

December 1, 1962

**Memorandum of Conversation between Ernesto
'Che' Guevara and Chinese Ambassador Shen Jian,
Havana**

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Summary:

Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Chinese Ambassador Shen Jian discussing the outcome of the Cuban Revolution, especially in terms of how it reflected US-Soviet relations.

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Contents:

Translation - English

Guevara: (on sitting down) please forgive what I said in our last conversation, the one taking place [on 13 October 1962] just before you returned to China.

Ambassador Shen: What happened in Cuba was a bad thing, which, however, could also turn into a good one. The Cuban people and the Cuban leadership have insisted upon a correct position, and carried out victorious struggle. Not only is it a good experience from the standpoint of the Cuban people, but also it provides the world as a whole a valuable experiment which gives it global significance.

Guevara: [The evaluation of this incident] should be carried out in close connection to Latin America. Indeed, to Latin America, it is genuinely a defeat. We are facing a grim situation in which some countries are going to shift their attitudes towards us. Although we were very careful when we expressed our disagreement with the Soviet Union, some countries have initiated corresponding economic measures. We have been determined, even if we were to be pulverized by nuclear bombs; after all, our lives are God-given. In Bulgaria, we had a very interesting discussion with brother parties. Comrade [Blas] Roca explained to Latin American fraternal parties the reasons behind Cuba's position. Representatives of a few fraternal parties-[I] don't know what countries exactly they were from-responded by saying that the overarching priority should have been to preserve peace. One of them even said: We are more concerned with Cuba's honor than with Cuba's statement. Venezuela did not turn up because they disagree with our position, but Uruguayan party representatives did take a conciliatory position. Anyhow, the rest are very bad. Perhaps this defeat could lead to victory in the future, yet the division [among Latin American communist parties], the division within the progressive movement, is inevitable. This would check the growth of people's power, or reduce it.

Ambassador Shen: This division at the moment, again, is a good thing as well as a bad thing. In fact, it is natural for Marxist-Leninist party members to stand up to some party leaders who subscribe themselves to Revisionism. This division between the Marxist-Leninist communists and the revisionist communists is to be expected. Consider the time when the Second International, after the death of Marx and Engels, found its way to Revisionism. At this moment, the disagreement between Marxist-Leninist communist parties and revisionist ones became an explicit division. Lenin, however, adhering to Marxism-Leninism, took over the people's revolution and in the end united all communist parties under the Third International. Cuba's revolutionary acts have been a great contribution to the enlargement of the global Marxist-Leninist camp.

Guevara: This is true. But that division also restricts the development of people's power. Instead of promoting and facilitating revolution, some parties were effectively suppressing it. When they were doing so, they even cited terms such as peace, the leading power of the socialist bloc. Do you remember that in our last conversation, I told you that there was something I could not understand[?]-that is because I was so deeply convinced by what Soviet top leaders told me (continuing eating).

Guevara: Among the people who supported the Cuban revolution, some did so only because they thought the Cuban revolution was a nationalist movement. So soon after we declared that we were Marxist-Leninists, they wavered, and after the withdrawal of Soviet missiles they vowed to initiate their own revolution which, in their vocabulary, basically means the abandonment of the proletarian revolution. However, these people actually could be won over by a determined Leftist force.

Shen: Better to see these people [i.e., the Soviets] having removed their disguise earlier. Even without that operation of the Soviet Union, there are still people, in America or the world as a whole, who don't necessarily carry out the revolution in the interests of the proletariat. In the circumstance when there is disarray and people don't see clearly, the Leftists should act and raise their distinct flag. Otherwise, our

[socialist] camp would fall into disarray.

Guevara: Before, facing the American aggression, we had firm support from the world. Not only did the world in general stand firmly behind us, but also Latin America in particular offered unwavering support. The Soviet Union even promised to help us with missiles. But now the Soviet missiles are gone and our international prestige weakened.

Shen: This is, however, a great exposure of the revisionists.

Guevara: Some revisionist countries remain unexposed.

Shen: Did the Soviet missiles come to Cuba as a result of the negotiations you and Comrade [Emilio] Aragonés had in Moscow [in late August/early September 1962]?

Guevara: They [the Soviets] proposed it [i.e. the deployment of missiles in Cuba]. We went to Moscow only to discuss the details of this proposal. Our side said that we don't have this sort of need. Yet on second thought, we felt guilty given the fact that such a radical proposal might actually drag them [the Soviet Union] into war whereas we remained undecided on whether we should provide them with missile bases. We accepted their proposal only in the hope of helping them [the Soviets]. We suggested the Soviet Union issue with Cuba a joint statement condemning the US, and publicizing their support to us. They said this was unnecessary and what Kennedy had done was merely orchestrated to win the presidential [i.e., mid-term Congressional] election. Still we felt that the equivocal promise was dangerous, particularly because it did not touch on the extent of the Soviet aid to Cuba. They can change, and they did. Later they kept blathering, for example, that they would send their Baltic Fleet. They also told us that they preferred actions to hollow statements, and that the mighty Soviet Union would deliver a destructive strike upon anyone who dared to invade Cuba, etc. At the time we believed their words were true.

Shen: I remember I asked you in our last conversation wondering if a possible American invasion would inevitably provoke another world war. In other words, I was asking if the Soviet Union would support Cuba with its missiles. The reason why I asked such a question was that I'm quite suspicious [about the promise of the Soviet Union].

Guevara: Now they have left. Though they promised to continue their support, only the naïve would keep buying their empty words. The treaty between Cuba and the Soviet Union, which has never been publicized, has been violated by the Soviet Union, and became ineffective.

Shen: Did the Soviet government consult with you and obtain your approval before they withdrew their missiles?

Guevara: They did at the beginning, but ceased when Khrushchev made a promise to the Americans. Fidel had written a letter to Khrushchev, bidding Khrushchev farewell. Because the Americans were expected to attack us the next day, the letter was not short of agitated words. This is probably why Khrushchev, in his reply to Fidel, said he could tell anxiety from Fidel's text. The Soviet Union withdrew their missiles on the grounds that they did not wish to feed the US with an excuse for war. This is itself an excuse. In his secret letter to Kennedy, Khrushchev had already made a promise to the Americans that the Soviet Union would back down. On hearing this decision, some Soviet military specialists burst into tears.

Shen: China had a similar experience earlier. It took merely one month from the moment of the Soviet Union deciding on withdrawing all of their experts [18 July 1960], to the point of the last Soviet specialist leaving China. We proposed that some

of them stay until contracts were fully implemented. The Soviet Union withdrew them anyhow. When they were being withdrawn, some Soviet experts cried too. Admittedly, the sudden departure of so many experts caused some difficulties in our economy. But it, again, encouraged us to rely on our own strength in resolving problems.

Other than missiles and IL-28 [medium-range bombers], what else had the Soviet Union left with? Were surface-to-air missiles also withdrawn? Are they in Soviet hands?

Guevara: [The Soviet Union] took away the missiles and IL-28s. Some tactical weapons have been transferred to us and our personnel will be trained to operate them. Yet surface-to-air missiles are in their hands. Now we could not shoot any invading American planes because we don't control any anti-aircraft missiles. But these surface-to-air missiles will not leave, they will stay.

Shen: In other words, only missiles and IL-28s have gone. Do the rest, including surface-to-air missiles and MiG-21 [jet fighters], stay?

Guevara: Yes, at least for the time being. They say [these weapons] will stay.

Shen: Are MiG-21s also in their hands?

Guevara: Yes. But they will stay and be operated by our own pilots.

Shen: What else will the Soviet Union take away? Will the fishing harbor be closed for maintenance [sic]?

Guevara: The fishing harbor won't. But another harbor has already been closed.

Shen: Is it of military nature?

Guevara: Yes, in a word, fear [not clear in text what "fear" refers to-trans.].

Shen: What further concessions do you think will the Soviet Union make to the US?

Guevara: The biggest concession I could imagine is that the Soviet Union chooses not to support us when the Americans attack us. As to what political concessions would be, we don't know. Anyhow, it's just a discussion between you and me. Perhaps the biggest mistake Kennedy has ever committed is that he chose not to support mercenaries and directly attack us in La Batalla de Giron [Battle of Giron, i.e., the Bay of Pigs]. Our equipment then was no match for ours today.

Shen: How did [Anastas] Mikoyan feel about the result of the negotiation with Cuba? Is he satisfied? Was his mission in Cuba aimed at implementing [overall] Soviet policy?

Guevara: We have no idea of his mission's purpose. He has undergone a difficult period. His wife died during his stay in Cuba. One day he said he would leave immediately, but the next day he changed his mind saying that this was because a new government order arrived. In another case, he originally assured us that [the stay of] IL-28s would not be a problem, but some four or five days later, [he said that the] IL-28 bombers had to be removed [from Cuba]. I don't know what sort of policy this is. He also mentioned that he would not leave Cuba until the moment he completed his mission. But never had he said what the purpose of his mission here was, as I see it. Now, I'm asking you why they [also] left China with their missiles?

Shen: Never in China have Soviet missiles been deployed. Where did you get this idea?

Guevara: From Soviet officers.

Shen: As one frank comrade to another, I believe you have already noticed two formal notes from us to the Soviet Union, on avoiding nuclear proliferation. [In these two notes], [we] made clear that the Soviet Union would not, from 1959 onwards, provide us with any ordinary nuclear materials, let alone missiles.

Guevara: Did China once have nuclear warheads?

Shen: No. As for the classified things the Soviet Union has always refused to give us them. I tell you what, they didn't even give us certain key components of the MiG-21, which is why we cannot use our MiG-21s.

Guevara: Did they give [these] to India?

Shen: As Khrushchev promised, this December they will.

Guevara: Including these key components?

Shen: All of them. And it is Soviet helicopters that delivered Indian weaponry and troops to the Sino-Indian border.

Guevara: Was it in the past, or has it continued until now?

Shen: Until now. Be nasty to true Marxist-Leninists while being nice to enemies, imperialists, and the anti-revolutionary. This is their nature.

Guevara: Soviet policies are not policies of Khrushchev alone, but of many. When I was talking to Khrushchev, [Mikhail] Suslov also joined us. We were told that [Leonid] Brezhnev would visit Yugoslavia. We expressed no opinion. They said Tito attempted to foster a conciliatory position and he was now fighting against the Rightists within the party. They also said some bad things about Albania. The plain fact is, Suslov finally concluded, Yugoslavia has a population of between 17 million and 18 million people but Albania has only [slightly] more than one million.

Shen: Instead of adopting a Marxist-Leninist attitude to analyze [phenomena], [they] evaluate [them] in terms of the population. But China did not receive any better treatment, even though we have a population of 650 million.

Guevara: [They are people] of no principle. I believe that in the future they will treat us as roses that have become infected and stink. Or [they will label us] Trotskyists or anarchists. Has the Chinese economic situation improved?

Shen: (Speaking in accordance with the communiqué of the Tenth Plenary Session.) Have you been informed of the details of Mikoyan's negotiation with Kennedy and Rusk?

Guevara: No, not yet. Soviet action in the United Nations was weak. When Mikoyan visited me, I said, "Victory is victory; defeat is defeat. To call defeat a victory is just wrong." Mikoyan said, "The Americans will not dare to examine Soviet ships, because [they] are afraid." I laughed at his words. He then became infuriated.

Shen: Presumably this is why, as I saw from the television, he did not give you a hug on leaving.

Guevara: Personally, I do respect him. But is this important?

Shen: Any move on the Americans' part?

Guevara: No. They have not been willing to give any concrete guarantee. They [say] if there is no supervision, there will be no guarantee of non-invasion of Cuba. And the Soviets tend to go along [with this practice].

Shen: Cuba is surely having a difficult time. We fully understand because we have been through that before. But bear in mind, in the most difficult period of the past, you had only 12 persons and 7 guns. Yet in the end, you succeeded in toppling the US-imperialist-backed Batista regime and obtaining nation-wide victory. And now you are far stronger than before; the general international situation has, too, become better.

Guevara: We were determined: the enemy may wipe us out but as long as [we have] one man remaining, we will still kill them. Now it is still the same: the enemy can wipe us all out, but if there is one man left, we will still kill the Americans.

(After the meal)

Shen: (Having briefed on the Sino-Indian conflict.) Do you have any questions?

Guevara: Did the Communist Party of India (CPI) split after its statement of condemnation of the Chinese aggression?

Shen: It had already been divided before the publication of the statement. The CPI's central committee divided into three factions during the discussion of whether China should be condemned. The Leftists, who opposed following Nehru's policy and refused to condemn China, accounted for one third of the members. The Rightists, rallying behind the party leader [Shripad Amrit] Dange, accounted for another third. It was they who initiated this statement. The remaining one third were people sitting on the fence.

Guevara: [They are the] Nehru faction within the Party.

Shen: Many Leftists have been arrested. Some 500 Leftist party members have now been arrested.

Guevara: No rightists have been arrested?

Shen: Not [a single rightist].

Guevara: Pathetic. As to the people on the borderland [of China and India], do they tend to sympathize with China or are they influenced more by [Indian] chauvinism?

Shen: As far as people within our border are concerned, they are either Tibetan or belonging to ethnic groups that have kinship with the Tibetans. They believe in Lamaism. Slavery used to prevail in Tibet. In 1950, the People's Liberation Army liberated Tibet and initiated democratic reforms. Although the upper Tibetan slave owners rebelled in the first half of 1959, we squashed it quickly. Democratic reforms were furthered and became quicker and more thorough. A vast number of people

began to support us. The influence of these democratic reforms on neighboring areas is considerable. Therefore, people are leaning towards our side, which is feared by Nehru.

Guevara: Perhaps this topic is somewhat distant [from the theme of our conversation]. Will the Xinjiang-Tibetan highway be connected to the one between China and Nepal?

Shen: No. (Points at the map.) This is the Xingjian-Tibetan highway. And that is the scheduled Sino-Nepalese highway. Do you have any other questions?

Guevara: Not now.

Shen: If, after you check the map and the materials, you still have questions, I'm happy to answer them. About your proposal of publishing a Spanish version of Peking Review, the homeland has already pondered the idea and will try to begin publication next March.

Guevara: This is important. (Starting to watch movie, "Protecting Cuba")

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