

August 19, 1961

Telegram from the Brazilian Secretary of State for External Relations (Afonso Arinos) for the Cabinet in Brasilia, 19 August 1961, describing conversation between Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Richard Goodwin, Montevideo, Uruguay, 18 August 1961

Citation:

"Telegram from the Brazilian Secretary of State for External Relations (Afonso Arinos) for the Cabinet in Brasilia, 19 August 1961, describing conversation between Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Richard Goodwin, Montevideo, Uruguay, 18 August 1961", August 19, 1961, Wilson Center Digital Archive, AHMRE 600(24h)—SIT. POL.—CUBA 1961 (Moniz Bandeira Collection, National Security Archive), Ministry of External Relations Archives, Brasilia, Brazil. Translated from Portuguese by James G. Hershberg, George Washington University. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/115182>

Summary:

A telegram from the Brazilian Secretary of State for External Relations (Afonso Arinos) describing a conversation between Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Richard Goodwin in Montevideo, Uruguay. At this meeting, Mister Guevara and Mister Goodwin, speaking as “enemies”, made a general appreciation of Cuban-American relations. Affirming that Cuba today definitely was of the sphere of influence of the United States. They also discuss Cuba's economic situation.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Portuguese

Contents:

Translation - English

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL RELATIONS

TELEGRAM

SENT

FOR THE CABINET IN BRASILIA

ON/19/VIII/61

CONFIDENTIAL

600.(24h)

SEC/DPC/DEC/Dor/591.7(24h)

Cuba. Information for the interview
Of the President of the Republic with the Minister of
Economics of Cuba, Mr. Guevara.

707 - I request to transmit to the Mister President of the Republic: "I judged to be of interest of Your Excellency to know the following information that was presented to me by Ambassador Barbosa da Silva about an interview realized in Montevideo at an informal gathering in the early morning of the 18th [of August] between, Commandante Ernesto Guevara and Mister Richard Goodwin, with also the participation of Mister Rodrigues Larreta, of Argentina. In this meeting, Mister Guevara and Mister Goodwin, speaking as [falandose de] "enemies", made a general appreciation of Cuban-American relations. Affirming that Cuba today definitely was of the sphere of influence of the United States, Commandante Guevara declared: 1) "the Cuban revolution has an irreversible character["]; 2) there is no possibility of the overthrow of the Government, since the people participated integrally in the revolution; 3) there should be dispelled the myths that the leaders of the revolution can be recovered [recuperados]; 4) it is an illusion to think that one can hope for a schism in the Government by the forces of the "moderates"; 5) they will continue to accelerate the socialization of the economy of the country; 6) the Cuban leaders do not have a Marxist theoretical formation, being [xxx], Guevara, the one that have greater readers in this camp, considering that the case of Cuba will be to illustrate completely the correctness of the Marxist doctrine for the solution of its problem; 7) Cuba, in order to be a socialist State, has a natural sympathy for similar systems, but this does not imply a political alliance; 8) the Cuban Government does not intend to invade the base at Guantánamo; 9) the United States provided a great service to the revolution by supporting the failed invasion [i.e., the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961], since it rallied the people around the Government. The success transformed the position of the Government from a "small offender" to an equal to equal, in whatever negotiations that will be realized; 10) Cuba does not intend "to export revolution," but cannot prevent that its example influences powerful sectors of opinion on the [South American] Continent; 11) although it does not finance or participate directly in the "pro-Cuba clubs" or similar activities, the Cuban Government knows that its example has, in many cases, the power to regiment the left, every time that Cuba was attacked. This regimentation of the left can be illustrated by the example with what occurred in Uruguay. Continuing in his exposition and insisting about the necessity of establishing a dialogue between the Cuban Government and the American Government, Commandante Guevara pointed out that both have ahead serious difficulties, as is known: I) United States: a) the great discontent of the Latin American peoples; b) some debilities of the "Alliance for Progress" program with which the United States seeks to combat this discontent, owing to the intrinsic contradictions of capitalism and the internal problems that the execution of the program will be susceptible to in various countries; II) Cuba: economic problems: a) certain deficiencies of its foreign commerce, including the loss

of the American market for its exports of sugar; b) lack of consumer goods to meet the popular necessities, amplified by the extremely accelerated process of development realized by the revolution; c) lack of spare parts for the factories "inherited" by the Government, which frequently are paralyzed or diminish their rate of production for reason of the lack of the aforementioned parts. Political problems: the action of provocateurs and saboteurs who are not despicable [não eram desprezíveis]; b [sic]) the reactions of the bourgeoisie to the socialization of the country; c [sic]) the reaction of the Catholic Church. Mister Goodwin explained to Mister Guevara that he did not have qualification, nor authority, to appreciate, concretely, all [quais-quer] aspects of the problems raised in the conversation. He explained, however, that there did not exist illusions in his country regarding the irreversible character of the revolution and the unrecoverability [irrecuperabilidade] of its leaders, but that it was judged to be possible other solutions with another government... [ellipsis in original] As for the decision of the Cuban Government not to attack Guantánamo, he lamented to be deprived of the possibility of making [an expression of] gratitude similar to that which was made to him regarding the failed [Bay of Pigs] invasion... [ellipsis in original] It is not judged possible any negotiation between the two governments, given the irreconcilability [irredutibilidade] in principle that exists between the two. Mister Guevara recognized these difficulties, saying, however, that perhaps one could think of official conversations about a secondary aspect of the Cuban-American problems, like, for example, the theft of airplanes [hijackings]. The American Government would have problems in order to justify the start of official negotiations owing to the reactions of public opinion, which would not be the case of the Cuban Government. The discussions about a secondary aspect, as the cited [example], perhaps would be a solution. By the way, Guevara stressed that the Cuban Government had nothing to do with the theft of airplanes. Mister Goodwin asked him if the affirmation was valid for the first airplane hijacked. Guevara responded affirmatively, saying that the performer of the theft was a good boy, who acted on his own account, he being presently incarcerated. Asked about the last hijacking, he said again that it was not his responsibility, the Cuban Government having judged until the same [action] was realized by "provocateurs." Mister Goodwin declared that such could not be, since the American Government has not explained this act to its public opinion. He registered the information and suggestions of Commandante Guevara and assured him that they would be transmitted to the highest level of his Government. Saying farewell with a handshake, Mister Guevara, Ambassador Barbosa da Silva and Mister Rodrigues Larreta continued in conversation until 5:30 in the morning. Ambassador Barbosa da Silva stressed the importance of his affirmation that the sympathies or affinities of the Cuban regime had not led his Government to the point of a political alliance or other form of affiliation [with] the Soviet Union. He pointed out the affirmative reiterations of a general character made by the Brazilian Government in the sense of which Brazil maintains its commitments in the ambit of the democratic west. The firm Brazilian position, [as] would be in case of a collective action against Cuba, [and] would be on other international questions such as Algeria, for example, indicates the independence of the Brazilian position within the western camp. Without prejudice to the position of the President of Brazil, one may ponder [ponderava] regarding the gravity of the situation that is created for Brazil, in case Cuba is [viessa] to incline for an alliance with the Soviet world. Mister Rodrigues Larreta mentioned the identity of the Argentine position with Brazil, to which Mister Guevara responded that he well understood [this]. As a matter of fact Argentina and Brazil, but above all Brazil, maintain an enviable position of independence, which lamentably is not the case of other American countries, above all the countries of the Caribbean. He was asked about why he came to Punta del Este and why there he maintained a moderate and conciliatory attitude, he responded that he saw in the "Alliance for Progress" program some positive aspects for the people of the Continent and that he hoped some Cuban suggestions would come to be incorporated in the final document, as in fact occurred. He was asked if he did not see in the result of the conference a significant political triumph for the United States, he declared that no, once that the internal problems that are created for the consultation of the postulates of Punta del Este will generate many difficulties to resolve dissatisfactions. Cuba could not adhere to the document, not only owing to the political incompatibilities about the concepts in the same contents,

but also because it has the certainty that it will not facilitate any of the recourses linked to the Alliance for Progress. Mister Guevara mentioned next that Cuba does not ignore the American condition, but that his country was constantly attacked, including by things that were not realized [fizera]. In a certain moment the help of President [Romulo] Betancourt of Venezuela was procured, but straightaway since the signing of the Commercial Accord with the Soviet Union, President Betancourt has made public declarations [aleivosas] for the Cuban Government. It is not fit to blame if Cuba counts on the spontaneous support in various countries, but in this it does not intend to intervene deliberately. However, he emphasized, in the case of Peru, if it can create a "bundle/intrigue to [President Don Manuel] Prado" ["lio a Prado"] [Cuba could] not fail to make [one]. The conclusion is that the Cuban Government demonstrates such fundamental interest in negotiations with the United States and in appeasing the reactions of the American Republics for fear of the defeat of the revolution by the play of factors on three planes: 1) the internal sector, where are presently the economic and political factors already mentioned; 2) the continental sector, where exists latent possibility of collective action against Cuba; 3) the international sector, where the East-West conflict can assume such magnitude that Cuba will come to be bargained between the United States and the Soviet Union. The appeal for negotiation with the United States, made in a speech at the opening of the conference and in the private conference, reveals a preoccupation so strong that it betrays the professed confidence in the stability of the regime. The preoccupation on making a good impression on the American Republics reveals unquestionably the fear of continental collective action. The desire to reopen its commerce with the United States, given to understand that it would pay indemnities for confiscated properties with resources withdrawn from its exports, show that the Soviet Union not only is not able to give all that is necessary, but it also does not give articles of quality that it needs. Moreover, [Cuba's] exclusive dependency on the East weakens its negotiating position, and would characterize its exclusion from American environment. The peaceful coexistence inside the Continent would be of interest for the Soviet Union, in order to maintain in check the American policy and, at the same time, constitutes the assurance of that the investments that it has made in the Cuban economy would not be lost in consequence of the fall of the present Government. It seems, since, that the principal desire of Mister Guevara to catch sight of Presidents [Janio] Quadros [of Brazil] and [Arturo] Frondizi [of Argentina] is motivated by his interest in strengthening the non-interventionist line, eliminating doubts as for its alliance or political affiliation [with] the Soviet Union. I believe that this information could be useful to Your Excellence in your audience with Mister Guevara. Respectfully, Afonso Arinos".

CABINET-RIO

.../VIII/1961