

## Conversation between Comrade N.S. Khrushchev and F. Castro

May 3, 1963, Zavidovo

F. Castro informed N.S. Khrushchev that Cuban Ambassador in Algeria Jorge Serguera, who strongly recommends that he [Castro] should visit Algeria after his stay in the Soviet Union, had arrived in Moscow.

F. Castro, on his part, said that when he was departing from Havana, he was planning to visit Ben Bella, and it was precisely with that in mind that he included a considerable number of supporting personnel in his delegation: security, medical personnel, interpreters and so on.

F. Castro said that there were several motives that encourage him to go to Algeria. Among those motives are the following: during Ben Bella's stay in Cuba, he firmly promised [Ben Bella] to visit Algiers at first opportunity;

--he, Fidel Castro believes that a visit to Algeria by a Cuban delegation would lead to a strengthening of Ben Bella's government's positions and would help him overcome a number of internal difficulties related to the problem of consolidation of Algeria's revolutionary forces.

--Castro believes that he owes a lot to Algeria, who provided considerable moral support to Cuba and besides, provided certain special services. In particular, Castro said that Ben Bella helped him acquire Algerian passports for some Latin American revolutionaries, who then were able to use these passports to travel illegally for work in continental Latin American countries.

Besides, Castro noted that, in his opinion, it is necessary to do everything possible to tear Ben Bella away from the Arab bourgeois nationalism, to turn him into a counterweight to the Nasserist tendency of uniting the Arab world on the anticommunist basis. F. Castro said directly that we should aim for a direct confrontation between the two tendencies in the Arab nationalist movement—the Nasserist and the Ben Bella's movement, and to provide the maximum possible assistance to the latter's movement.

F. Castro noted that Ben Bella should be strongly advised to create Algeria's people's militia on the model of the Cuban [militia] in order not to be under a constant threat of a possible military coup, a danger of which is quite real considering the personalist aspirations of some of the leaders of the Algiers' army and the intrigues of imperialist intelligence services.

F. Castro said that Cuba provides assistance to Algeria within its capabilities as much as it can. Some time ago, Cuba sent sugar as a gift to the needy Algerians; currently, there is a group of medical personnel consisting of 35-40 doctors, which is led by the minister of public health. This group will work in Algeria for free and will provide immediate medical assistance to the population and at the same time, it will help the cause of organizing organs of people's public health in Algeria.

N.S. Khrushchev agreed completely with the assessment of the Algerian revolution presented by F. Castro; however, he said that a trip to Algiers would be a very dangerous operation, the risk of which is unlikely to justify possible results of such a trip.

N.S. Khrushchev related an incident that occurred during L.I. Brezhnev's official visit to some African countries, when his plane was attacked by a military fighter plane and was fortunate not to be shot down.

N.S. Khrushchev also noted that the internal situation in Algeria was currently not stable enough for the government to be able to say with confidence that they control all the hostile elements and guarantee that it would be impossible to organize some kind of a terrorist act against the leader of the revolutionary Cuba. In this connection, N.S. Khrushchev drew Castro's attention to the fact that just several days ago, in the middle of April, the Algerian minister of foreign affairs was assassinated in Algiers. "And if,--said N.S. Khrushchev--their own ministers get killed in the country, what kind of guarantee could there be for the visiting political figures." You have to keep in mind that your name, your person currently belong not only to Cuba, but are part of the international communist movement. [Therefore, comparing the benefits and the possible negative consequences of such a trip], one also has to keep in mind the fact that the intelligence services of all the imperialist states are now on a hunt for you. Your travel to our country was organized by the appropriate organs of the USSR and Cuba with one main goal – to confuse the foreign intelligence services, to put them on the wrong track, and to not give them any information about your flight, which was carried out practically in secret. The same way as you expressed your wish that your departure back to Cuba was organized following the elementary principles of cover-up. We agree with this request and believe that it is reasonable and correct. But any kind of trip to Algeria for you cannot be carried out with the same conditions and requirements that were implemented for your arrival to the USSR and departure from the USSR. First of all, we would have to give the names of the passengers of your plane to the governments of those capitalist countries over whose territory it would fly, which means that while in the air, you would be under threat of a possible or probable provocation on the part of foreign intelligence services; on the other hand, in Algeria proper, where the organization of security services is still at a very early stage, and where the government is not yet in full control of the situation, we cannot be sure that this exact visit would not be used by foreign intelligence services as an opportunity to conduct a terrorist act against you. In that case, both you and us would appear in a very unfavorable light. And the imperialists will be laughing at us, saying, for a long time we have not been able to organize a terrorist act on the Cuban territory, Castro managed to keep the trip to the USSR secret from us, but here in Algeria, a most favorable opportunity for such an act presented itself. They will be laughing at us too, saying the Russians are fools, they organized the Castro trip to their country quite well, but at the same time, practically delivered Castro into the hands of our intelligence agents by letting him go to Algeria.

I think, said N.S. Khrushchev, that taking all these circumstances into consideration, you should reconsider the issue of your visit to Algeria.

F. Castro noted that he has a special request from the Algerian government, who asked the Cubans to serve as intermediaries in purchasing Soviet weapons for the Algerian army, and he, Castro would like to talk about this with Ben Bella. Besides that, he (F.Castro) feels very uncomfortable personally because he gave Ben Bella a concrete promise to visit Algiers, and right now he does not see any proper way to get out of this difficult situation.

N.S. Khrushchev said that in such situations they sometimes use a format of a personal letter that would be delivered officially by specially assigned comrades from the delegation traveling to Algeria who would hand it personally to Ben Bella, and talk to him. And I am sure, said N.S. Khrushchev, that Ben Bella, being a revolutionary and your friend, will understand correctly the reasons that make you abstain from this trip at this time.

F. Castro said that in general he agrees with the considerations expressed by N.S. Khrushchev, and that he will think once again about the possibility of canceling the trip to Algeria taking all these circumstance into account.

Then Castro related to N.S. Khrushchev some of the information that Jorge Serguera presented to Fidel Castro. In particular, he said that Ben Bella's government provides quite energetic assistance to the rebel movement in the Portuguese colony of Angola. It sends weapons, money, and medicines [to Angola] and also hosts leaders of the partisan movement of Angola for military training.

Then he related that there was a fast-growing negative opinion in Algeria regarding the French policy in the sphere of nuclear arms race. According to Ben Bella, the Algerian government intends to respond to every French nuclear test in the Sahara with new economic measures directed against the French interests. In particular, one of such first steps will most likely be nationalization of all oil industry in Algeria, which is still owned by the French monopolies for now. Nationalization will be carried out after nuclear testing would start again.

Fidel Castro also said that apparently Ben Bella expressed some dislike of the Soviet ambassador in Algeria, who, in Ben Bella's opinion, was an exceedingly haughty bureaucrat, inflexible politician and a person who does not have the skill to easily get into contact with the people of the new formation who came to power in Algeria after the victory of the national liberation movement.

In addition, F. Castro informed [Khrushchev] that Ben Bella told the Cuban ambassador Jorge Serguera that the current investigation in the case of the murder of the Algerian [minister] of foreign affairs showed that several days before the assassination the killer met with the TASS correspondent in Algeria. This information was obtained by Ben Bella during his personal interrogation, and the Algerian government intends not to make this information public because it is possible that it was one of attempts of the imperialist intelligence services to put an obstacle in the relations between Algeria and the USSR. However, one has to keep in mind that the event indeed took place and the Soviet government has to be ready for it.

N.S. Khrushchev said that he would inquire about this question and would figure out what was the matter, while also emphasizing that in those conditions especially a trip to Algeria would have been inexpedient. He even said that when he makes the final decision about the trip, F. Castro could inform Ben Bella in a personal letter that his request for receiving Soviet weapons would be satisfied. Let that be—said N.S. Khrushchev jokingly—our joint price for giving up your visit to Algeria. In doing that, of course, we would lose some, but we would save the most important thing unharmed and intact—your head, for which the leaders of imperialist intelligence services had very likely promised a very big sum.

F. Castro asked N.S. Khrushchev to express his opinion regarding the future political development of the African continent, noting along the way that he himself was very critical about the prospect of fast political progress in a number of African states, among which, in Castro's opinion, Algeria was, probably, the most revolutionary, in the best sense of the word, country, on which one could rely and one could hope that this revolution could produce very good results under certain circumstances and with certain support.

N.S. Khrushchev said that the liberation of the African countries that was happening rapidly during the last several years did not always produce the desired results. Many factors were at play there: the great experience of the colonial powers, which tried to keep their lackeys in the leadership of the young African states, instigation of racial clashes by them, organizational weakness of the progressive forces and so on. As a result of all this, said N.S. Khrushchev, Africa, as a continent, would still have to travel a long evolutionary path; the peoples of Africa still have to figure out who of their leaders are true champions of their interests, and who is a puppet and a lackey of the imperialist powers and defender of the interests of their own local "black" bourgeoisie. They still have to see for themselves that not all the whites are exploiters and not all the blacks are the exploited, as well as [understand] the reality that there are working [class] Negroes and bourgeois Negroes. They still have to engage in the fight against bourgeois nationalism in the very worst sense of that word, against political prostitutes like Sekou Toure and so on.

In a word, one can say that their liberation was easy, but they have a hard struggle ahead of them, social struggle ahead of them. This is an inevitable stage, and Africa will go through it.

F. Castro expressed his full agreement with N.S. Khrushchev's opinion regarding Africa's political future and thanked him for sharing his opinion.

N.S. Khrushchev told [Castro] about the great economic assistance that the Soviet Union provides for the young Afro-Asian countries, who have just started the long path of their economic progress. However, while doing it, noted N.S. Khrushchev, we follow very cautious policies, so that our economic assistance could not be in any fashion interpreted by our enemies as interference in the internal affairs of a certain country, or moreover, as exerting political pressure on its government this way. We provide economic assistance without any reservations, with preferential conditions, out of our sincere desire to help them to be able to stand on their own feet.

N.S. Khrushchev told [Castro] that the Soviet Union generally follows the policy of complete noninterference in economic and political affairs, and in particular, it has eliminated all the ventures, which the Soviet Union had ever had in foreign countries. The Soviet Union does not exercise control over management of those construction projects that are carried out by our specialists in the countries of the Afro-Asian bloc, in particular the Aswan [dam], Bhilai, and so on, it has shut down all joint ventures, which some time ago were forcefully imposed by Stalin, and which we subsequently liquidated.

Fidel Castro noted in this connection that some time ago, apparently as a result of an oversight by the Soviet leadership, there was a small misunderstanding between Cuba and the USSR regarding the fact that during the preparation for the construction of the fishing port in Havana, the Soviet side proposed in the drafted agreement to appoint a Soviet administrator to the position of the top manager. I, said Castro, spoke against that provision in the document, citing the possibility that such decision regarding the administrator could lead to the emergence of a whole number of undesirable conflicts between the Cuban workers and the Soviet (by nationality and citizenship) administrator. I persistently spoke against that provision, in order to have a Cuban comrade in that position, for whom it would be easier and more natural to resolve issues with the Cuban workers, regardless of what kind of issues those were.

N.S. Khrushchev noted that it could have only happened as a result of some oversight on the part of [mid-level] management indeed, because the general line of the Soviet government in this issue is to never to put Soviet specialists in the positions of leadership. They should build, and not administratively direct, the construction.

In the conclusion of the conversation, F. Castro told Nikita Sergeevich that he would like to share with him his opinion about Sukarno.

F. Castro said that Sukarno made a very unpleasant impression during his visit to Cuba. He, Castro, was struck by the fact that Sukarno did not show any interest in any of the achievements of the Cuban revolution. He never visited any cooperatives, any people's estates, did not want to see the new construction in Cuba, [new] schools, but limited his visit to the purely tourist visits, and the Cubans were somewhat offended that a political leader of a large country only visited the same points of interest as a rank-and-file tourist.

Besides, Sukarno's constant, exaggerated chatter about women, about his affairs and so on, makes a really unpleasant impression. His prurience irritated people.

N.S. Khrushchev said that we support and will support Sukarno as a political leader mainly because currently in Indonesia there is no one who could seriously implement the general course taken by Sukarno or to implement a more radical revolutionary policy. [Abdul] Nasution, who represents probably the only alternative to Sukarno—is an outright bastard. In this sense, Sukarno is the least evil, and so we have to support him.

N.S. Khrushchev spoke in detail about the diplomatic support that the Soviet Union has been providing for the Indonesian struggle to return the West Irian and in other issues. He spoke also about the special assistance that the USSR provides (training crews for submarines and for the air force and so on) [to Indonesia]. We do all this, emphasized N.S. Khrushchev, in the name of the Indonesian people, of Indonesia, whom we support against the imperialists. When they have a better political leader than Sukarno, a more serious, a more influential [leader], then we will support that son of the Indonesian people.

You note correctly that Sukarno is a womanizer and an actor. What kind of hell of a leader is that! But, I repeat, one has to take the situation into account and to understand the reasons of our support for Sukarno correctly.

Ambassador of the USSR to Cuba, A. I. Alexeyev was present at the conversation.

Conversation was recorded by N.S. Leonov

[Source: Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI), FONd 52, opis 1, delo 57  
Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive]