

December 3, 1963

Erzsébet Görög, Charge d'affaires, 'Cuban Foreign Policy in the Light of Two Castro Speeches'

Citation:

"Erzsébet Görög, Charge d'affaires, 'Cuban Foreign Policy in the Light of Two Castro Speeches'", December 3, 1963, Wilson Center Digital Archive, MNL, M-KS, 288 f. 32, 1963, 11 ő.e, p. 1 [94]. Contributed and translated by Radoslav Yordanov.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/301063>

Summary:

This report analyzes the fluctuating nature of Cuban foreign policy under Fidel Castro, shaped by his unscripted speeches and reactions to international events. It highlights a tension between pro-Soviet and independent, anti-Soviet tendencies within the Cuban leadership, exacerbated by domestic frustrations and external pressures. Castro's September 28 speech emphasized Cuba's "own way" of socialism, creating speculation about distancing from Soviet policies, while his November 23 speech reaffirmed alignment with the Soviet Union and global peace efforts. These shifts reflect the complex interplay of internal dynamics, U.S.-Cuba relations, and the broader geopolitical context, underscoring the dual influences of ideological independence and dependency on Soviet support. This document summary was generated by an artificial intelligence language model and was reviewed by a Wilson Center staff member.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Blavatnik Family Foundation

Original Language:

Hungarian

Contents:

Translation - English

Top secret!

Copy of the report of the Embassy in Havana dated December 3, 1963.

Subject: Cuban foreign policy in the light of two Castro speeches.

Our reports on Cuba's foreign policy are often contradictory. Where do these contradictions come from? In my opinion, from the big swings in Cuban foreign policy - within a certain basic trend - which are reflected in one or the other of Fidel Castro's speeches.

Fidel Castro's speeches to huge crowds are never, as is well known, written down or discussed in detail with party and government leaders, and therefore, under the influence of momentary emotion, he sometimes says things that are shocking and that are essentially contrary to the fundamental interests of Cuban foreign policy. / See the speech delivered on 15 January this year at the Congress of Latin American Women and the announcement of the "own line" on 28 September. / -When these speeches are then backed up by such astonishing facts as the absence of Fidel and Raúl Castro and President Dorticós from the November 7 Soviet reception, the rise of Chinese propaganda, Fidel Castro's repeated visits to Western, capitalist envoys, - and his seclusion from the heads of mission of the socialist countries /Alexeev Soviet and Pavlicek Czechoslovak ambassadors could not live with him for a long time, although he used to visit them regularly or summon them / -then, of course, not only the American news agencies speculate and spread various reports about the change in Cuban-Soviet relations, about the estrangement, but also the socialist diplomats who are accredited to Cuba are puzzled by certain phenomena and do not know what to make of the news. The speculations begin, and some ask the question: what does "your own way", Cuban socialism, mean? Can we continue to talk about socialism in Cuba without any signs, or will we be forced in the future to talk about 'Cuban' socialism, like 'African socialism', or, as the hostile Latin American press in the North uses the term, 'Castro-communism'? The question is too big to be answered in this report. For my part, I do not think that we should

(p. 1)

draw such far-reaching conclusions from the truly disturbing phenomena that characterise the particular path of socialism in Cuba and which have been appearing in waves since the Caribbean crisis last October.

The high point of the past two months was the announcement of the "own road" on 28 September, - the low point was the Fidel Castro speech the day after the Kennedy assassination.

Between the two speeches, in the months of October and November, we observed several phenomena that pointed to the predominance of the anti-Soviet mood and the 26 July line within the leadership and the party. The much larger-scale Soviet aid for the cyclone had much less press publicity than the smaller but more visible [látványosabb] Chinese aid, not to mention the fact that the smaller-scale aid from the capitalist countries had more press than the aid from the Soviet Union or any socialist country other than China. All party and state leaders, including President Dorticós and his wife, were present at the Chinese national celebrations on October 1, with the exception of Fidel and Raúl Castro, but the November 7 celebrations were inexplicably absent. President Dorticós first excused himself by letter, citing biliary problems, and then, an hour before the reception, the secretary of the Council of Ministers, Célia Sanchez, called the Soviet ambassador and excused President Dorticós by saying that he had gone to the countryside. Fidel Castro had told the Soviet ambassador in the morning that he had to go to Pinar south Rio, - but on the evening of the 7th, several people saw him in his car, together with his brother Raúl and Vilma Espin, driving to the house of his mother, who had died a few months ago, near the Soviet ambassador's residence. I should also add that Fidel Castro attended the Algerian reception on November 1, and when he left, he spoke only to the Algerian diplomats and Cuban leaders who were hosting the reception. Unlike his previous practice, he did not even invite the Soviet ambassador to come to his house.

Increased impatience with the food shortages caused by cyclone damage very often erupted in anti-Soviet outbursts. We could cite a long list of incidents witnessed by ourselves, by our trade mission staff, by our experts, where Cubans - mainly in Havana, but also in some places in the countryside - have made vehement anti-Soviet statements. In elevators and on the walls of public toilets, the -never-before-seen sign appeared: " Cuba sí - ruso no" or " comunista no"; a black Havana worker in a small café told

(p. 2)

one of our experts: "Go home, Russian, you have our coffee, you can drink it there"! One of our scholarship holders was told by a student at the University of Havana that the reason there are no shoes in Cuba is because the shoes are shipped to Hungary! These and similar absurd statements were everywhere to be found, fed of course from North American and counter-revolutionary sources, but as they were not stopped from above - they continued to proliferate.

The university youth, with their strong '26 July' leanings, had apparently received another concession on the replacement of the much-maligned old communist leader, Comrade Juan Marinello, as rector of the University of Havana. Although, according to the Ministry of Education, Comrade Juan Mier Febles, the newly appointed interim rector, who is also the deputy minister of higher education, was appointed to head the university precisely to bring order with a firm hand, - which Comrade Juan Marinello failed to do - and yet there is a side effect of the replacement, which is emphasised sharply by the Western press agencies and also by diplomats from the socialist countries, albeit questioningly, that the Cuban state and party leadership is trying to get rid of the few old communists who still hold important posts and replace them with '26 July' young people. There has also been talk for some time of the expected replacement of Manuel Luzardo, the Minister of Internal Trade, also a long-time communist, who was most recently harshly criticised by Fidel Castro. By contrast, INRA President Carlos Rafael Rodriguez was given the rank of minister and transformed into a ministry at the very time when North American press agencies were most alive to reports that Comrade Carlos Rafael Rodriguez was also due to be removed.

Very often, these phenomena are part of party politics or even domestic politics. But it is precisely their examination that will show us where Cuba's foreign policy is heading, whether it is parallel to the foreign policy of the Soviet Union in fundamental questions, whether it is completely independent of it, or whether it is opposed to it on certain issues.

To a certain extent, this question was answered by Fidel Castro's intelligent and calm speech on 23 November, the day after the Kennedy assassination, in which the Cuban Prime Minister took a clear and unambiguous stand on the Moscow nuclear non-proliferation treaty (although he had already taken a position on the issue on 26 July) - he correctly criticized US foreign policy, distinguishing - for the first time - between the ultra-reactionary and the more liberal Kennedy tendencies. He also stressed once again, after a long time, Cuba's identity of interest with the Soviet Union, that Cuba's destiny is closely linked to the destiny of humanity and peace. It was perhaps the first speech by Fidel Castro in which the Cuban Prime Minister looked beyond the borders of Cuba, Latin America and the Americas and said: "...the destiny of our country is closely linked to the destiny of humanity."

(p. 3)

Fidel Castro's speech of 23 November also seems to confirm that the Cuban position on a number of international issues, if similar to the Chinese position, is not identical to it and does not stem from the same considerations. This is borne out by the recent events since the Kennedy assassination: the great reduction in the circulation of the Sin-hua, the Chinese bulletin, the rate of attendance at Yugoslav and Albanian receptions, etc. /The Yugoslav reception was attended by two more ministers than the previous one, and the press commemorated the Yugoslav national holiday in parallel with the Albanian one, while Che Guevara did not attend the Albanian reception, unlike last year./

The news of Kennedy's death reached Fidel Castro in Varadero, where he was having lunch with Jean Daniel of the Parisian Express. The Cuban masses, however, in their political ignorance, only rejoiced in the destruction of the "archenemy", without considering the circumstances or the consequences. Dampening down the mood of the crowd was also necessary to inform the masses that Fidel Castro was already speaking the day after the assassination. And this televised speech on 23 November showed once again the confidence and unreserved support of the Cuban people for Fidel Castro. The jubilation over the death of the US President has disappeared, the atmosphere has normalized and there are no new anti-Soviet manifestations, at least for the time being.

Moreover, from an international point of view, Fidel Castro had to give this speech, he had to react like that and so quickly.

In my opinion, the speech on November 23rd also contributed to the fact that the diplomats of the Western, capitalist countries accredited to Cuba, including the Swiss ambassador representing US, French, English, Belgian, Uruguayan, Chilean, Israeli, and Lebanese diplomats, vehemently reject the anti-Cuban and anti-Soviet provocation related to the murder. They condemn American gangsterism in almost identical terms, point out that it is no longer possible to provoke a Reichstag trial and, interestingly, it was Swiss diplomats and the Lebanese envoy who stressed to me how the affair represents a huge loss of prestige for the USA and could even pose a threat of civil war between North and South.

(page 4)

If we compare the two speeches of Fidel Castro, from September 28th and November 23rd, they reveal two opposing trends affecting Cuban foreign policy.

Which of the two trends prevails, in my opinion, depends not only on the Cuban leadership. When Cuba can apply the principle of peaceful coexistence depends to a large extent on the extent to which the United States intensifies or reduces its attempts at invasion, provocations and blockades. Cuba's position depends on the development of relations between the Soviet Union and the US.

Erzsébet Görög
Charge d'affaires

(page 5)