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From the Diary of Yu.V. Petrov: Report on a Conversation with Fidel Castro

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Summary:

Castro discusses ways to strengthen relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union, as well as the possible normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States. They also discuss the situation in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

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EMBASSY OF THE USSR
IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA

From the diary of
Yu.V. PETROV

REPORT ON CONVERSATION
with FIDEL CASTRO

20 June 1990

□ We inquired as to the opinion of our conversation partner about the course of the discussion about the CC CP of Cuba's approach [obrashchenie] to its upcoming congress.

□ F. Castro said that in party organizations, the state of the approach was being actively discussed, and that communists were freely expressing themselves about all of problems worrying Cuban society, and were introducing many valuable proposals. In his words, it had been possible to melt the "ice of reserve and traditionalism" which had frozen discussion at the first stage, something which required additional explanations on the part of the leadership of the party.

□ Responding to a question about our interlocutor's intentions to take part in the plenums of provincial party organizations taking place throughout the country, F. Castro said that he planned to travel to Camaguey in order to stimulate discussion and possibly would speak there, but that urgent business was forcing him to remain in Havana. All the same, he plans to take active part in a meeting with working people which will be organized along the lines of the United [Trade] Union Center of Cuba.

□ After this, our partner in conversation dwelt on the issues of Soviet-Cuban cooperation. Stating his satisfaction with the work of the Soviet delegations headed by L.I. Abalkin, O.D. Baklanov and K.F. Katushev, the Cuban leader emphasized that in this complicated period of changes taking place in the USSR, it was very important to devote much attention, as it would be in the future as well, to the meetings and contacts with the representatives of the Soviet parliament, party and other organizations. In this plan, remarking with satisfaction of the results of J.P. Viera's visit to the USSR, he approved our proposal to invite coms. Dzasokhov, Matvienko, and others, who are showing great interest in different aspects of the Soviet-Cuban partnership, to Cuba. Our interlocutor also reacted positively to our desire to hasten the dispatch of the Cuban parliamentary delegation headed by J. Escalona Reger to the USSR and to approach more actively the fulfillment of the plans to develop direct ties with Soviet enterprises. In this connection he said that on the practical plane he is ready to examine the issues of the development of tourism with a view to [s vykhodom na] Soviet organizations as discussed with L.I. Abalkin.

□ In his words, concrete steps are being taken along the lines of the ministries of the oil and gas industries of the USSR, and the Cuban side is ready to organize joint Soviet-Cuban enterprises in the area of tourism.

□ For our part, we supported this idea and inquired about how the fulfillment of our

program of cooperation in medicine was proceeding.

□The Cuban leader stated that they were taking every measure to broaden the assortment of medicines and biological preparations sent to the USSR and that a list of these products would be prepared on his instructions for 1991 (Given to us earlier by the Cuban minister of health, L. Tehoy).

□He also touched on the arrival of the latest detachment of Soviet servicemen-internationalists and children who were victims of the Chernobyl accident and assured us that every measure would be taken for their rapid treatment and rehabilitation here.

□The position stated by F. Castro, on the whole, came down to strengthening our cooperation by every means possible, rendering support to the USSR in this difficult moment for the Country of the Soviets.

□In this capacity he expressed the idea that at present it was advisable to preserve calm and restraint to a maximum degree, reacting in a balanced way to any unexpected events and continuing to prepare the country for [this] special period.

□After this, we turned the conversation to the topic of international politics. We touched on the theme of the normalization of Cuban-American relations and informed our conversation partner about the results of the Soviet-American meeting and M.S. Gorbachev's speech to the session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

□F. Castro expressed his great appreciation to M.S.Gorabachev for the clear and principled position on the Cuban issue which was being put forward consistently and insistently in the dialog with Bush. In connection with this, our interlocutor emphasized that he was using not only our intelligence, but was also relying on information from other sources.

□In F. Castro's opinion, the USSR's call for a move to civilized relations between the two states sounded convincing and authoritative, and now it remained only to wait for a reaction from the USA.

□For his part, Fidel clearly confirmed Cuba's readiness to normalize relations, although a certain pessimism could be heard in his statements with regard to analogous intentions on the American side.

□Our interlocutor asserted that the Americans are basing their calculations on the USSR's inability to help Cuba because of domestic difficulties, and that the country would be doomed to economic collapse. The USA, in his words, are tightening the economic blockade and are using all of their channels [of influence] to increase Cuba's political isolation.

□In our turn, we expressed the idea about the need for more active moves on the part of Cuba, including neutralizing anti-Cuban feelings and, conversely, supporting those forces in the USA which advocate normalizing relations between the two countries.

□Our partner in conversation agreed in principle with our arguments, but he noted that Cuba did not want to display impatience. "They (the USA) must not get the impression that we are in a hurry."

□In this capacity, speaking about the negotiations on immigration issues taking place in New York, he noted that the Cuban delegation received instructions not to display

unilateral interest or impatience, to hear out the American side's position attentively, and to enter into discussions on issues not included in the day's agenda only outside the bounds of the official negotiations, stating only their personal opinion. In relation to the essence of the negotiations, F. Castro stated that the USA was not fulfilling the agreements reached earlier on immigration issues, and were trying to take in as few Cuban emigrants as possible, leaving them in Cuba in the capacity of a "Trojan horse" in order that they might later make exaggerations on the issue of human rights.

□To our observation that such a passive position was unlikely to be justified, F. Castro again repeated the well-known argument about the USA's lack of desire to conduct a dialog with Cuba on an equal basis, obtaining only unilateral concessions from [the talks]. All the same, he did agree that it was necessary to use all opportunities to move the process forward.

□We brought to F. Castro's attention the USSR's position in connection with the possible renewal of hostilities by FMLN [Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front] in El Salvador and asked him for an assessment of the consequences arising from this situation.

□Our interrogator confirmed Cuba's readiness, as stated earlier in C.R. Rodriguez's conversation with De Soto, to assist a peaceful settlement in Salvador, and firmly refuted the USA's speculation about the inflammatory role of Cuba in the central American region.

□In his words, Cuba has not supplied a single weapon to El Salvador for over four months now, although it was not publicly renouncing its obligations, as the Americans were insisting.

□Furthermore, he made a statement in regard to the fact that the Cuban leadership did not influence FM LN on tactical issues, and the decision to conduct this or that military operation was entirely the prerogative of the partisans. In connection with this it was possible to understand that the Cubans were not ruling out the possibility of another attack by the partisans, insofar as they had managed to preserve their military capabilities and could resort to the force factor with the goal of increasing pressure on Christiani's government, moving him toward more constructive talks.

□In response to our question about his personal position on the given issue, F. Castro said that in the given situation, the leadership of the Front should be more careful and circumspect in its actions. "It is important to have military capabilities, but not to waste them," he emphasized.

□Our retort that this position should be made clear to the leaders of the FMLN did not encounter objections.

□Touching on the Americans' possibilities in the given issues, our interrogator noted that they can work directly with the partisans through the latter's representatives in international organizations, and that they did not need to resort to the intermediation of other states.

□In reply to our arguments about the desirability of using the experience of the settlement in South-West Africa, including in order to strengthen the FMLN's position and to find more quickly a resolution acceptable to all, F. Castro stated that he did not object to P. Cuellar's formula, but that so far no one was proposing it, and that the Americans were unlikely to agree to Cuba's participation in negotiations in a broad format.

□We inquired as to the results of D. Ortega's brief visit to Cuba.

□The Cuban leader spoke positively of the tone of the talks, noting their friendly character and entirely optimistically assessed the state and prospects of the FSLN [Sandinista National Liberation Front] which had managed to stand together and become the main political force in the opposition.

□In his words, at the meeting of the Sandanista national assembly which took place recently, the course which the front had taken, and in particular its recent electoral stage, were subjected to acute critical analysis, and the relevant conclusions were made in regard to the strategy which would be necessitated in future by the new conditions.

□In F. Castro's opinion, the Sandanistas, despite the complications of the period they had lived through, have managed to preserve a fairly firm social base and the sympathy of a significant portion of Nicaraguan society, which gives them the right to hope for an outcome more favorable to themselves in future elections.

□At the same time, our conversation partner did not conceal the objective difficulties of the FSLN's path, above all the internal contradictions which have arisen in connection with the alteration of the government's course and the unavoidable loss of a portion of the social victories. The dissatisfaction of local [nizovye] organizations, which have begun speeches and strikes by workers and government employees are forcing the Front's leadership to search for compromises in order to avoid open confrontation with the government at the given moment. Our interrogator emphasized that D. Ortega was constructively inclined, and that he planned to conduct the struggle only through parliamentary means, excluding a priori any use of force.

□He also confirmed the FSLN leadership's intention to stabilize the situation in the country, which in his opinion is assisting the building of bridges between the FSLN and the wing supporting V. Barrios.

□In F. Castro's words, the disarmament of the "contras" and their "dissolution" as a political force, which on the whole has been achieved, is an undoubted victory for the Sandanistas, and that such an outcome is consolidating the Sandanistas' position and is creating the preconditions for the formation of a sort of alliance with the new government of the country, which is obliged to find a reliable support given the circumstances of instability and economic difficulties. This is also evidenced by the fact that B. Aronson, who visited Mangua recently, was not able to incline V. Barrios toward the dissolution of the Sandanista army.

□The Cuban leader clearly outlined Cuba's two strategic lines in relation to Nicaragua. The first is solidarity and the preservation of cooperation with the FSLN on an inter-party basis. The second, as was announced earlier, is directed toward the establishment of friendly inter-state relations. In F. Castro's words, the arrival of a Nicaraguan governmental delegation to examine issues of commercial-economic cooperation is expected here in the near future. Our interlocutor again affirmed Cuba's readiness to send medical workers to Nicaragua if such a request were made.

□At the conclusion of the conversation, we replied to F. Castro's question on the internal political situation in the USSR, and also inquired about the course of his work on an interview in "Pravda."

□Our conversation partner said that not long ago he gave an interview to the leader of "CNN," with whom he maintains friendly relations, is preparing for a meeting with Italian television, and also continues to work on a series of newspaper interviews. On

the whole, as he emphasizes, the entire Cuban leadership is very tense and is working a lot.

□The first secretary of the embassy of the USSR in the Republic of Cuba, V. Pogrushevskii, was present at the meeting.

EMBASSY OF THE USSR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA

Yu. Petrov