

November 8, 1962
Telegram from Yugoslav Embassy in Havana
(Vidaković) to Yugoslav Foreign Ministry

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Summary:

Yugoslav Foreign Minister Koca Popovic speaks with Ernesto "Che" Guevara about the Cuban Missile Crisis - the U.S. blockade, the fighting determination of the Cubans, the American imperium, and Latin American governments.

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- Very urgent -

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

[Yugoslav Foreign Minister] Koca [Popovic].

I talked with [Ernesto "Che"] Guevara this night.

Their strategic and tactical conceptions are very clear and very simple. Inspection in Cuba they will not allow to anyone. Khrushchev believes Kennedy's guarantee, [but] "we never do." The question of rocket weapons is a Russian matter. If they [i.e., the Cubans] had them, they would install them in every centimeter of Cuba and if necessary would fire them without a second thought into the heart of the aggressor-New York. Since they don't have them, they don't have to declare themselves.

The [US] blockade is also practically the matter of the USSR. Cuba has four small vessels, thus her [i.e., Cuba's] opinion has no practical meaning. Things that are within their sovereignty, this is where they are firm. On their territory or in their territorial waters-there are no inspections. Every [US] vessel in their waters they will sink, they will down every plane; they still have enough arms.

If there is a direct attack they will defend with all their might, whether they are alone or are being helped. On the critical night of the 27 October he gave instructions to his own staff: since rocket bases could be destroyed in the first attack, and many leaders could be killed, the fight has to be continued, without prisoners, until death. (All this with the intonation of sorrow that they were denied the opportunity for "honorable suicide").

He noted that their fighting determination is known to everyone and asks what are their [i.e., the Cubans'] conceptions on the political plane; what and how do they think to use and nourish the factors of moral political support which Cuba received during the crisis. [He] says that these factors have no practical meaning. No morale exists. Where have those factors ever played any sort of role? He never saw it. They said so to U Thant as well. The main factor is struggle and their determination to fight to the death. "Homeland or death" ["Patria o muerte"] is not an accidental slogan. It has been thought through very deeply. There is no compromise with imperialism. Those are basic factors, the rest are trifles and nonsense [trice i kučina]. (Non-engagement [i.e., non-alignment].)

Towards imperialism one should have a policy of a hard fist and not compromising. It is true that the American imperialism is not a paper tiger but a real one. If the socialist elephant turns its back this one [i.e., the tiger] would jump on its neck and defeat it. The concrete struggle around Cuba represents a loss for the socialist world because of the USSR's policy of retreat. The decision by the Pentagon and the rest of the military in the USA to attack Cuba on the critical 27 October is an immediate

result of previous Soviet steps that showed weakness. They came to a clear conviction that the USSR will not enter a war because of Cuba. If the USSR had responded firmly and clearly to the blockade: "if you open fire at our vessel...we will [fire] rockets at New York," the situation would be completely different, imperialism would be scared off.

With regard to Latin America and the support of [its] governments, the position has not changed an inch, on the contrary, the traditional position of the Second Declaration [of Havana], [is] even accentuated. There is no support there [that they can depend on]. When they [i.e., the Americans] push [Brazilian leader João] Goulart against the wall to declare himself he will show himself the same as [his predecessor Janio] Quadros. The path for Latin America is revolution, the same way as they are doing in Venezuela. This does not mean the imminent victory of socialism, it is a question of years of struggle with which imperialism could not come to terms. A road within the confines of legality, alliance with different bourgeois groups as is promoted by the communist parties of Latin America, does not lead anywhere. A road of elections towards peaceful changes is absurd.

In many specific cases they do not agree. With uprisings in P[uerto]. Cabello and Carupano the same as in this last one.¹³ They openly said [this] to Venezuelans. They gave them very clear instructions to stay clear of cities and to go into guerrilla [war] and then after this with the ripening of conditions the cities fall as ripe pears. No power can control villages in huge areas. The villager is the basic revolutionary force. The industrial worker in Latin America is in an advantageous position compared to the villager. He participates in the division of plunder and exploitation. This is the explanation of the opportunistic character of the communist parties of L[atin] A[merica]. Their main base is the working class of the cities, etc., etc. In the last few years in Columbia the guerrilla is gradually acquiring this form. Thus, armed and continuous, consistent struggle will tire out imperialism and lead to victory. Although they [i.e., the Cubans] do not manage [these armed struggles] directly, they encourage [them] with all available means.

Everything said above he says that it is his own opinion. "Well this is how we Marxists are and everyone can have his own opinion." (Obs[ervation]. Beside the three of them [i.e., Guevara, Fidel Castro, and Raul Castro-ed.], the rest either do not have them [i.e., their own opinions] or if they had their own opinions they are worth nothing.)

Talks with [Anastas] Mikoyan are still ongoing and he cannot say anything more specific about the results. They do not agree with Khrushchev's tactics. They do not agree with his conception of the struggle for peace. Nikita-appeasement; they-fist. Certain compromises, even shabby [ones], they must find. M insists on a common communiqué. How to do it they still don't know. What to say in it? [They are] putting it off.

They started economic negotiations as well. They [i.e., Cubans] without Russians couldn't even move. M promises everything. Only this year they are 200 million dollars in deficit to the Russians. Next year it could easily be double. The Russians are obliged to help the revolution. They will certainly do it.

They said their positions to U Thant. In the closed meeting between Fidel and U Thant, the latter expressed sympathies for their struggle and said that he's on their side, the rest is known.

Yugoslavia, as he says, has fully identical positions with the Russians on all current issues. He wanted to say, here you see we are the only ones fighting for the purity of Marxism-Leninism, for revolutionary-ness.

On the Chinese theme he beat around the bush [vrdukao]. He didn't want to say anything openly. They do not know what is the essence of the Sino-Indian conflict and this is the reason they do not declare their position. They are considering it currently.

This and the manner in which he interpreted things in conversation with me represents the basis of their preoccupations. The interpretations are almost identical to what we have already heard at different levels. Previously, we could not take these positions too seriously. However, after this test [i.e., after this talk with Guevara-ed.], yes. This should not be taken as demagoguery. They firmly believe that the people follow them and will follow them even into suicide. (It is possible that Castro and his brother think the same.)

This dose of courage and tenacity, now that the main danger has passed, points towards something that should be opposite to this. However, in every case, the drunkenness of courage and self-criticism is great, who knows what kind of imprudence can be done[?] Definitely, they can't do without big everyday excitement. Very little or nothing is being done.

Vidakovic