
INTERVIEW

Translated by Tim Ennis

GENERAL NIKOLAI LEONOV AT THE CEP*

**Nikolai Leonov, Eugenia Fediakova,
Joaquín Fernandois, and others**

This is the conversation held between General Nikolai Leonov and a group of academics and researchers from the *Centro de Estudios Públicos*. Summarizing and expanding on the topics of his lecture at the CEP the previous day, here General Leonov gives his opinion on the current situation in Russia, the outbreaks of nationalism and the causes of the breakup of the USSR. He refers to the Soviet authorities' opinion of the Chilean Armed Forces during the government of Salvador Allende, the breaking-off of relations between the USSR and Chile after the military coup and the presumptive participation of the USSR in three crucial episodes during the military government in Chile. He illustrates by anecdote the way Soviet Intelligence operated and gives his thoughts on the Cuban regime, Cuban-Soviet relations and the unfolding of the Cuban Missiles Crisis (1962), as well as Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East.

* Between 1983 and January 1991, General Nikolai Leonov was Sub-Director of the State Security Committee (KGB) of the Soviet Union, the second most important post within the KGB structure. Previously he was Sub-Director of the KGB's Analysis and Information Department (1973-1982) and Sub-Director of its Latin American Department (1968-1972). General Leonov is Doctor in Latin American History, at the USSR Academy of Sciences, and author of the book, *Essays on Contemporary Central American History* (Moscow: Ed. Nauka, Academy of Sciences, 1973). In 1985 he published his memoirs under the title *Difficult Times* (Moscow: International Relations). Currently he is a professor at the Institute of International Relations in Moscow.

This interview was held on September 23rd 1998 in the *Centro de Estudios Públicos* and was edited by M. Teresa Miranda assisted by Eugenia Fediakova, Joaquín Fernandois, Emilio Meneses and Olga Uliánova.

Estudios Públicos, 73 (verano 1999, "El general Nikoai Leonov en el CEP").

—*General Leonov, I would like to start with a question on the disintegration of the Soviet Union to which you referred yesterday in your talk¹. You argued that in some way the structure of the Soviet Union itself gave the republics certain wings of autonomy as well as certain symbols which, in the end, helped to create a nationalist spirit even where there wasn't one before. Was this nationalist spirit in the Soviet Union felt in the Communist Party itself, or did the disintegration ultimately involve a disintegration of the communist party project? Were there nationalist communists?*

—There were cases of nationalist expression that were quite well defined, even among the hierarchy of national communist parties. The most notorious involved the overthrow of Shelest, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine, in the 1970s, who had begun to speak out publicly in too nationalistic a way. Instead of perhaps doing a more profound job of eradicating these nationalist expressions, coercive measures were adopted, as was common at that time: the First Secretary of the Ukraine Communist Party was removed from his post, and expelled from the Politburo of which he was a member in his capacity as head of the Ukrainian party. Then, for a short time a propaganda campaign was deployed to explain to the population that he had been expelled for being a nationalist: in other words this was not hidden, it was not covered up. This is the only case I know of where the nationalist issue took on a national dimension and transcended public opinion.

But of course these things were not present in the Ukraine alone. The other leaders of the national communist parties also had their peccadilloes: all of them always leant towards independence; nobody wanted controls from the center. Faced with Shelest's expulsion, of course they closed up like seashells to develop within their national cells, waiting for a weaker leader to come to power in the center. That situation presented itself later with Gorbachev, by which time they had already begun to speak out, seeking greater privileges, more freedom, more independence. But nationalism was never present among the people.

The Russians, the central nation, because of their idiosyncrasy and historical experience —as they were the central core of the empire, and this was always multinational— had always been very internationalist by mentality: they accepted all nationalities easily. When the empire expanded, the Russians never used barbaric methods or annihilation. They

¹ See in this edition *infra*, the talk by General Leonov to which this question and later ones refer. (Editor's Note)

allowed all peoples joining the empire to keep their own religion. Within the Czarist empire there were Muslims, Buddhists, etc. who had very few restrictions. The sole restriction was that only Christians could be nobles, and only they could be officers and generals in the army. Whether this was a blessing or a curse, who knows? ... Those who professed the Islamic faith could, it is true, serve voluntarily in the army: so the Tartars sent their detachment of cavalry into the war against Napoleon. There was no other discrimination. Russians are very tolerant, very tolerant indeed.

Furthermore, a central principle in education, in the education of both Soviet Communist Party militants, as well as all the people, was the lemma of “internationalism”, not only proletarian but also national. Several years before the breakup of Soviet power, there arose in the ranks of the Communist Party Central Committee a new concept —“the Soviet People”—, and references began to be made to the Soviet people and no longer to Russian people, Ukrainian people, Georgian, Uzbek...It was said that a new community of peoples with different mentality had arisen: the “Soviet people”².

—*And did this idea penetrate among the masses?*

—Yes it did, yes. When, up in the high spheres of party bureaucracies, they were thinking of separating or at least sharing their privileges and powers, it was decided to hold a referendum to consult the people, all of them, whether or not they wanted to preserve the Soviet Union: preserve it, reformed, more democratic, of course. The referendum was held on March 18th 1991. 75% said they wanted to preserve the Soviet Union and remain inside it. So, those who liquidated the Soviet Union at the stroke of a pen, there in that little hunting lodge in Belorussia, were acting against the will of 75% of the population.

—*Where there regional differences in the voting? Did the Russians voted the same as the Ukrainians or the Georgians for example?*

—Those most determined to preserve the USSR were the inhabitants of Belorussia, now an independent state: nearly 87% of them voted in favor of the union; the Russians too, over 80%. In the Caucasian republics, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, the voting was a bit lower, about 71 or 67%, somewhere around there; in the Ukraine the figure was

² In 1972, during celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the USSR, it was formally declared that in the course of this half century a new human community had been formed in the USSR, namely the “Soviet People”. This formula, widely used afterwards in official discourse symbolized the easing of ethnic differences within the USSR. It should be stressed that the concept of “people” is used in a broad sense in the Russian language to mean nationality—but nationality in the sense of ethnicity rather than civic membership or belonging. (Editor’s Note)

around 65%. The Baltic republics (Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania) which were part of the USSR, did not participate in this referendum —they refused to do so. But we had it absolutely clear that these countries belonged both culturally and economically to the West; for a long time they had been arguing in favor of total independence, so we did not consider them obligatorily as part of the Soviet Union. Now, except in the Ukraine where voting in favor of the Union was little bit lower, about 65%, everywhere voted more or less uniformly.

Ukraine is a special case. There are three fronts, one of them is Western Ukraine, which borders with Poland, Slovakia and Hungary —Galicia as they call it there. This strip of Ukraine, which has approximately 15% of the republic's total population is furiously anti-Russian and anti-Soviet.

—*They are Catholic too...*

—Yes, and it is the only place in the world where to this day disputes between orthodox Christians and Catholics become violent. Before leaving Russia this last time, I was reading about the squabbles between them, using shots, stones and sticks to claim cathedrals from each other... In World War II these people even took up arms against the Soviet army. The SS troop division known as Galitchina, famous in our part of the world, was formed there. They were ferocious with the guerrillas, never took prisoners and torture was brutal. For them there was no fighting on the front with regular troops —they fought against the guerrillas in the rearguard. And from such places the famous nationalist leader, Stepan Bendersa, emerged: a name that perhaps you have heard of. He collaborated and fought for a time with the Germans against the Soviets; even wearing a nazi uniform. He was a nationalist leader, a very aggressive and brutal type. Many lives must weigh on his conscience. He wanted the Nazis to help to proclaim the independence of the Ukraine, but Hitler did not want to do so. He was the last war criminal to be condemned to death —tried in his absence as he lived in Germany. It was entrusted to Soviet Intelligence to carry out the sentence abroad, which happened in 1959. This was the last case in which Soviet Intelligence participated in the physical liquidation of a political enemy of the regime.

Of course this whole legacy leaves a mark that is difficult to overcome in the Ukraine. They now have a political party, the RUJ³, which is furiously anti-Russian and has about 10% of votes in the Ukraine

³ One of the main political parties in the Ukraine, famous for its separatist campaign during the final years of the USSR. In independent Ukraine it represents the nationalist opposition. (Editor's Note)

Parliament. But they are so aggressive, so energetic, that at times we say that Galicia is the tail on the dog that wags the whole of Ukraine.

—In a way the Second World War was a factor that helped to consolidate the Soviet regime, but it also gave it a nationalist face. Is the memory of World War II in some way still a unifying factor in Russia today? I also want to ask about General Vlasov, What has happened to him; has his name in the army been restored?

In answer to the first part of the question, I can tell you that in people's hearts, especially veterans, war memories live on. But current political leaders try to bury all of these memories... In February this year I went to Stalingrad⁴, at the invitation of veterans of the battle there. The Mayor of Stalingrad and the veterans of the Battle of Stalingrad had the idea of forming a "Heroic Cities League", made up of the twelve cities that defended themselves most heroically during the war. Half of these were in Ukraine, such as Kiev, Sebastopol, Kerch; others are in our territory like Stalingrad, Leningrad; and others in Belorussia, such as the fort of Brest and the city of Minsk. The Russian and Belorussian cities were in agreement, but only one of those in Ukrainian territory was willing to form this league —Sebastopol, which is 100% Russian, as it is a naval military base with almost no Ukrainian population. In other words, although the events of the World War II are celebrated by veterans, when they die, I think this unifying memory will also die with them.

—And General Vlasov?

—General Vlasov is considered by very few, really only by an insignificant minority of national public opinion, as a hero, as a fighter against socialism. But veterans never would consider him a hero; nor even the current Russian authorities, let alone the older generation. I am talking about people's feelings: everyone sees him as someone who betrayed his country in wartime, so one can't even contemplate his justification or absolution. Personally, everything I know of his activities gives me plenty of reasons to class him as a traitor. He deserved the punishment he got, because really he put himself at the service of the enemy. Above all, he fought against the guerrillas, because the troops he formed, known as the Russian Liberation Army, about 90,000 strong, wore Nazi uniforms and had Nazi weapons. Like those of Galicia, Vlasov's troops were basically used against the population itself and against Russian guerrillas. They were not on the battle front.

In Peru, near Lima, I once found myself with one of Vlasov's soldiers, a survivor. At that time a rumor was going round that a Soviet

⁴ Volgograd since the mid-1950s. (Editor's Note)

journalist was going there, and a young lad of some 17 or 18 years old came up to me and told me in Russian, "My father would like to invite you to lunch, to talk to you." I replied, "Why doesn't your father come himself?" He replied, "No, my father has problems, he is ashamed." Exceeding all the limits generally placed on an Intelligence officer in service, I risked going to an unknown place with an unknown person, and with no clear objective. It was simply a sentimental thing, for I convinced myself he was a Russian soldier lost there in the Andean mountains. When I entered the house, I saw a strong man with a big moustache, Russian through and through: he spoke Russian perfectly, the house was full of Russian books, there were was a balalaika, vodka on the table, and the food was Russian. We had a drink, and then another, and he began to tell me his story. I won't repeat it here, but he confessed to being a soldier in Vlasov's army. When I asked him "Why don't you go back?" as by now those events are covered by the Statute of Limitations and he could return to his homeland, he replied, "No. My brothers are so bloodthirsty that I wouldn't even be able to set foot there." "So," I replied, "Why did you ask me to come here?" and he replied that the only thing he wanted me to do was to look out for his children, the lad and a daughter he had. I assured him that I would take steps for them to obtain Russian citizenship. Two more citizens: what was there for my country to lose? We don't answer for the parents: they were victims of the war.

And I believe he was right, for if he returned to my country, of course they couldn't put him on trial, but in his capacity as former Vlasov soldier he would find himself isolated in society, he would have a very hard time, because the magnetic field is negative for anyone who served under Vlasov's flag.

—Going back to Chile, to the Allende period: you said that in the Spring of 1973—I suppose it must have been May or June, the northern spring—they asked you and other members of Intelligence what you thought was going to happen in Chile. Apparently the information you had at that time, judging by what you said yesterday, was that a coup d'état was expected. Which of the Chilean armed forces were expected to initiate this, in your opinion? And, another question, when the Soviet government decided to send weapons to Chile, what was their purpose? Because, of course, apart from the fact that any arms sale is a political act, whereby one gains influence, it is clear that these weapons would have caused division in the Chilean army.

—We did not have any precise opinion as to which branch of the armed forces could be the standard bearer for a coup. But in general—in

Intelligence circles, in the Soviet Military Defense Ministry— it was usually thought that the most reactionary bodies —I am using the language of that time— were the navies. Whether it be Peru, Argentina or Chile, the navy was considered the most conservative branch, the most anti-Communist, the most linked to the United States and to England, and the most anti—Soviet. And this was for several reasons: they used technology acquired in those countries, and it was also believed that the officer and admiral corps came from the upper echelons of society.

As for the other armed forces, the one that was always seen as most possible to work with were the land forces, which in any country are nuclei of the army, because seldom in the history of plots and military rebellions can the navy triumph if the land forces are against them. In our own history we have the case of the famous battleship Potemkin, a very powerful battleship which rebelled but had no means of provisioning itself. So our sympathies would be more with the army; but limited sympathies of course, because the military caste was in no way seen as a possible ally of ours.

The air force would be sort of in between the other two branches, but perhaps closer to the navy than to the army. The air force might be seen as a bit more aristocratic, more linked to North American training centers, with French and North American technology basically.

The least reliable were the police corps, or the special police forces, because they were always more ideologically sensitive as their role is to deal with domestic social and political problems.

This was our general view of Latin American armed forces.

As regards Chile, well, the trust and all the relations we had in those years were tinted by the personality of Salvador Allende. Of course we knew there was not total unity among the generals commanding land forces, or in the armed forces generally, and that a majority were against the socialist experiment. There is a book by a Soviet researcher, named Sergueev, *X-ray of the Military Plot in Chile*, which scrutinizes the psychological and technical training process among the Chilean military: where they got weaponry, where they received education, what spirit predominated in officer circles, etc. So, by 1973, thanks to these quite detailed studies it was pretty certain that the army would act as one, as a very useful tool in the generals' hands against the government of Salvador Allende.

—But was that book before 1973 or later?

—The book was published in 1976, apparently. But the research it is based on was done earlier. The Communist Party Central Committee used

to commission studies from the research centers, and the Latin American Institute —to which I have had the honor of being a member since its formation— often got the job of preparing studies on one issue or another. The study I am referring to was of this type. And you yourselves know about some of those studies, which were completely confidential⁵.

—*But in your talk yesterday, you also referred to several reports that were presented to Andropov, which by early 1973 had written the Allende government off ...*

—Yes.

—*Why then sell weapons to Chile, if Chile was already a lost cause?*

— In those years, arms sales could only be done by one agency: the Ministry of Defense. Within this ministry there was a general directorate, I don't remember its exact number, but I believe it was General Directorate N° 12, specially responsible for sending weaponry and munitions abroad. Only this directorate could decide what type of weapons could be sold, how much and where, etc. The only restriction was that the most sophisticated or modern weaponry could not be sent; it always had to be of a earlier generation. There were two categories of armaments: the first were the most sophisticated weapons, which could only go to socialist countries like Poland or the GDR; the second category included less sophisticated weaponry that could be sent to capitalist countries, or the third world, Chile included, where clearly there was the chance they might fall into United States hands. So care was taken to ensure that these armaments could not affect the defensive capacity of the Soviet Union.

In most cases of arms sales the Defense Ministry did not inform the other state agencies or Intelligence. When they were preparing the documentation —plans, the prices, periods, specifications— they sent them to the Defense Council, whose president was always the Secretary General of the Communist Party Central Committee.

The Defense Council was made up of some six or seven people, including the Defense Minister, one of the Secretaries of the Central Committee, who was responsible for the military-industrial complex, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, because he had to evaluate the sale's convenience for national interests. I say this because I participated in meetings of this council as an expert on certain issues, so I saw it at work. The decision they took was definitive; if they approved the Defense

⁵ Here the General is alluding to the report from the Latin American Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences, published in "Chile in the Archives of the USSR," *Estudios Públicos*, N° 72. (Editor's Note)

Ministry proposal, it became law and specific instructions were given to the Ministry to carry it out.

—*You said that the weapons bound for Chile were tanks and artillery among other things...*

—Among other things, tanks and artillery, certainly.

—*What type of tanks; do you remember?*

—I can't say, because really I never saw any document relating to this sale. The only thing I do know is that there were two or three ships with the weapons on board and they were heading for Chile.

—*Two or three ships? What type?*

—Merchant ships, of course.

—*Merchant ships?*

—They were always merchant ships, because you couldn't use military vessels for these purposes.

—*How did you find out about this convoy?*

—I found out through one of my military colleagues who was working in military intelligence.

—*You got to hear of it by chance, them?*

—Not entirely by chance, because precisely in May and June 1973 the two Intelligence Services had been questioned about the necessity or possibility of sending armaments and money to Salvador Allende. I told you yesterday that opinion at Intelligence was against this, as the reports we had received showed us it would be useless to try to save the situation by these means, and the Soviet military understood our position. For that reason, for sure, they did not want to start discussing the question of arms sales with us, because then they would have had one more opponent which would have made process more difficult. They did it without consulting us, and they had every right to do so.

When my friend in Military Intelligence told me the weapons had already been embarked for Chile, I commented to my colleagues that we had been ignored. We then consulted with several of our most important information centers, i.e. Washington, New York and, in this case, Santiago as it involved Chile. This was in... when was Allende's aide-de-camp killed?

—*July 27th.*

...In July, exactly. I remember the Cubans had just celebrated the anniversary of their assault on the Moncada. Well, when we found this out and got all the information in, we asked, "Are you sure the coup is imminent?" They replied "yes," it was imminent, it was inevitable.

—*Who told you this, the Cubans?*

—No, no. I am talking about our information centers in Washington and New York. Of course, we had also asked our representation in Havana to give us their view. But from everywhere the opinion we received was unanimous: a coup was inevitable. So we sent one of the cables we had received straight to the Politburo, an intelligence cable saying that the weapons aboard the ships would be sure to be protagonists in the next coup d'état helping the forces of the right.

And of course, for the Soviet government, it would have been scandalous to send weapons that tomorrow would be used to kill their own—if not ally, then sympathizer, their friend Salvador Allende. The cable, which was very well written, was dramatic; and when it reached the Politburo—where they had already been discussing the issue in the Central Committee apparatus and where I had heard the comment that “Allende is making a mistake stroking a tiger’s foot, because tomorrow it will strike him.”—of course it produced a sufficiently strong impression, and the order was given to change the ships’ course.

—In Chile in the 1970s and 80s, some people said that it had been the belligerent attitude of the Governing Junta towards the Soviet Union, against communism, which made the government, and the whole Soviet bloc apart from Rumania, decide to break off relations with Chile. On the other hand, others said that the breaking of relations was due to domestic reasons in the Soviet Union, that the USSR would thereby now hold a trump card that would even be popular in the west: isolate the Chilean government and thereby prevent or deter any future strike against the Soviet Union ...

—You don’t deter any strike with such measures. Coups and domestic revolutions occur for domestic causes and domestic reasons. Nobody is held back by a barrier of words or documents from another country, they are of little importance in such cases.

We did not break off relations with Chile, but used another diplomatic formula: suspending relations. Of course, unlike 1947, when the Chilean government of that time under González Videla broke with us, banning the communist party and shutting down the newspaper *El Siglo*, this time the initiative was ours. We suspended relations because for our public opinion, for the communist party, for our people as a whole, it would have been difficult to swallow the idea of maintaining diplomatic relations with a political regime that came to power by bombing the presidential palace, using aircraft and tanks. You know those scenes perfectly well...

And seeing what happened in Chile afterwards, the difficulties with the Cubans, even the shooting incident there in the embassy and the almost military retreat of the Cubans, strengthened this position still further. So I repeat, psychologically and politically it would have been very difficult for our government to have maintained relations with the military government of Chile.

— You said yesterday that the struggle was against the United States and that Latin America was a field on which you could carry out policy against the United States. But the Chilean military government had declared itself hostile not towards the Soviet Union, it never said that, but towards international Marxism. In a way it also declared itself to be an ally or friend of the west; although it criticized the Carter government. In the international political framework of two opposing blocs, as we know, it is impossible to be entirely neutral towards the ally of an adversary. In what was then Soviet policy, was there the possibility of punishing or openly fighting against the minor allies of the United States? And turning to the specific area of your work, what instructions did you have in the Latin American section regarding Chile? Although Chile was closed to you as a country, obviously there was a way of getting in and obtaining information: what did the Soviet government ask from the KGB in this period of military government in Chile?

*—*Recalling the course of relations between Chile and my country, and viewing them through the lens of Intelligence, I am amazed now by the short time in which there were normal relations between the two countries. Imagine, in 1947 we broke off incipient diplomatic relations. Then 17 years elapsed before 1964 when they were established again, and from 1964 to 1973 there are only nine years, no more than that. Relations were reestablished in 1990, but by then Russia was mortally wounded and Intelligence in practice was focused on areas that were giving rise to immediate threats, for it would have been crazy to expend human and material elements in other zones.

Consequently, in total, we have had relations with you from the Intelligence point of view for just those nine years, from 1964 to 1973. And really one would have to discount the three years of Salvador Allende, because Allende was our political ally —well, our sympathizer— and we had no motive to carry out intelligence work against a leftist government. Of course one always has to know what an ally is thinking. But apart from those three years, what remains is very little: practically only the period of Eduardo Frei (1964-70). So there was very little time to organize any classical Intelligence nucleus. The process itself, firstly of acquiring a

source, then building it up and beginning to exploit its possibilities, takes time, sometimes four or five years. To set up a classical spy network is a very long job. In the 1930s and 40s—in the early 1940s when our Intelligence Services even recruited informants from communist ranks—it was easy to set up such a system—you are a communist, I am a communist, let's get to work, bang, bang. But then comes the question of discipline, as we say, international solidarity. So, at that time, networks were rapidly set up in the United States, England, in France above all, and in other places too. But after the war, Intelligence was banned from recruiting communist party militants. In the case of Chile, this also included the socialist party because it was the political ally of the Chilean Communist Party, forming a single coalition. But one cannot quickly create a network: it is a slow and arduous task.

During the government of Eduardo Frei Montalva I was not in the Intelligence leadership, I was an intelligence officer working in the field in Mexico, doing my bit there against the United States. As I say in my book, I worked against the United States and I feel greatly honored by the big responsibility that was conferred on me.

—*My question related to the military period.*

—In 1973 we broke off relations with Chile, and our country's interests came to be represented by India. The Rumanians stayed on in Chile, the Chinese too, but with them we were in open conflict. And the ally who betrays you is worse than the enemy—a universal law, right? Consequently we had nothing to do with them.

Of course, there was interest in assessing the political situation of this country. We were not interested in the economic question, as we said, but politically yes: the degree of stability of the Pinochet dictatorship. The degree of organization and effectiveness of the left, the disagreements in the military and opposition camps, the possibilities and alternatives for the development of the situation. These were basic questions which we were interested in at that time. But there was no way of sending a Soviet official here under cover of a correspondent or a diplomat...

Now, we always had a network of illegal agents or officers. I remember when I signed the order to send some of our officers here. The illegal agent might be an intelligence officer living for years and years in one of this hemisphere's countries, with the citizenship documents of a Latin American or European country, a businessman, a journalist, a banker or something else.

Creating an illegal officer is a highly complicated technological process, costly too but also very effective. Because at times these people

become ambassadors of their own country in other countries, like the case of an Intelligence officer, a friend of mine who became Costa Rica's ambassador to the Vatican⁶. A fantastic guy, really, who in the process of preparing for this work showed himself to be a genius of the profession. He knew Costa Rican exiles in a Latin American country who were preparing the revolution of 1948 —the people of Calderón, Guardia; he spoke Spanish perfectly, and he helped them in several ways. Then when they won, they asked him what post he would like in compensation. He replied that he needed a week to think about it. He consulted with the Center about what he could ask from the Costa Ricans. The Center answered, “well ask the for the Vatican embassy, because we cannot penetrate there.” So he went to the Vatican, and he worked there for years and years. Later he wrote books and was even decorated by the Pope!

—General, during the military government in Chile, there were three major episodes in which it was said here that the Soviet Union was involved. The first relates to the Soviet weaponry that arrived in Peru, and the incitement to Peru, presumably Soviet, to attack Chile while it was unarmed from the end of 1973 to 1975, at the end of the Velasco Alvarado period in Peru. The second was in 1978, when a war was about to break out between Chile and Argentina, and which North American intervention helped to calm down, partly because it would have caused them a lot of complications. And the third is the organization know as the Manuel Rodríguez Front when the Chilean Communist Party abandoned its traditional policy and initiated an armed struggle in Chile, which at one moment had the military government, if not on the ropes, at least very uncomfortable.

—The Soviet State and my Intelligence Service are totally absolved, in this court, of the sins you mention. We had nothing to do with those cases, absolutely nothing, with none of them. What interest could we have had in Peru and Chile fighting each other? What would we have gained?

—If Chile lost, the military government would fall; in other words it would mean revolution in Chile...

—At the time, revolutions scared the Kremlin more than reactionary regimes, because if a revolutionary regime takes power, it begins to seek aid, loans, money, etc. On the other hand, a stable conservative government, is there, right? It keeps normal relations, there are no problems or worries. Please, don't pay any attention to propaganda statements, which unfortunately have a lot of weight in opinion formation!

⁶ The reference here is to Iosif Grigulevich, whose literary pseudonym was “Lavretski”. (Editor's Note)

Before, I was talking about illegal agents. We sent several illegal here, also our assistants came, if you like we can call them agents, renowned western journalists, who came to Chile to carry out the mission we had commissioned them with: gather information on the situation in Chile, within the limits of the interests I have just outlined. They provided us with this material, which was enough for the Soviet government to more or less orient itself on the situation in this precise area.

—*Were they western journalists?*

—Yes, western. A journalist of a country you greatly respect and which had open doors to Chile... Of course, we chose the flag that best suited us. If it is more advantageous to use the French flag, well we seek representation on a French newspaper or magazine. This is easy; in Intelligence it is called “using foreign flags”.

—*I'd like to ask you about the economic aid that the Soviet Union gave to the Chilean Communist Party from the 1960s till 1973. Documents have recently been published showing that in 1970, for example, the Chilean CP received US\$ 400 thousand (equivalent to over US\$ 1.5 million today). Where did this money come from? How did you get it to the Communist Party in Chile?*

—Technically it was done in a very simple way. The Central Bank of the State of the Soviet Union handed the money directly to the Central Committee, to the International Relations Department which was responsible for relations with communist parties and national liberation movements. The money was physically taken to the Central Committee and as the final paragraph of these resolutions always said “Mr. Andropov of the KGB is entrusted with carrying out the decision”, we received the order to collect the money, send it to the corresponding countries and deliver it to its destination.

Personally I had to carry out such missions on several occasions. I would arrive at the Central Committee —often I didn't even have a car— and pick up big bundles containing wads of dollars, some 200 or 300 thousand dollars, packed in the most ugly bags. The distance between the Central Committee and the Security Committee is short, about 400 meters, but as the bags were heavy, every so often I would have to stop and put them on the ground, in a puddle, and rest or take breath before resuming the march and arriving at our place, where it was divided up in accordance with indications: 60,000 for them, 80,000 another group, 400,000 for others.

—*Were these physically dollar bills?*

—Yes, dollar bills.

—*How were they taken out of the Soviet Union, and how were they delivered to the destination parties?*

—Well, firstly we had to remove from the bills all signs of where they had come from... This was done in the Intelligence building; then we put tapes on them brought from your countries and we repackaged them. The money was packed in the diplomatic pouch and sent with diplomatic officials to the corresponding country. Once in the destination country, the Intelligence Officer in charge...

—*The resident?*

—No, not the resident. Why sacrifice a resident? On the contrary, someone less visible, a gray mouse who would not arouse suspicions. Then one night, at the time and place agreed on, the money would be handed over.

—*Did a receipt have to be signed?*

—A receipt was necessary because we were Intelligence Officers and we were extremely meticulous in such cases.

Now, nearly always it was a very rapid operation, not during a meal in a restaurant or café, but in some closed uninhabited space... The package was handed over, the receipt signed, and that was that.

—*Was it a dangerous operation?*

—It was dangerous in some Latin American countries, where we did not have an embassy.

—*As in Chile for much of the period?*

—Yes, for much of that period, and in certain Central American countries, it was dangerous too. In all the years I worked, I heard of just one case where the messenger carrying the money was discovered in customs with wads of dollars.

—*Was that in Chile or another country?*

—It was in another country. The guy carrying the money had a lot of guts. In these cases, of course, you work up a “story” —an explanation of where the money has come from. This guy told the story that he had sold a large farm he had inherited from some relations. Although he received a tremendous beating and was in prison for nearly a year, he managed to get out, and the court returned the money to him, which he then handed back to the Party. This messenger’s behavior was astonishing in fulfilling his role despite going through some very hard times.

Often they were asked where the money came from, who had given it.

It came from the State Bank of the Soviet Union, as I have already explained, although really the money came out of our own wages, from our

wages as communists, as militants of the Soviet Communist Party. Because, if we calculate that at that time there were nearly 300,000 communists working abroad, among diplomats, journalists, military specialists, civilians, sailors in the Navy, etc. —because being a communist was almost a precondition for going abroad— and as everyone paid 2% of their wages in currency to the Party, to their party committee, which was more or less US\$ 10 per person, then nearly US\$ 3 million was collected in this way. That amount, as a minimum, because some people's wages were US\$ 500, while others got US\$ 1,000 or US\$ 1,500. There were also people who worked in banks, because we had several banks abroad, in France and in London, and there communists earned a banker's wage.

—*What do you think of the memoirs written by Shevchenko⁷, the agent who was in the United Nations and deserted to the United States?*

—I knew him personally and he revolts me deeply. Before reading Shevchenko's memoirs I read the memoirs of a certain Mary Chávez, the prostitute placed there by the CIA, a Puerto Rican; and after reading her memoirs, I lost the desire to read Shevchenko's. He was a very negative person, very negative indeed.

—*And Gordievsky, who deserted in Great Britain and is now working in Cambridge...?*

—Yes, he published a book with the British; I believe his co-author had the surname Andrew. I've got that book at home. My colleagues sent it to me, because it mentions me there and, well, people ask, "How do you come across in it?" I never knew Gordievsky, nor he me, because he worked in Northern Europe, and I in America. However, suddenly he talks about me, explaining my role in Intelligence and attributing things to me that are unfair. This made it clear to me that he is not the book's author. It was written by British Intelligence; he put his name to it, that's all. Well, that's a way of keeping him, paying for him, justifying the expense. The book is full of material which is largely true; in some places, as always, it tells lies, and of course there is always anti-KGB venom, anti-Intelligence, that's logical.

To tell the truth, traitors were never a source of information for me, on one side or the other. A traitor is a traitor; he always tries to justify himself, to relieve his conscience apart from anything else.

—*And Philby?*

—No, that was a very different case. Philby was a member of the famous Cambridge quintet, and they never got into contradictions with

⁷ Shevchenko came to hold the post of Deputy-Secretary General of the United Nations. (Editor's Note)

themselves. They got into the work attracted by the ideology; they were not mercenaries. And it was always like that until their death. I acknowledge their personal integrity; whether one is mistaken or not, that's another issue...

But it was not the same with people like Shevchenko, who was an intimate friend of Andrei Gromyko, spent his life in his house and was a friend of his son. He pursued his career under the protection of the all-powerful wing of Andrei Gromyko and then, suddenly, when they picked him up in a brothel there in New York and he was afraid his career would end there, he gave in to the CIA. That is unacceptable.

—*And what about Pinkovski, what category do you put him in?*

—A book was published about him: *The Spy who Saved Peace*. The x-ray of this personality is not very clear. But, yes, he is more consistent. From the moment he first offered himself for recruitment, he said he was an enemy of the Soviet Regime, and he repeated this up to the end. Even when he was tried in the USSR, he acknowledged that he was serving the interests of another state out of enmity towards the Soviet regime. However, I believe this was a kind of shield behind which he was hiding his human weaknesses.

—*A psychological shield?*

—Yes, a psychological shield. It was better for him to put on this armor of ideological enmity, because the fact is that he never showed himself to be an ideological enemy in his normal life, as a lieutenant in the Soviet Army. He was always a quiet, obedient communist party militant. Later, to screen him, they promoted him to Army General, but by then he was already under counterintelligence observation. In his relations with his North American and British masters —because a mixed group was in charge of him— he nearly always asked for large amounts of money. He was a womanizer and liked expensive gifts. Of course, judging by his concrete actions, what trapped him in the end was material interest: people who are tied to such interests worry about what post they are going to have afterwards in the North American Army; he asked them to show him a colonel's uniform they had promised him... These were things of vanity, human weaknesses. But he wore that shield of ideological enmity right up to his death.

—*The Soviet State Archives apparently were opened for a while in Russia before being closed again. How much truth is there in this? What access was there to them?*

—It is a long time since I worked in the archives. But I know that the State Archives were opened at the beginning, but then closed on

Yeltsin's orders. I don't know what reasons Yeltsin may have had to do this. One might have been that documents from the archives began to be sold abroad. The beginning of corruption in society...

The KGB archive is partially open. Everything related to reprisals and purges is open. For example, if your relatives were victims or suffered for these reasons, you can ask for the documentation linked to the case, and you'll get everything. If any material vestige remains at all, or personal objects, they are handed over to relatives.

The Intelligence archives are kept in perfect condition. They are complete from 1918 until now. Nothing has been touched, but they are not open to the public. There were people who got access to those archives by direct permission from Yeltsin or his aides, such as that general, the former head of the Army Political Department, who had been a militant Communist, but on the first day of the democratic revolution became a militant democrat. His name escapes me⁸, but he wrote two books, one on Lenin and the other on Stalin. Yes, he got into the Intelligence archive, with Yeltsin's permission, to consult the case of Trotsky.

—But I understood that Gordievsky got permission for access to the archives, though I don't know if he got into the KGB archives or to others, and had them scanned...

—During the early days of the upheaval of the coup d'état, because it really was a coup d'état, the whole State apparatus was paralyzed. On August 22nd in the morning I was at my desk in my office as Head of the KGB Analysis and Information Department. I stepped out and came face to face with Kalugin, the traitor, dirty beggar ... He came along with a group of five or six North American journalists, practically kicking the office door down and demanding that papers be shown to them. I confronted him and said: "Please, look you know we are old servants of the State and you can't come into my office with these people. Tomorrow, when I am no longer here, you can do what you like, but not today". Well, I had a weapon at my side, of course... They entered the building without a pass, nothing...

—General, I would like to take you to another topic; you clearly knew Yuri Andropov. As Secretary General, did he have as a any master plan for the Soviet Union, a perestroika or something like the Chinese model, the idea of promoting limited change; or did he represent another way of maintaining a slightly renovated Brezhnev system? Did you manage to perceive anything in him?

⁸ He is referring to General Dimitri Volkogonov. (Editor's Note).

—It was difficult to get inside Andropov's mind, but I believe you are right in some of your observations. He studied the Chinese experiment very carefully and in great detail. He had two aides who were among the best sinologists in the Soviet Union. He chose them from the press and from the Academy of Sciences, and put them to work in the State Security Committee (KGB). He immediately gave them the rank of colonel, but they were really great scientists who knew China.

Basically, Andropov's idea was to make gradual changes towards democratizing the country; gradually introduce elements of the market economy to improve the economic structure, but never letting go of the reins of leadership of the country. He also said that he would never allow organized opposition. Freedom of opinion among people, yes of course, but not political parties. I don't believe he would have accepted the idea of allowing a political force that could have represented a threat to the country's regime. The same as in China, more or less: give certain spaces for freedom, but don't allow organized opposition.

Andropov was very liberal, he had very broad judgment. He knew the situation in the country better than anyone, because he received reliable information from each of the nuclei that the KGB had in every republic, in every region. He never took abrupt decisions; he was not an arbitrary man, and always consulted about what he wanted to do. When he had a serious issue he always consulted, on the loan to Chile for example, as I mentioned earlier. But there were also other cases such as Iran, China... When he came to Intelligence Headquarters—which was far from the center of Moscow, about 20 kilometers or so, and where he also had his permanent office—and summoned experts and specialists, he did not skimp on time: meetings would take two or three hours to reach a conclusion. He was perhaps more intelligent and better prepared than the rest of his colleagues in the Politburo. But when he took over as a Secretary General we knew he was terminally ill from kidney disease and we didn't think he would last more than a year. Everything possible was done for him, different fruits with a lot of special acidity were even brought from abroad on doctors' recommendations, but his disease was too far advanced. Unfortunately, too, he was the oldest ruler to reach the country's top post.

—*What about Chernenko?*

—Andropov took office before Chernenko. In fact it was Chernenko who put up Andropov as a candidate when Brezhnev died, afraid that they would expel him the very next day for being old and sick...

—*Because Chernenko was Brezhnev's heir...*

—Yes, Chernenko was the heir. But he was quite astute and he hurried everything along and said: “I propose Comrade Yuri Andropov as Secretary General”. Applause... and thus Andropov took office.

—*You give the impression that you believe the process Russia is living through today could have been completely avoided, and that another leader could have held the Soviet Union together.*

—Absolutely. I am sure the collapse and decomposition of the country, and the events of the past seven years, were not an inevitable predestined course. On the contrary, what is happening in Russia today is the fault of our leaders.

We are always discussing this in Russia. When I read my diary of those years I find the following question, directed at my comrades: “Are objective weaknesses, inherent in socialism as a system, the consequence of doctrine or the result of failures in the human element?” This topic has always been under discussion, and we nearly always reach the conclusion that our ills are a result of the role played by the individual in our country’s history. The role of the individual, above all in Russia, has been very big, too big ... Theory, practice, doctrine, they mean much less. For that reason we don’t talk of the history of communism, but of Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev, Yeltsin. The role of the individual has been quite disastrous.

On the other hand, in the west, in the United States or in Europe, there is more stable development thanks to the scaffolding of the different democratic organizations. It is logical. In Chile, as was explained to me today, the judicial system and state structures did not change when the military took over. For example, the Comptroller General remained in his job. Pinochet left and another government took over, but the laws remained the same. It doesn’t happen like that in my country: whenever a new person comes to power there is a catastrophe of near geological proportions: an real epoch-making change... ***

—*Let me go back in time. In your presentation yesterday you attributed enormous importance to the middle east in the cold war period. You argued that the Soviet Union had made a very serious and sustained effort there, and gave the impression that the failure of the famous “Crocodile Plot” meant the loss of a very far-reaching opportunity for Soviet power. Could you explain to us a bit about your strategy and expectations regarding the middle east? Seen through Soviet eyes of that time, what would have been considered a success? What goal was being pursued: an Arab victory over Israel, for example?*

—A victory over Israel, of course, within the limits of international law: taking back from Israel what they took from the Arabs in 1967. Ultimately, the re-establishment of an independent State of Palestine is the thorny issue at the heart of the problem.

—Let's assume this had been achieved, what would the Soviet Union have gained with a Palestinian State?

—Basically, of course, we were guided by the idea that the destiny of world confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, between Capitalism and Socialism, would be resolved in the Third World. This was the basic premise. And which was the most vulnerable area in the Third World close to the Soviet Union, the most promising in the strategic and demographic sense? It was the near east. There was enormous oil wealth there, and we knew the value this held for the future. The socialist rhetoric used by all the Arab leaders fanned the flames of this bonfire of illusions. In Syria and Iraq socialist parties were in power, the famous Baathists, Arab socialism, right? The Egyptian government had more or less the same orientation, so there was a certain feeling of ideological affinity. Some countries closer by were already embroiled in conflict with the United States. The Arab-Israeli conflict clearly is a dividing line: the Arab countries are natural allies of the Soviet Union, whereas Israel is playing on the United States team⁹.

Strategically speaking, victory was certain because the Arabs were numerous. Israel is still only a small strip of land; moreover, in everyone's eyes it continues to be an aggressor because it keeps on banging and banging away. So, based on this, the strategic idea was developed that victory in the Third World could more likely be achieved in the Middle East and with fewer resources. So the task of approaching them began. It started in 1956, I believe, when Khrushchev, a very impulsive and strong-willed man, came out in favor of sending Soviet volunteers to fight on the Egyptian side. Of course this was a military intervention, because what we called volunteers could be regular units... "Chinese volunteers" in Korea, volunteers any place —a euphemism. Afterwards, when the Suez Canal boycott was declared, we sent our practitioners to replace the Europeans who quit servicing marine traffic. Friendship with Nasser began, and this led to our sending military advisors and arms. At the same time, the same happened in Syria and in Iraq, so we came to have quite a strong presence in the area.

In Intelligence, we viewed this with some caution, always remembering how the British distrusted the Arabs, with their famous saying: "He who relies on the walking stick of Arab faithfulness, will feel

its splinters digging into him the day the Arab betrays him.” But the military, of course, were very much in favor of deeper intervention, as they were seeking points of support for our navy in the Mediterranean: some port, Alexandria, Algiers... to reprovision with water and food, or in some cases change crew.

The conventional power of Soviet ships was not comparable to that of the United States navy, but the time was coming when ship-to-ship or sea-to-sea missiles with nuclear warheads would appear, and that superiority would vanish. The situation would level out, and the United States knew this perfectly well. For that reason they carried on the struggle for a long time, from 1956 to 1972. There were almost 16 years of this tug-of-war until the “Crocodile Plot” occurred. For a struggle was also going on in the Arab world between taking a more radical socialist path, as was fashionable at that time, or lining up alongside the United States; and that is what caused the internal split in Egypt’s leadership. One very influential part, nearly the entire cabinet, was in favor of socialism, while President Sadat was in favor of the United States. It was then that they asked us to support a plot, a coup d’état. We stayed silent and Sadat bided his time. He arrested them and put them in prison, and Egypt aligned itself with the United States.

—*Why didn’t you support them at that time?*

—Under Brezhnev there was already another mentality, and we were not willing to get involved. I recall that in 1975 we drew up an analytical document on Soviet geopolitics. The basic idea of the document, which came from the office I headed, was that the Soviet Union could not give itself the luxury of expanding its geographical sphere of influence ever further. By this time we were already in Angola and Mozambique, we had interests in Ethiopia, and our political, economic and military resources were exhausted. So we proposed the alternative of cutting back our obligations in the world: no longer supporting socialist-type movements. Because many groups call themselves socialist just to receive aid and nothing else. Suddenly you get a coup d’état in Dahomey, they declare themselves to be socialist, and the next day they are asking for aid. But, for goodness sake, there’s nothing there...!

—*Apparently a North American historian once told a Chilean colonel that the military in Chile had made a serious mistake: instead of golden stars they ought to wear red stars: then the Soviets would come*

⁹ He is referring to the Baath party, an important political force in Syria, Iraq and other Middle East countries after the World War II. (Editor’s Note)

running to help them, and the North Americans from then on would stop criticizing them...

—I remember we took the British Empire as an example. We said, look, the British held on to the key points for controlling enormous strategic spaces; Gibraltar, Malta, Suez, Aden, Singapore... Our suggestion was simple: instead of Egypt, a country full of conflict and potential traitors like Sadat —who in a single night in 1972 expelled all Soviet advisors and breached all signed agreements— better to choose a small country among the Arab nations, the most Marxist of all...

—Aden...

—Aden, exactly: South Yemen... Concentrate the few resources that we had there. By controlling Aden we would have an outlet to the Indian Ocean, a port for the navy in the case of emergency; we could cut the route from Europe to India if necessary. In addition, we could make a sort of Cuba out of this little state, almost without enemies and surrounded by desert and sea. As for North Yemen, it could be conquered, or a peace agreement could be reached with them. The population of South Yemen did not amount to two million inhabitants; moreover, they had oil and a refinery. In other words what they needed was water to develop agriculture, because everything grows perfectly well there.

That was the idea, not to take big spaces, but rather four Arab countries and stay there. We sent the report to our boss, Andropov, because we couldn't jump up to the Central Committee over his head. The report was about 30 pages long. Andropov read it and said it was very interesting but too long. So we cut it down to about ten pages. He read it again and said, "Well, you can leave everything in, but erase the suggestions; the bit about South Yemen will have to be removed. Let it be simply an informative report without recommendations." Often we were told we should not try to teach them how to manage and run the State, we should confine ourselves to informing. We cut out the suggestion, but the document came back to our office without Andropov's signature, and thus our analysis on this geopolitical issue that we called "The Novel of the Century" died. Because for a document to follow the formal course it had to have Andropov's signature, then it would be assigned its expedient number and afterwards a reply from the Central Committee might even arrive...

—*When you talk of the Central Committee are you referring to the Politburo or to the Central Committee?*

—When we refer to the Central Committee in its decision-taking capacity, then it is the Politburo. The rest of the Central Committee didn't

mean a thing. The Central Committee is made up of the Party Bosses from all the republics, which met once or twice a year. But what really functioned in Moscow was the Politburo, though not all of it, because many of the regional leaders, such as those of Ukraine, Kazakhstan, who were Politburo members, were not called to Moscow all the time. Only those who made up the brains of the country were in Moscow: i.e. the Secretary General, the Secretary for Organizational Matters, the Secretary for Ideological Matters (firstly Suslov and then Andropov), and the Foreign Minister, the Minister of Defense, the President of the KGB. They were the ones who always worked in Moscow and took the basic decisions on foreign policy issues and those of a military nature.

—But apart from having a military foothold in the area, didn't you seek to achieve some influence in the Arab world, and access to the economic power concentrated there, to be able to control the oil power?

—Of course that interest was there, and in some cases it explains concrete measures, including today in the case of Iraq. Iraq repaid all their debts to us —for the purchase and maintenance of weapons— with oil, which afterwards we resold on world markets. In addition, we signed contracts with them, guaranteeing us the right to exploit a large part of Iraqi oil reserves. For that reason, everything that is happening now concerning Iraq is largely aimed at Russia: to prevent Russia from now exploiting those deposits...

—Which legally belong to Russia...

—There are important oil deposits in Iraqi territory which legally belong to Russia. France also has rights there... But the blockade of Iraq does not let Russia make this type of exploration. The United States stay quiet as mice, right? They produce desert storm and other things...

—Isn't it a paradox that the physical invasion of Kuwait happened just as the Warsaw Pact was meeting to dissolve itself?

—It was a historical coincidence, that's all.

—But didn't the Soviet union warn Iraq, or didn't it have the capacity to influence Iraq at that time in July or August 1990?

—Saddam Hussein didn't advise the Soviet Union that he was going to attack Kuwait.

—But didn't you know about the maneuver or realize what was going on?

—As I told you before, we viewed our Arab "allies" with some caution. We had treaties of friendship with them —mutual understanding, consultation; the usual thing. But they never consulted with Soviet Union on anything. There were some dramatic cases: one day Syria launched its

tanks against Jordan, and we only knew about it the next day, when the invasion had already begun. When differences between Syria and Iraq reached fever pitch at a certain moment, and the Syrians wanted to bomb the electric power plants on the River Tigris, we only knew about it through Intelligence, and of course we had to intervene to stop them doing it: "We built this dam, and now you with our planes and our bombs are going to destroy it! How crazy!"

They never consulted with us about their decisions. Iraq didn't advise us they were going to war with Iran, the famous ten-year war. It started without any warning. The attack on Kuwait, forget it... no one told the Soviet Union for fear that they would be held back, that we would say "No."

—Yesterday you suggested that at some point in that period, in 1975 or thereabouts, you felt that in terms of territorial influence the Soviet Union had begun to draw back.

—That's right. I said I see 1975 as the dividing line: the ascent ends and the eclipse begins. And for several reasons: firstly, in that year Brezhnev suffered his first cardiac arrest, and by now he was morally liquidated. In general, Brezhnev was a very mediocre person, there were always people behind him pulling the strings —his "Suslov", because Mikhail Suslov was really a very obscure personality, very conservative, very dogmatic; it was he who brought Brezhnev to power. He was the second in command, Secretary of the Central Committee, the Politburo member in charge of the ideological front. In his capacity as ideologue he was a sort of communist cardinal-archbishop within the apparatus. So Brezhnev, without ever being a brilliant personality, lost half of his leadership capacity or more. And from 1975 onward the state apparatus went into a period of decomposition. People knew the leader was no longer in charge of the situation, and everyone arranged things as they saw fit. Here the analogy with an orange, that I made yesterday, is apt: each ministry took care of its own things, and the country loses strength because it was a centralized state.

Brezhnev dies, and Andropov takes over, already sick. He is followed by Chernenko, also ill. Then Gorbachev takes office, but he was not a leader, and finally Yeltsin, the destroyer. In other words, we did not have a leader of national stature. That was the first conclusion I came to when I heard the news of Brezhnev's illness.

Secondly, we were aware of the economic constraints that were approaching, in terms of money and natural resources. When we began to depend on the international market for foodstuffs, when we had to import

grain, the situation became somewhat scandalous. It was a open wound through which between three and six million dollars flowed out of our pockets each year.

—*Did your oil resources drain away there?*

—A large part of the oil resources were spent in a scandalous way.

If you go to Russia today you can see that that money was spent on luxuries. Things began to be imported that one had never dreamt of importing before: furniture, air conditioning apparatus, the most incredible things were bought. The abundance of money created a tremendous irresponsibility at one point in time.

I recall that I've got noted in my diary that a secret report said the political leadership had decided to buy eight or ten million dollars worth of women's bras, with goodness knows what kind of wiring. For the "construction of socialism" we had to buy these special wired bras, and millions of dollars were spent on this.

—*In what year did this begin to happen?*

—When the oil price began to rise, 1973, 1974, 1975. In 1975 we raised our voice in alarm.

—*So Afghanistan turned into a sort of curse.*

—That was in 1978. In every region, in Rostov, Murmansk, wherever, between 1974 and 1976 new very luxurious buildings started to be put up, as party headquarters, with materials brought from abroad. quantities of resources were spent in this way on goods that didn't produce anything. In reality, we knew that our imports were costing much more than what we were earning from oil. On the other hand, the situation in agriculture was getting steadily worse, the pace of growth in industry was slowing down, and difficulties in the socialist camp were increasing. Czechoslovakia was in the background and the Polish phenomenon was to the fore. I had to make 15 visits to Poland to take the temperature of the situation. We had very bitter arguments with Andropov, when I told him the fate of socialism in Poland was virtually sealed.

—*Was this before Solidarity, or once the conflict had broken out?*

—Both before and after, because the process began with Gomulka. The crisis entered its critical phase in 1980.

—*When did you detect it?*

—Intelligence sensed it a bit before, at least, when an orthodox communist like myself, a faithful servant, went to Poland and put in his report that Poland is a different country to the Soviet Union, because there the Church has enormous ideological power over the population, many times greater than the influence of the Party and communist ideology.

Secondly, in that country socialism did not exist in the agricultural sector. The whole countryside was in the hands of small-scale owners, who were the basis of Polish agricultural development; and the small owner had another mentality, he could not be a communist true to the regulations imposed on him. The only place where there were kolkhoz or communes was in the land that had been won from the Germans in World War II, but this was no more than 15% of the territory of the country. There were no small owners there for fear that one day the Germans would arrive and punish them for having taken their land.

Apart from this, Poland was formally a democratic country with several political parties. In Russia there was only the communist party, but in Poland there was the Democratic Party representing small owners in the cities; there was also an agrarian party, I don't remember its name... In other words, there were now about three or four parties albeit somewhat somnolent, right? Tranquil but legal. I say "now", because an apparatus already existed which could expand tomorrow and everything would end. This happened in all socialist countries where there were several parties. We even used the expression "inconclusive socialism" to refer to Poland. According to the notion of socialism held by our Central Committee, there was no socialism in Poland. So those worries were permanent, and in 1975 it was already clear that we were entering a period of big problems within the socialist camp.

I am not talking of China now, which after Kissinger's visit was ever more distant. We had heated arguments about the tactics to follow in the conflict with China; I describe this in detail in my book, because the Moscow establishment was split in two: there were the "doves" on one side and "hawks" on the other. The hawks were in favor of taking drastic steps against China. A plan even emerged—I don't know if it was real one, as I didn't see it on paper, but I did hear it was being discussed ... it seems the author was Marshall Kulikov—a plan for the nuclear decapitation of China which involved making a strike on the installations where fusion materials were being produced, in places of uranium extraction. If it had come to this, imagine the ruling level of psychosis.

—Yesterday you mentioned that in these border incidents, there was Soviet bombing of Chinese territory at one point. What was the extent of this and how many people died?

—This happened as a result of events on Damanski Island, it was autumn, late in 1969. It was a border dispute arising from different interpretations of a treaty signed with China in 1860, the Treaty of Peking. The maps of this treaty were very badly drawn. Both Russians and Soviets

believed the whole river area belonged to Russia. For us the border was along the banks of the river, but the Chinese interpreted this same treaty in the sense that it should pass through the *thaweg*, i.e. the deepest part of the river.

The Chinese then invaded one of the islands close to the Chinese shore, the Island of Damanski, which according to our interpretation is ours, but according to the Chinese is theirs. When the Chinese occupied the island, our border guards appeared and while they were talking with the Chinese representatives, a line of Chinese appeared forming a sort of curtain. Suddenly the curtain opens, and Chinese soldiers with machine guns kill all our border guards in cold blood, about eight or ten soldiers and an officer. The Russians were obviously furious and immediately sent what tanks they had to hand, which was a small show of force, but they sent them, and battle commenced. In the first skirmish it seems the Chinese sank one of our tanks, because the river was iced up and the explosion of ice made the tank sink (of course the Chinese said afterwards that they had burnt the tank; they raised it from the bottom of the river and now keep it as a trophy in Peking). But, of course, we Russians sent reinforcements, because any confrontation on the border with China puts us at a disadvantage in terms of population; in China on the other hand the human element is limitless. So our missile-launching artillery got there. They used what we now call hailstorms with 24 projectiles in each, and inflicted a tremendous bombardment on Chinese territory. According to intercepted radio messages we heard that Chinese were mourning big losses, which ran into thousands because they had brought up one or two divisions, and suddenly a shower of projectiles fell on top of them, 152 millimeters each one. God preserve us from that. And there the conflict ended, because we kept Damanski; but there began to be more and more anti-Chinese hysteria.

Afterwards we had to invest billions of rubles to create new points of resistance, lines of defense. I belonged to the doves, and argued this was useless, because all these wars were result or repercussions of the visceral struggle in Peking between the Mao Tse Tung and Chou En Lai groups, between the pragmatists and the orthodox, and each was seeking to create some sort of tension. But the resources were spent anyway. In my judgment, however, the only way of defending ourselves against China, to this day I am sure, are nuclear weapons. Anything else is useless.

—Did China, like the Soviet Union, have a network of kindred parties in other countries, whom they supported economically and with whom they maintained links?

—I can't be sure, for we had an unbridgeable gap in our information sources on China. We made a tremendous mistake there for political reasons. In the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s, we had a very extensive and well formed information network on Chinese soil, i.e. during the years of the war with Japan. When the revolution triumphed in China, Mao Tse Tung goes to Moscow —there's a meeting with Stalin, singing on all sides, Russians and Chinese brothers for ever— and in an outbreak of unbounded goodwill our leaders decided to turn over to China the entire network of Chinese who had collaborated with our intelligence system. We believed the destiny of world revolution was being decided, that the people who collaborated with us for the liberation of China in the construction of socialism there had to be decorated, they would surely be everybody's heroes. We were somewhat idealistic, utopian, and we handed them the lists of people who had helped us and the Chinese to win the war for the victory of socialism in China. All of them disappeared afterwards...

—*All of them? They killed all of them?*

—They killed them all. And so we were left without our networks in China...

—*That's why you were taken by surprise by the Kissinger-Nixon connection with China?*

—That's right, we knew about it, but through other channels. It came as a surprise. It was a surprise for the Chinese themselves: it came out of the blue. But in China we always had this lacuna, and I don't know how they fed their satellites or their allies in the communist movement. We knew they included Rumania, Albania —the communist party of Albania— Cambodia, certain African countries... But a minority in any case.

—*What role did North Vietnam play in this?*

—North Vietnam was like Kipling's cat, it always walked alone, following its own path. It is a country whose national feeling had often been wounded by China. During the years of the war against United States, North Vietnam used China or took advantage of it, but without ever losing sight of its national interest. In my view, they were very closed and nationalistic. There are even some anecdotes. In the middle of the war with the United States, we sent supplies and weapons to Vietnam, but there was no other way of getting them there except through China, with whom we were in conflict. Transport by sea was impossible, as it was sown with mines when the North American blockade (of Tonkin) began....

—*...In May 1972?*

—But the Chinese let our trains through, so we sent a convoy. Now, whenever we asked the Vietnamese if they had been received, they always

answered “yes”. So to test whether they were arriving or not, we began to feed them false data, because we didn’t know what part of the armaments were being kept in China and what was getting through to Vietnam. For example, we sent them a convoy of 30 wagons, but told the Vietnamese that it was a convoy of 50. Then we asked if they had received the convoy of 50 wagons and they answered “yes” they had received the 50 wagons, when really we had sent 30. They always confirmed what we said to them, so it was impossible to know how much had arrived and how much had disappeared en route.

—General, yesterday you said that the Cubans had turned to the Soviet Union because of problems they had had at the start with the United States, that circumstances had led Fidel in this direction. The controversy surrounding this topic—whether or not Fidel was a communist or close to Marxism from the outset—has never been resolved. But didn’t Fidel and Raúl Castro from the beginning have a greater affinity with the Soviet Union?

—If you look at the course of the Cuban revolution during its first year, you see clearly that the first government is totally bourgeois. There wasn’t a single communist in it. When Fidel entered Havana, the communists offered him all their human and political resources to collaborate with him; there is even the famous Blas Roca declaration¹⁰, that they were willing to dissolve or do anything to join the Cuban revolutionary process. But this did not happen for a long time, and the Cuban communist party continued on its way, with its newspaper, *Hoy*.

—My question was whether or not Fidel Castro already had some affinity towards Marxist thought...

—He knew Marxist doctrine, he had read some Marxist—Leninist works, but in his initial steps, if you read the decrees he signed, he was leading a bourgeois democratic revolution; sure, with a national liberation face that was clearly anti—North American. The people he drew into his first government, and with whom he worked, had nothing to do with communism, they were even anti-Communist. At that moment, Ché Guevara and Raúl Castro were relegated: Raúl was in the province in the east, and I don’t know where Ché was. The members of this first government were bourgeois democrats, or linked to the United States.

The crisis began about May 1959, when Fidel, proclaimed agrarian reform in fulfillment of his promise to the peasants of Sierra Maestra, the people who had helped him win the revolutionary war: the process begins

¹⁰ Secretary General of the Popular Socialist Party, which was the communist party in Cuba. (Editor’s note)

there. What did this reform have to do with socialism? Absolutely nothing, because owners were left with some very extensive pieces of land, I believe they were 30 *caballerías* in size: one *caballería*, apparently is equivalent to about 14 hectares. In other words, the first agrarian reform left each owner with nearly 400 hectares; but this was still a heavy blow to North American interests. Was this a socialist measure? No. Afterwards the Peruvians did the same, then you yourselves here, in Chile. It was a logical reform.

But it provoked a very strong reaction from the United States, because the North American sugar plantations were affected by the reform. So a conflict arose inside the Cuban government. The Prime Minister (José Miró Cardona) and President Urrutia, immediately raised the legal problem it would pose. For Fidel, however, agrarian reform was a promise he had repeated a thousand times in the mountains when he was fighting Batista. In addition, to humiliate these a people a little, he had decided that the signing of the Agrarian Reform Act would be held in the mountains of Sierra Maestra itself, and the ministers, with their shiny boots, had to go there on foot, in the mud, among peasants... a tremendous thing. That's when the crisis broke out within the government and Fidel decided to take a radical course: he left the Agrarian Reform Act in place and demoted Urrutia. Then he summons Raúl and Ché. It was in May and June of 1959 when he was considering what course to follow.

Then afterwards, with each new blow from the United States, Fidel felt obliged to reply; it is his psychology. When he was prevented from importing oil, he took over the refineries; when they blockaded sugar, he sought a market for sugar in the Soviet Union. But it was always a way of replying to the United States. As I said, it was a process that lasted a year and a half.

If we analyze Fidel's discourse during the trial for the assault on the Moncada, *History Will Absolve Me*, we find that the word "Socialism" is never used there. In documents of the period, in preparation for the revolutionary process, socialism is never mentioned. The word "socialism" appears on April 16th 1961, one day before the Bay of Pigs Invasion. Before that, socialism was never mentioned, nor did the people talk of socialism, but when they threatened him with war —the Bay of Pigs Invasion— Fidel decided. He said that the people would defend the revolution. After the bombardment, the invasion was sure to come, because the United States had previously bombed all the airports. It was during the burial of the victims of this bombardment that Fidel declared that the people would defend their revolution, and the revolution would be *socialist*. It was practically under North American bombs that he declared this. I make this argument, therefore, based on the chain of events.

The Cuban Communist Party was only set up in 1965: i.e. nearly six years after the triumph of the revolution. Before that, there was a series of parties of the Cuban revolution, revolutionary organizations, but no Communist Party existed.

—*But Castro has never let the Cuban Communist Party operate like other communist parties. Fidel exerts a very tight control over the party...*

—Sure, he keeps a very tight control on the party.

—I mean he doesn't even let the party develop as it could do if it was not under the shadow of his leadership. Parties tend to grow and develop, even beyond the will of their leaders. But the Communist Party of Cuba has never been able to develop all the typical structure of communist parties of other "real socialisms". As a party, the Cuban CP has been much weaker internally, it has always been more tightly controlled.

—How can it be weaker if it is more controlled? The more controlled and the more united, the more effective the communist party always is. The less controlled, the weaker it is.

—*My colleague's comment related to the fact that the Communist Party of Cuba had no autonomy. When Stalin died, for example, there was still a communist party in the Soviet Union. The question is whether there really is an analogous communist party in Cuba.*

—*My hypothesis is that without Castro the party would vanish...*

—I can't say, because the situation has changed a lot. The Cubans studied different models of "real socialism" for fifteen years, before holding the First Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba in 1975. I known they visited Yugoslavia more than once to study the process of constructing socialism there with its Titoist characteristics; they also studied the Chinese case in great detail. The Cubans didn't do anything at random. They studied our systems of control through the party, in the Soviet Union, for a long time. They chose their own model with its special national characteristics, but these draw together the essence of the communist experience the world over, to a large extent.

—*General, a question about the missiles crisis. A naive question, almost elementary. In your opinion, what was it that led Khrushchev in the end to withdraw the missiles? What could have been said or offered to him by the United States? Was it the nuclear threat? But what sense did such a threat have? Or was it an offer of influence in some part of the world? How did you see this negotiation, from so close to the process?*

—I know the exchange of correspondence between Khrushchev and Kennedy, which led to the unfolding of the crisis, very well, i.e. how they resolved the crisis. As I told you earlier, I was an interpreter during Fidel

Castro's first visit to the USSR in 1963, and I read that correspondence, translating it at the conversation table between Khrushchev and Castro. So I more or less know the conditions.

How did the missiles crisis begin? That is a much more obscure page, for such issues are not in the papers, but only remain in the memories of those who participated. Of course, fundamental here were Fidel Castro, Khrushchev, who is no longer with us, Ché Guevara, who is not here. On our side Rashidov also took part, he was First Secretary in Uzbekistan, but he has also died. Apart from Castro, only a few second-rank people remain. They could clarify the problem: who was the initiator, what the objective was, although there are always certain lacunae.

There are many operations in which written documents are not preserved. At times many things were resolved through cables that were later destroyed, through telephone conversations that were coded, through messengers. For example, the whole operation of sending missiles and troops to Cuba was done in complete secrecy, no classical resource was allowed to be used, no coded cables, nothing of any kind; there was no correspondence, only a medieval medium: personal envoy. For that reason there is little that remains.

The United States became aware of the Soviet presence in Cuba very late, and apart from that what they knew was insufficient. In my book I cite information from our military who participated in the operation, which was code—named Anadyr—a polar peninsular—because the operation was disguised to be maneuvers by units in the polar zone. When they loaded the missiles and everything, they also loaded skis and fur coats; of course that threw everyone completely off the scent.

The general idea, of course, arose after the United States' attack on the Bay of Pigs. This made us wonder how to defend Cuba, because if the United States had not tried to invade Cuba, the idea of putting missiles there would not have arisen in the Soviet Union. But after the Bay of Pigs, it seemed clear that if the invasion had failed this time, they would try again. There were human resources—Cuban emigrants—and material resources more than sufficient to repeat the attempt. Moreover, no politician or military personnel of the United States ever said after the Bay of Pigs that it would not be repeated. It was logical then to consider how to defend Cuba.

The Soviet Union couldn't protect Cuba with conventional forces because it was too far away. The voyage by ship took 27 days. As for strategic aircraft, we didn't have any. So there were two ways of defending Cuba. One was the permanent danger of nuclear war, i.e. keeping

submarines installed with nuclear warheads there, which would serve as a protection barrier for Cuba. But Russia at that time had few nuclear weapons, very few, and the submarines, apart from being scarce, were relatively modest. The other alternative was what ended up being chosen: installing atomic weapons in Cuba, for otherwise it was impossible to prevent the danger of invasion.

Thus the idea arose of sending missiles to Cuba. I imagine it formed in Khrushchev's mind. It was then that he made that famous remark in the Politburo, "We are going to put a hedgehog in the Yankees' pants". And he began to place this hedgehog... We all know the rest of the story.

—*When the crisis broke out, was Khrushchev's power affected inside the party?*

—Yes, of course, everyone got a tremendous fright.

—*What was the fright, what was the threat?*

—The threat of thermonuclear war, because we were really one step away from it. There were already 164 of our nuclear warheads in place in Cuba ...

—*You mean, that would have liquidated the United States...*

—Not only liquidated the United States, but a large part of Latin America too. A nuclear warhead is far more dangerous than a Chernobyl-type catastrophe.

—*Given that the two powers had such enormous destructive power, why did Khrushchev decide to withdraw the missiles?*

—Ah! Because that was the commitment he reached. United States makes a commitment not to attack Cuba—the goal was achieved—and the Soviets withdraw their missiles.

—*There was another point: Khrushchev also wanted equivalence to what the United States had in Turkey.*

—That arose afterwards. That did not figure in the first exchange of letters, it came later.

—*General, there's one thing that has always been insisted on, that between October 26th and 27th everything happened so quickly, and on the 29th a Monday, the United States was going to bomb. Was there an awareness in Moscow that Kennedy was under pressure to act immediately?*

—I was in Mexico at that time. I was working on the front line, as they say, and I had some contacts in U.S. military bases, in the south of Florida. I got information and sent it, but I was not in Moscow. I returned there in 1968. During the October crisis, we worked very intensively; I had three or four meetings a day with people who came from the United States.

In Moscow there was less hysteria than in the United States, because less information was getting through there. You know that our press is very laconic and highly filtered. What I saw in Mexico surprised me greatly. The hysteria in the United States reached such a pitch that the civilian population began to arrive in Mexico in large numbers, fleeing from the danger of nuclear conflict. In those very days that you mention, North American families were crossing the Mexican border in caravans of trailers, by day and by night, sleeping in improvised camps with no conveniences; nobody was prepared, it was dramatic.

What about the psychological climate in Moscow? I can't tell you. In Mexico I was sure a peaceful solution would be reached. I asked myself, "Is it worth starting global thermonuclear war over the dominion of an island like Cuba?" It seemed to me not. Neither the United States nor the Soviet union deserved this. It was a tremendous war of nerves... But I was sure there would not be a world war. That was simply impossible, it was illogical, suicidal. We knew the United States calculated that we had about 30 or 40 warheads, but they were only counting the medium-range missiles. However, there were other missiles for coastal defense also with nuclear warheads, and there were planes, rather primitive at that time, but capable of carrying atomic gravity bombs, simple ones. Forty nuclear warheads are enough to destroy the North American navy...

—From the United States standpoint, the danger was the warheads themselves; from the Soviet Union's point of view, the danger was the security of Cuba. But from the time the United States imposed the blockade on Cuba, Khrushchev was in a dead-end street; if the Soviet ships broke the blockade there would be a naval confrontation, but not nuclear; but if the Soviet Union lost, the confrontation would escalate, and then what you have just outlined would occur. So escalation would have meant slaughter...

—Yes, but in the White House everyone, except Robert Kennedy, was waiting for Monday to bomb the missile installations on Cuba. Because most of the Crisis Committee —Jack Kennedy, MacNamara, Llewellyn Thompson, the former Ambassador to Moscow— voted for immediate bombardment. This is the version that has been repeated systematically up to now.

—Any bombing attempt would have immediately provoked a retaliatory strike. A conflict of incredible proportions would have erupted. The blockade increased the danger of this, because there was no way of communicating by land, only by cable, so the decision to use nuclear weapons was slipping little by little from the high command there in

Moscow to the military chiefs in charge of the warheads. I am sure the psychology of the generals commanding the troops would have been to defend themselves at all costs, rather than die under North American bombs without responding.

—*So, in your opinion, what happened in the end was that Russia, by withdrawing the missiles, was guaranteeing that the United States would not invade Cuba?*

—History justifies us. 36 years have gone by since the crisis of 1962, and the United States watches but does not invade.

—*If that is so, then why do you say the crisis cost Khrushchev his political life?*

—Because it was Khrushchev who installed the missiles in Cuba. It was he in the end who was the protagonist of this crisis: a mortally dangerous crisis for both sides.

Now, any bragging that the United States could bomb, is only talk. At that time it was dangerous first and foremost for the United States, because our missiles had quite long ranges, about 2,500 km from Cuba, so nearly all United States territory would be in range.

Although it is often said that Khrushchev capitulated, that he withdrew, this is only carefully elaborated propaganda. What there was, was a rational commitment, a deal between two eminently sensible politicians who understood the true dangers, and there was no climb-down on either side. The United States made a commitment not to attack, which it had never previously done, and we withdrew the missiles.

But in the eyes of the people around them, both failed; they did not fulfill their historic duty. Khrushchev put world socialism in danger, and Kennedy did not carry out the wishes of the majority which was to bomb and put an end to Castro. So one of them was shot and the other deposed.

—*But at the time it was seen as a triumph for the United States; in the world it was understood in that way.*

—Looking at it through absolutely reasonable, calm eyes, completely dispassionately, of course it was a horrific thing to see North American planes flying over the area. But the North American inspectors were not allowed to enter Cuban territory to see the process of dismantling the missiles. On the open sea, they could see what they liked. So there were serious concessions on both sides. I believe it was a clean bargain, and the United States kept its promise. And of course, in this case I could make some tremendous accusations against the Russian side, because there was no legal justification for this conflict: we went in there without a military treaty with Cuba. It was a secret operation, but the idea was to do it

differently: first install the missiles and then Khrushchev would sign a formal treaty of military alliance with Cuba. But this could not be done as there was no time.

—But the person who saw his power increased as a result of all of this was undoubtedly Castro, because Khrushchev felt himself in Castro's debt. Castro was strengthened not only on this continent, but also within the Soviet Union.

—I believe so. Because Russia had to ingratiate itself with Fidel Castro, inviting him there in 1963, decorating him, offering him a whole panoply of material aid. In other words, the Soviet Union recognized the justice and integrity of Castro's stance.

Castro is an outstanding politician. The day he dies we will talk about him in different language, for now we can't.

—But those days of October—November 1962 were not pleasant for Castro. He was not an actor; he was not consulted at all...

—You are right. He truly suffered at that time and used very harsh language. If we read his declarations, we see that at times they were violent. I do not know if it is true, but I was told that one of the things he said was "If today I were to land in Russia, the whole country —Russia— would rise up and follow me.

As I told you, I was his interpreter in 1963 and I remember how multitudes gathered spontaneously to wave to him, to applaud him. He had tremendous prestige.

—And did that weaken Khrushchev in the Soviet Union?

—It weakened him greatly, of course. For that reason Khrushchev fell in 1964, whereas Fidel is still in power in 1998.

—A final question on this: did the handing over of the list of Chinese spies occur when Stalin was still alive or was it in the years just after his death?

—It was in the period just after Stalin's death. ☐