

**Record of Main Content of Conversation between M.S. Gorbachev and F. Castro
(Havana, Cuba). April 3, 1989.**

State Council of the Republic of Cuba. Participants: from the Soviet side, E. A. Shevardnadze, A. N. Yakovlev, V. M. Kamentsev, Yu. V. Petrov. From the Cuban side: R. Castro, C.R. Rodriguez, J. Risquet, O. Cienfuegos, I.Malmierca, J. Camacho, C. Aldano.

M.S. GORBACHEV. I would like to express heartfelt thanks for the warm public welcome. It turned into an expression of big feelings. This is a characteristic feature of our relationship, which is based on fundamental values. Of course [our relations] also contain material, cultural and scientific aspects, and that is also an important sphere. But the basis of our relations is the commitment to the choice of the Cuban and the October revolutions. This is what has united the Soviet and the Cuban peoples for many decades. We can be proud of it, but it is not enough to be proud, we need to develop and deepen our relations. I see this visit from this perspective. We have approached it with the understanding that our relations, even as solid as they are, need to be taken care of, like a tree—so that the roots grow deeper and the branches grow fuller.

Today, the world is on the move, it is searching for ways to the future. At such a turning point, this visit allows us to demonstrate the high level of our relations. This relationship is of great value. It has a unique character. The world needs an example like this. A huge country and a small one, if we speak about quantitative parameters, located on different continents, with different histories, succeeded in developing a type of interaction, which is based on respect, independence, sovereignty, openness, and trust. This is why this visit is important not only for you and us but for the entire world. Your northern neighbor is watching intently what will transpire here; Latin Americans do too and there is great interest in Europe, in Africa, and Asia. In other words, it is an event of global significance.

My first trip to Latin America is to Cuba. By this, we are consciously stressing Cuba's role on the Latin American continent, where important and deep processes are currently unfolding. This visit gives us an opportunity to engage in a comprehensive exchange of opinions on pressing issues of the development of world socialism. Socialism exists in the context of global issues. Everything that happens in the world in some form affects the processes unfolding in socialist countries. We are faced with the task of adapting socialism to the current realities, of opening [fully] the potential of our social order so that it reflects the imperatives of the time adequately. Here we need a breakthrough of thinking in theory and practice on the basis of fundamental values. The current stage, as never before, has highlighted the fact that there is no universal model, which would allow us to solve all problems. There is the experience of Cuba, Eastern Europe, China, and the Soviet Union. Along with a common direction, with a common ultimate goal, each country has its own dynamic, traditions, and starting point.

This meeting allows us to conduct a friendly conversation about Soviet-Cuban relations. Time puts its demands on us, but the main feature remains the same—old friendship, as they say, never rusts. This is the point of view of our leadership.

Once again, I would like to express our common appreciation that we will be together during these days and will have a chance to have brotherly and deep conversations.

F. CASTRO. I am very grateful to comrade Gorbachev for these words. In essence, this is not the first visit. In December, we already experienced the feeling of enthusiasm related to it, even though the visit did not take place then. We understand the reason well—even a much smaller tragedy would be sufficient for Gorbachev to realize the need to go back.

We invited people to come to the welcoming [ceremony], but what is important is the enthusiasm with which people came, the feelings that they

expressed. I watched the people attentively, the expressions on their faces. One can organize a meeting, but you cannot [organize] joy, enthusiasm. We could hear the symphony of voices, I myself could barely contain my emotions, fired up by the mood of the people. In it, you could see the close ties between the Cuban and the Soviet people, the gratitude of the Cuban people toward the Soviet people. It was also an expression of respect and admiration for cde. M.S. Gorbachev, which are very prominent in our country. All this came together in an outstanding event.

M.S. GORBACHEV. I think I benefitted greatly from the appreciation that Fidel enjoys among his people. They were happy to see us together.

F. CASTRO. We received information from Moscow that people there are also very happy that this visit is taking place. This is natural. I am happy that the Soviet people from such a great distance will be able to take part in these events.

I share the statements that you made just now. Our agenda is open, we will discuss international issues as well as our relations. The negotiations will proceed in a spirit of total trust, as always when we met and talked. The only difference is that today we have the privilege to receive you here. And you have an opportunity to see some of the achievements of our revolution.

We will probably dash the hopes of the American press who have gathered here. They are waiting to see the expressions of contradictions and differences between Cuba and the Soviet Union.

M.S. GORBACHEV. And they are worried lest we disappoint them. The Americans are thinking too. I cannot say that they made much progress in those considerations but something is happening. We will talk about it further here. Bush sent me a letter on the eve of my departure. I have it with me; I will show it to you later.

We have to do everything to not miss the chance, the opportunities that have opened. Things that you and I started to do in recent years are already creating great problems for them. The reactionary circles are very worried by the increasing

influence of socialist countries' initiatives and the new methods of approaching the resolution of problems. The military-industrial complex especially does not like it. They do not like our *perestroika*, and they are now launching a campaign to discredit it and attack Gorbachev personally. Radio voices are often trying to infiltrate [people's] minds with the idea that *perestroika* is stalling, that it is doomed, that socialism can only exist as a dictatorship, or chaos is unavoidable. This is being broadcast in all languages to our people; we stopped jamming them, now they hear everything.

The last elections became for us like a tuning fork, a trial run from the point of view of domestic processes—economic and political reform, changes in the ethical sphere. Almost 90% of the electorate participated [in the elections], and among the elected 85% are communists. It was a big and very important campaign in terms of testing the attitude of the population to our policy. In essence, these elections drew a line under the last 4 years [...]

In the United States they are seriously worried about changing attitudes toward the Soviet Union. [James] Baker, according to reliable information, came back from Europe in a panic: there they no longer see the USSR as an enemy and do not expect it to move on Europe with tanks; [Europe] is leaving the United States and going "into the arms of the Russian bear." After this, as we know, Bush had a number of meetings with Sovietologists. They are trying to tentatively come up with a different course, but so far, it looks like they are not succeeding. We, meanwhile, get more and more convinced of the correctness and effectiveness of our new political thinking. Naturally, this is a big turn, it requires philosophical grounding, and it is important not to make mistakes here.

F. CASTRO. It appears that the new U.S. administration is acting very cautiously. It is interesting, why are they so sluggish in foreign policy, including the détente with the Soviet Union? What are the factors at play here?

M.S. GORBACHEV. I am leaning toward the explanation that primarily we are seeing the influence of the military-industrial complex. Recently they conducted

studies and came to a conclusion that transferring the military sector into civilian [hands] would be accompanied by the growth of unemployment and subsequently by social tensions. Besides, they don't know how to employ the huge sector of military-scientific research. And finally, the most important [factor]: the new situation in which the enemy image disappears will work to the benefit of socialism and of progressive regimes. For them, it would be [like] giving up their positions.

Therefore, you are right when you say that this is a very cautious administration. Shevardnadze adds, and I agree with him, that it is also an indecisive one. And their indecisiveness stems from the fear of continuing what has recently started to come together in Soviet-American relations and in world politics. It is [now] more difficult for them to give orders to the Europeans, more difficult to work with Congress; they are losing their ability to interfere in the affairs of other countries. Of course, we should not entertain any illusions, any romanticism, we must stand on the basis of facts. However, the realities show that we are expressing our pressing needs better. We have an opinion that we have a chance to grab the historic initiative solidly and for a long time.

F. CASTRO. At some point, I had an impression that they were counting on difficulties in the Soviet Union—economic and even political ones.

M.S. GORBACHEV. I would just add that transferring the military complex to civilian tasks would be accompanied by a growth in the production of consumer goods and the Western market is already oversaturated. They were expecting that the Soviet Union would open its markets, but we are not doing it for several reasons. And more. Further disarmament would give the Soviet Union an opportunity to free resources, to put them in the service of the interests of the people, to open up the potential of socialism. This is where they get the temptation to slow down the disarmament process, to preserve SDI, so that the Soviet Union will stay entangled in the arms race. Today, Fidel, we are spending 15-18% of our budget on defense. That does not happen in any developed country. The Americans would want our national income to go, as it did in the past, mainly toward military goals, and as a

result we would have social tension and political instability, and socialism would be discredited.

They persistently propose to us:

take credits and use them to buy consumer goods. But we use credits to buy equipment for light industries, for other sectors that produce consumer goods. We create our own base. We want to turn the discontent of the population with the situation in the internal market into an understanding by the people of the necessity to reform the economy and not to wait for manna from heaven?.

F. CASTRO. Many thought about the Bush administration with hope and believed that he would be a less ideological, more pragmatic president. Moreover, during the electoral campaign he spoke as a person who supported Reagan's foreign policy and was going to work in favor of disarmament and reducing tensions. I think the word "indecisiveness" describes the situation quite well. As far as [our country] is concerned he has a more definite policy. Just on the eve of your visit, information was leaked that the State Department sent instructions to all its embassies that policy toward Cuba will not change, that the harsh policy will continue.

In the past they said that if our troops were withdrawn from Africa, relations would improve. [...]

I think they are still making mistaken calculations about Cuba. We have not spoken on this issue yet because we want to give diplomacy a chance. But we will not tolerate this. We do not have an alternative. This kind of act is so offensive, so humiliating for us that it is intolerable.

Therefore, hopes that the Bush administration would be more pragmatic and less ideological have not been realized yet. Maybe they are doing it to please the right-wing circles, play a game—"a little bit this way, a little bit that way." But this is a dangerous way. We are acting attentively and carefully toward the Bush administration. Not a single bad word has been said about them.

M.S. GORBACHEV: In my view, the United States is still unable get to realistic positions vis-à-vis Cuba because their foreign policy, which they have been conducting for decades, is now sputtering. They are worried about Western Europe, the Middle East, and China. There is a reason Bush went there before my visit. They are saying that everything is normal, that they do not see a problem in the improvement of Soviet-Chinese relations, but in reality it worries them very much. India is getting out of hand. And finally, the Latin American continent. Where is it going to go, in what direction?

Your behavior looks responsible to me, without rhetoric or emotions. This is a strong position. Many times, I myself wanted to say something, because Baker and other representatives of the administration make statements, which deserve to be responded to. But we decided to react in the press for starters.

Recently Bush passed on his appreciation for our understanding and patience, because they, apparently, are using this time to think through what to do next. But it seems to me it is hard for him to make the choice: whether to continue the old policy that no longer brings any dividends, or to choose a new policy, the first signs of which emerged at the last stage of the Reagan administration. We will not say whether it was Reagan's achievement or they simply failed to calculate whether they would win or lose. In any case, our firm but responsible and flexible policy will keep pushing them in a more realistic direction.

F. CASTRO: One has to have in mind that at the end of the Reagan administration there was a situation, which subjectively helped him form a smarter and more realistic position: Reagan's prestige fell significantly when he turned out to be involved in Irangate. It reminded one of a situation where Nixon found himself in his time. Only in foreign policy was Reagan able to find some space to win some sympathies again. Indeed, the most brilliant page in his administration opened when he chose the path of peace, of negotiations with the USSR. He would never have been able to achieve such popularity and respect in the international arena had he not signed the treaty with the Soviet Union.

M.S. GORBACHEV: The current administration consults intensively with Kissinger and with people like him, who are connected with certain stages of the Cold War. What Kissinger was telling me is already present in his practical policy. Shevardnadze felt the same when he was meeting with Baker. This administration is especially dangerous, in my view, because it tends to fall under influences. One can consider it a normal process when a political leader considers different alternatives in foreign and domestic policy and chooses among them. However, when this quality—the skill of making choices—is lacking, then vacillations occur. And because we are talking about the U.S. administration, it is very serious.

F. CASTRO: About Latin America: here we see more and more the drive to independence; there is no unity, however there is an aspiration toward unity. There are several factors behind it. The first, chronologically, is the Malvinas [Falklands] war. The United States united with Great Britain having forgotten all their agreements, pacts, and even the Monroe Doctrine. The Latin Americans, naturally, were on the Argentine side, even though it was ruled by a repressive government.

The second factor, and ultimately the most important one, is the existence of a huge external debt and economic crisis, which all the countries of Latin America are experiencing because of the unequal exchange rate. What is happening is a shameless pumping of pure capital out of Latin America. It is tens of billions of dollars annually. Cuba raised the banner of struggle against it as early as 1985. We, essentially, have laid down the course. Before that nobody dared to say that it was impossible either to pay out the debt or to recall it. This drew a lot of attention among the countries of Latin America and [it] played an important role in the cause to unite them. But the United States does not want to discuss debt issues with all the countries together, they prefer to deal with each country individually.

M.S. GORBACHEV: In our meetings with the Americans, as soon as we would touch on this subject, we said that we should internationalize the discussion of this problem; and in response we got a deafening silence.

F. CASTRO: Our economic and social situation is most difficult. The Americans behave like egoists. Five years ago, they imported 5 million tons of sugar annually, but then they started to subsidize their own producers and gradually eliminated the quotas for the traditional exporters from Latin America. Now they have reduced [imports] down to 1 million tons. This, naturally, has led to falling prices. They undertook many similar protectionist measures, which helps raise consciousness in Latin America. The U.S.A. put great pressure on Latin America so that they would vote against Cuba at the Human Rights Commission in Geneva. First it was done by Reagan, now by Bush. He called each of the Latin American presidents. They lost that diplomatic battle, but one should not underestimate their influence.

My trips to Mexico, Ecuador, and Venezuela tell you something about the situation in Latin America. Before, nobody was inviting me, now they have. I had to take the risk and went. I had very good contacts with people, I was wonderfully received. Venezuela was the most impressive. Sixty thousand Cubans live there, rich people, bourgeoisie, by the way, and they have great influence over the press. There has been constant American propaganda against Cuba for 30 years, a dirty campaign was unleashed right before the trip, including calls for assassination. But I was hoping that 30 years of our struggle did not go to waste and that they could not deceive the people. And what happened is that all that propaganda evaporated instantly. Crowds followed us everywhere, I could not stick my head out of the hotel, all our meetings were on live television. The Yankees were very concerned. After my visit to Mexico, where [Raul] Alfonsin was [visiting], he visited the United States and had a conversation with Bush. The latter asked him a question: why do they applaud Castro more than others? And suggested an answer himself: it must be because of the "David and Goliath" complex. Alfonsin said that it was not only that, but that Fidel was saying many correct things, having in mind the Latin American economic problems.

The Americans see the phenomenon of improving relations between us and Latin America. It is taking Cuba into its fold. The sympathies of Latin Americans toward Cuba are growing, and this is more important now than the period after the revolution. Because then everything was still undefined, this is now not a Castro,

who just came down from the peaks of Sierra Maestro, but a leader of a socialist country, a leader of a Marxist-Leninist party. Other factors play a role, too. For example, the behavior of the church, which speaks for human rights in many countries of the continent. The smartest thing for the United States to do would be not to aggravate relations with Cuba. By conducting a hostile policy toward Cuba, they will not earn much sympathy in Latin America.

M.S. GORBACHEV: This observation reminds me somewhat of what is going on around the Soviet Union. In recent months, I received no fewer than a dozen political scientists, very big and influential, who advise the administration today. They say that Bush is hesitating. He sees that in America, after all, the overwhelming majority of people are in favor of further normalizing Soviet-American relations, but his soul is probably closer to the military-industrial complex. He is simply afraid of it. In this sense, Reagan was more decisive and confident because he belonged to the farther right wing. But this one, he is afraid, he flirts with the right wing, because he does not want to lose their trust. But the hostile attitude of the right wing towards the Soviet Union and Cuba does not reflect the changes going on in American society.

Your observations about the Latin American continent are very interesting. Let's take the last visit by the Brazilian president [Jose] Sarney. He brought with him representatives of all political stripes, including communists, famous writers, artists, architects, representatives of business circles, i.e. the whole team that reflects the entire spectrum of national opinions. And you know what his main thought was? Let us cooperate, help Brazil get out of America's embrace.

F. CASTRO: Sarney now is a firm proponent of expanding relations with Cuba. He starts from the assumption that further development of Cuban-Brazilian ties would have great importance for improving the situation in Latin America.

M.S. GORBACHEV: Reads a passage from a message received from Sarney, which says that the Brazilians want to develop economic ties with Cuba and to establish a relationship of “political partners.”

F. CASTRO: The third serious problem for Latin America is the narcobusiness. The Americans want to solve it by way of herbicides, but this is an economic problem. The United States created a hundred billion dollar market for this and crime is growing. Latin America essentially has an entire narcotics production industry—in Peru, Columbia. This is in some way like a cancer. Latin Americans are no longer just producers, they are starting to use the drugs too.

The Americans behave in Latin America in absurd, illogical ways; sometimes it is impossible to understand what they want. It helps to create a new atmosphere here. I think your visit here could be considered a visit not only to Cuba but to Latin America at large. It is very important in the situation we find ourselves in.

[Source: Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, Fond 1, opis 1.

Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya and Sarah Dunn for the National Security Archive.]