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## PLAYBOY INTERVIEW:

# FIDEL CASTRO

*a candid conversation about reagan, revolution, dictators, drugs, debt and personal life with cuba's communist leader—and washington's nemesis*

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**PLAYBOY:** But isn't it true that Duarte was elected president by the people of El Salvador in an open and free election?

**CASTRO:** No! [*Pounds table*] Everyone knows under what conditions the elections took place: amid the most ferocious repression, terror and war; everyone knows that the electoral campaign was planned by the United States, that the political parties were manipulated by the United States and that the electoral campaigns were funded by the CIA. The present government and all other allegedly legal bodies are the result of all that manipulation and all those maneuvers by the United States. Augusto Pinochet of Chile could also say that his government was legal after the fascist constitution was imposed upon the people in an alleged plebiscite in which no one but he and his constitution took part. Actually, one can't help wondering why the United States considers the El Salvador elections to be legal and, in turn, considers the Nicaragua elections illegal. In spite of the fact that the elections in Nicaragua were sabotaged by the United States, the people turned out to vote with enthusiasm, granting the *Sandinistas* and the left more than 70 percent of the vote. This was witnessed by more than 1000 people from all over the world: representatives of governments, political organizations and parties and journalists from everywhere.

**PLAYBOY:** As you say, it can be argued both ways. The question remains, Isn't it true that Cuba has worked, and is actively working, to overthrow the government of President Duarte? If so, what right does Cuba have to intervene in the internal affairs of another country?

**CASTRO:** I'm not concerned in the least about charges against Cuba in relation to our solidarity with El Salvador. We have stated that the United States knows perfectly well that sending weapons to the Salvadoran revolutionaries is very difficult, in practice almost impossible; but I have no interest whatever in clarifying anything on this subject, because I consider that morally, it is absolutely fair to

help the Salvadoran revolutionaries. They are fighting for their country; it's not a war from abroad, like the dirty war the CIA carries out in Nicaragua; it's a war born inside the country that has been going on for many years.

What I can assure you is that, in fact, the main supplier of the Salvadoran revolutionaries is the Pentagon, through the weapons given to the Salvadoran army. That also happened in Vietnam; the revolutionaries there seized huge amounts of weapons delivered by the United States to the puppet army. I really don't know who could feel morally entitled to criticize Cuba for allegedly supplying weapons to the Salvadorans when the United States admits to supplying weapons to the Somoza mercenaries to overthrow the government of Nicaragua.

**PLAYBOY:** What evidence do you have that the CIA manipulated the presidential elections in El Salvador? Didn't they have the same kind of scrutiny as Nicaragua's elections, which you claim were fair?

**CASTRO:** The information was published in the United States—and the CIA admitted it publicly. It gave money not only to the Christian Democrats but also to all the other parties and covered the expenses of the election campaign. Proof is not necessary in the face of a confession.

**PLAYBOY:** You've mentioned Grenada. How do you explain the failure of the socialist revolution in that country?

**CASTRO:** The invasion of Grenada by the United States was, in my view, one of the most inglorious and infamous deeds that a powerful country like the United States could ever commit against a small country. What was occurring there had nothing to do with the failure of socialism. What had been taking place in Grenada was a process of social change, not a socialist revolution. I believe that what opened the doors for invading that country, what gave the United States a pretext on a silver platter, were the activities of an ambitious and extremist sectarian group. I believe that the main responsibility for the domestic situation created there lies with Bernard Coard, an alleged theoretician of the revolution, who was really advancing his own ambitions to conspire against the popular leader, Maurice Bishop.

**PLAYBOY:** Do you believe that the United States would have intervened in Grenada had Bishop still been in power?

**CASTRO:** No. If Bishop had been alive and leading the people, it would have been very difficult for the United States to orchestrate the political aspects of its intervention and to bring together that group of Caribbean stooges in a so-called policing coalition that didn't include a single policeman from the Caribbean—it was exclusively U.S. soldiers.

**PLAYBOY:** You say the U.S. invaded on a pretext. But President Reagan argued that the United States had no choice but to intervene in Grenada, because Cuba was building an airport and stockpiling weap-

ons with which to export revolution—and, of course, because the American medical students studying in Grenada were in mortal danger. Why didn't the U.S. have a right to protect its citizens and prevent the spread of revolution?

**CASTRO:** The U.S. invasion was accompanied by unscrupulous lies, because for one thing, U.S. students on the island never ran any risk. The first thing the coup group did was to give assurances of safety to everyone, particularly the medical students. The safest people in Grenada were the U.S. students. As to the airport, Washington claimed a thousand times that was a military airport, but not a single brick that went into that airport was military. It was built with the participation of the European Economic Council and England, Canada and other United States allies.

**PLAYBOY:** What explains the fact that the Grenadian people cheered the United States intervention and rallied behind its goals and objectives?

**CASTRO:** I doubt very much that that support is as deep and widespread as you suggest. Bishop was a man greatly loved by the people. He was the leader of the Grenadian people. He had the real, sincere and enthusiastic support of the people. The group involved in the coup plotted against Bishop, arrested him, fired on the people when they revolted and, furthermore, assassinated Bishop and other leaders. Naturally, this caused great outrage and confusion among the masses. The United States intervened, stating its sole purpose as the noble aim of liberating the country from those people and that it would

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punish Bishop's murderers and those who had fired on the people. It was logical for a large number of people in that country, even most of the population, to be susceptible to accepting invasion as desirable.

**PLAYBOY:** What about public support in the U.S.? The overwhelming majority of the American people rallied behind President Reagan's decision.

**CASTRO:** Public opinion in the United States was manipulated by a pack of lies told over and over again. Melodramatic elements were brought into play: the students kissing U.S. soil on their arrival; the bitterness and frustration resulting from the Vietnam adventure and its humiliating defeat; the problem of the Marines killed in Lebanon and the memory of the Iran hostages; all these elements, latent in the spirit of the U.S. people, were manipulated in a cold, calculated manner. People can be manipulated; they can even applaud crimes. When the Nazis annexed Austria, the German people applauded; when they occupied Warsaw, the vast majority of Germans applauded. Some Americans applauded at the start of the invasion of Vietnam; later we saw the consequences. I believe future generations of U.S. citizens will be ashamed of the way their people were manipulated.

**PLAYBOY:** You compare the "shameful" Grenada invasion to actions by Nazi Germany; some would say that the actions of Soviet troops in Afghanistan are a more appropriate comparison. How can the bloodshed caused by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan be anything but a shame and an embarrassment to socialist countries?

**CASTRO:** Afghanistan is one of the most backward countries in the world, where a feudal regime had existed until April 1978. It had an illiteracy rate of 90 percent and an infant mortality rate of 235 for every 1000 live births—one of the highest in the world. Two thousand families owned 70 percent of the land, and the population consisted of around 1500 tribes. I believe that Afghanistan was one of the places in the world where a revolution was becoming more and more indispensable. As soon as that revolution took place—as it inevitably had to—the CIA began its subversive activities, exactly like the ones being carried out in Nicaragua. The United States has invested one billion dollars in helping the counterrevolutionary gangs since the beginning of that Revolution.

The Afghan Revolution led to a series of tensions in the region. Cuba was involved in trying to find solutions, including hosting the sixth summit meeting of the non-aligned countries in Havana, in 1979. There I met President Taraki of Afghanistan. I had also met the man who was to overthrow him and cause him to be murdered—Amin. He was a man who came to resemble Pol Pot, the genocidal leader of Cambodia. You can't imagine what a pleasant man he was! You know,

I've had the rare privilege of meeting some figures whom you would find courteous, well educated, who have studied in Europe or the United States, and later on you find out that they've done horrible things. It's as if at some moment, people go mad. It seems that there are people whose brain neurons aren't adapted to the complexities of revolutionary political problems, so they do crazy things that are really amazing.

In any case, everyone had a hand in that situation until the events that took place in Afghanistan in later 1979. The Soviets were helping the Afghans—that is true—because Taraki originally requested their help. Amin also asked the Soviets for help later, and a lot of Soviets were there, assisting in a wide range of fields—military, economic, technical, all kinds—up until Soviet troops were sent into the country on a massive scale.

**PLAYBOY:** That is, when they invaded. You say that was based on what provocation?

**CASTRO:** Essentially, counterrevolutionary actions fostered from abroad. Revolutions always entail more than a few complications and headaches. No revolution has ever avoided that; not the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Chinese Revolution, the Vietnamese Revolution, the Cuban Revolution or the Nicaraguan Revolution. There are

no exceptions, and all the problems arise from the invariable attempts made from abroad to overthrow the revolution. This is also what happened with the revolution in Afghanistan.

**PLAYBOY:** You blame the invasion on the CIA, then?

**CASTRO:** The CIA was doing, and continues to do, everything in its power to create problems for the government of Afghanistan and for the Soviets. It's pouring enormous numbers of weapons and amounts of money into Afghanistan, using the *émigrés*, playing on the political backwardness of a part of the Afghan people, using religion—it's making use of every tool it can to create difficulties for the Afghan revolutionaries and for the Soviets. I don't think the CIA is particularly interested in promoting peace in the country.

**PLAYBOY:** Yet there was a bloody invasion. How can you defend the Soviet action, and at the same time preach the philosophy of revolution and liberation?

**CASTRO:** I sincerely believe that the Afghan Revolution was just and necessary, and we could support nothing that would jeopardize it. We sympathize with and support the Afghan Revolution; I say this frankly. But I think Afghanistan could be a nonaligned country—but one in which the revolutionary regime was maintained. If a solution is sought that is based on the idea that Afghanistan should go back to the old regime and sacrifice the Revolution, then, unfortunately, I don't

think there will be peace there for a long time. I think it's in the interest of all the neighboring countries, including the Soviet Union, to find a solution. And I believe that the observance of the principle of respect for Afghanistan's sovereignty and for its right to make social changes, build the political system it deems best and correct and have a nonaligned government—as a Third World country—should serve as the basis of a solution for the problems there.

\* \* \* \* \* **EXCERPTED**