billion US dollars to Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai-shek], but didn't save him from his destiny.

Castro: At that time, the US was richer than it is now. Back then socialism hadn't acquired global power as it has now, therefore [was] unable to help [international socialist] revolutions.

Shen: The Cuban revolution is a significant event in the world. When Maj. [Ernesto "Che"] Guevara was in China [in November 1960], we were arguing, partially, about a problem: when discussing [the content of the] communiqué, Maj. Guevara's opinion was to describe [China's support] as China's unselfish aid to Cuba, we didn't agree and [believed] it should be written down as mutual aid instead of unselfish aid. Later we brought this issue to Prime Minister Zhou Enlai. Prime Minister Zhou Enlai also advocated that it should be not written as unselfish aid, but mutual aid.

Castro: Yes, both our countries share things of common interest. Both China and Cuba are firmly opposing imperialism. When imperialism hasn't disappeared, China, Cuba, and Latin America all are at the risk of war. The entire world has the same interests in the disappearance of imperialism.

Shen: The success of the Cuban revolution is a great strike against the US imperialists. The US imperialists have even occupied our country's Taiwan. Across the Taiwan Strait, we're also facing the military threat from the US imperialists. The Cuban revolution's success drags the US' feet on the other side of the world, which is support for us. Our aid to Cuba is very limited. Our economic foundation was in bad shape. From the success of [the Chinese] revolution, it's been only 11 years. We will possibly give greater help than before. Cuba is revolutionary, and China is revolutionary, too. China's success of revolution was several years earlier than Cuba's, therefore [we] have the duty to support the Cuban revolution. With the success of revolution being several years later than China's, Cuba also has the right to demand aid from countries that succeeded earlier. This is internationalism.

Castro: When revolution happens to another Latin American country, we will also give it aid. I'm speaking in full confidence that there will be anti-imperialist revolution in Latin America which could be stopped by no one. Because we are the first country that achieved the success [of revolution], all sins are thrown up at us. But we are happy. Between [the scenario of] Latin America having revolutions with Cuba facing attack and [the scenario of] Cuba being in peaceful environment yet with no revolution in Latin American, we choose the former. We're facing the encirclement of hostile governments. Pirate planes often fly in our territorial space; we don't know where they come from, perhaps from Guatemala, Nicaragua, Miami, or any airfield in a country that participates in this encirclement. We're encircled by enemies' bases.

Shen: I and my Cuban friends once came to a topic: Is the US more afraid of Cuba, or is Cuba more afraid of the US? Of course, Cuba is also afraid of the US, because the US is as yet a powerful imperialist. But your revolution is advancing to victory and you are happy. And the success and development of the Cuban revolution is bound to push the development of revolution in other Latin American countries. More Latin American countries will march to victory, which means imperialism increasingly approaching its death. Eisenhower and Kennedy both see the Cuba problem as one of their headaches. Judging from the fact that Kennedy [rhetorically] attacked Cuba five times after he assumed office, he is more afraid of Cuba. The US will create some difficulties for Cuba, but the Cuban revolution will receive support from the world. The rapid development of the Cuban revolution accelerates the arrival of the doomsday of imperialism.

Castro: In modern history, the first strike upon the US imperialists was delivered by China.

Shen: Then the second strike to the US imperialists was [from] Cuba.

Castro: (speaking with a smile and gesticulating) our strike is very small but with strength. More powerful strikes will [fall] upon the US imperialists and lead to its downfall.

Shen: Cuba's revolutionary success also solves a problem in some people's mind. Some people thought that China succeeded only because China is distant from the US, with a vast territory and a huge population. A wrong theory they held is that one country, small and close to the US, will be unable to attain revolutionary success. [But] Cuba's revolution succeeded, and this absurd theory then perished.

Castro: This is how I think: if it was 15 or 20 years ago, that sort of argument might have been possible. At that time, the socialist world was not as powerful as it is now. Without the support of the socialist world, the US imperialists might have created severe difficulties, and Cuba's revolutionary success would have become much harder. If it was in the [19]30s, I believe that the US [would have] already directly sent their troops. The US now is being forced against a wall. I'm certain that revolution will develop in Latin America.

Shen: The presence of the socialist world amounts to the support of Cuba, which is very important. But mainly you have to rely on your own force. You landed with over 80 people; then about a dozen people moved to the mountains and fought guerrilla war; in the end, [you] enlarged your army, toppled a reactionary government, [and] kept developing until now. This [achievement] is mainly attributed to your own strength. Without one's own efforts and strength, others' support won't have an effect.

Castro: There would have been no Cuban revolution in the absence of the Soviet revolution and China's revolution. We have expended tremendous effort, which was in line with the law of historical development. Our tasks are just part of the development of history. Imperialism was also working hard, but [their efforts] were made in the opposite direction of the law of historical development. There are many kinds of efforts, but only those that share the same direction with historical development will find their way to victory.

Shen: This explains why the US imperialists, having squandered so much money and built so many bases, are still unable to save themselves from downfall.

Castro: Socialism doesn't need foreign bases.

Shen: Chairman Mao used to describe bases established by the US across the planet as nooses. The US imperialists put their head into the noose, one end of which has been handed to the people of each country. Taiwan is a noose. Guantanamo is a noose, too. When people of the world all rise to oppose imperialism and tighten these nooses together, the US imperialists will be dead.

Castro: This moment is approaching. About the problem of the Guantanamo base, I'm looking forward to asking, one by one, Britain, Italy, West Germany, Spain, and other countries and governments that have connections to US bases, in the UN General Assembly: does the US have the right to occupy another country's territory? If they say [the US] does, then it will amount to selling their own sovereignty which leads to internal conflicts.

Shen: In the Sino-American Ambassadorial Meeting in Warsaw—of course, as you know, we conduct tit-for-tat struggle with the US in parallel to the Sino-American

meeting—our ambassador raised the difficult question to the US representatives on the spot: is Taiwan Chinese territory or US territory? The US dare not say that Taiwan was theirs. So they only said that they have a diplomatic relationship with Jiang Jieshi. We said that Jiang Jieshi had already been overthrown.

Castro: [You] could also stress: [Is] Jiang Jieshi Chinese or American? The US finds their way into all others' houses across the world. I'm looking forward to meeting Chairman Mao in person. I admire him very much. To meet him will be my honor. We also hope that he could visit which would be a big event in the world.

Shen: Chairman Mao speaks highly of Cuba's revolution. I'm sure that Chairman Mao will be happy to meet you. If you could have the chance to visit China, it will be a great hope to the party and government officials of our country and the Chinese people.

Castro: When our country's defense power becomes well established, improved and unlikely to have major problems, I'll visit China.

(The following is about the three yachts that the Cuban government prepared for each friendly country.)

Castro: China's art delegation really impressed me. I could never forget. The Chinese art delegation has left behind in Cuba the admiration [of the Cuban people].

Shen: You mentioned that you wished us to send a circus, which we're preparing and it will come when it is ready.

Castro: The art delegation has made a great contribution to the friendship and fraternity of the two countries. I wish I could have the opportunity to see China's arts. Our country's people all agree that the performance of the Chinese art delegation was marvelous.

Shen: In line with Chairman Mao's instructions, China's arts should serve workers, peasants, and soldiers, and should not be the stuff of the ivory tower. Watching [the performance] of China's arts not only gives pleasure to people, it also boosts people's revolutionary spirit. In this sense, China's arts are also a form of education.

Castro: The Chinese art delegation once performed for the children in the Maersitela Mountain area [sic]. That was the first time for these peasant's children to watch an artist performance. We are also prepared to raise three thousand dancing, music, and drama teachers, let them work in those village schools across the country and deliver arts to people, making the life of our peasants and workers happier and more joyful. We established music schools at the houses of rich people who fled to foreign countries. We wish that you could visit these places. We also bring the off-spring of Xiyanaru's [sic] peasants to Havana, and let them receive education in rich people's houses. Even the children of US millionaires would envy [them]!

Shen: I'm looking forward to visiting them, but don't know where and whom I should contact.

Castro: If you want, we could visit them right now.

Shen: Good.