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SUBJECT Interview With Fidel Castro, Part I

ROBERT MACNEIL: Our major focus section tonight is a newsmaker interview with Cuban President Fidel Castro. Last month the U.S. and Cuba successfully negotiated an agreement under which Cuba will take back 2500 undesirables who came in the Mariel boatlift of 1980 and the United States will reopen normal immigration procedures in Havana. Since then, Castro's said he'd be willing to talk further about improving relations. Washington has reacted coldly, saying Castro is saying nothing new, and it wants to see Cuban deeds, not words.

How far Castro wishes to push his new effort has not been clear. But in Havana, part of his motivation is obvious.

Havana today expresses the weaknesses of the Cuban revolution. Its successes are in the countryside, where better nutrition, health care and education have changed more lives. Havana, the symbol of the decadent past, was neglected, with little new building.

But with an economy still unable to meet all Fidel's goals an acute need for hard currency, old Havana is getting a facelift to attract tourists. Buildings and streets from the Spanish colonial period are being refurbished, as is the square of the old cathedral.

The bulk of the tourists are still people from the Eastern Bloc, their presence symbolizing Castro's dependence on the communist world for economic survival in the face of the American trade blockade. That's been in force for a quarter of a century and has been tightened by the Reagan Administration.

Cuba's lifeline is a procession of Soviet merchant ships

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bringing virtually everything, from oil and lumber to light bulbs. They return taking Cuban sugar, citrus and nickel, but recently not enough to meet the plan quotas.

So Cuban consumers have been asked to tighten their belts again, to wait for more attractive consumer goods, while a big drive is made to boost exports to the Soviet Bloc and to the West, both to meet Cuba's commitments to her communist partners and to earn hard currency to pay her Western debts.

This is the context for the growing suggestions that Castro, 26 years after his revolution, would like to patch things up with the U.S.

There is no slackening of revolutionary zeal. The spirit that defeated the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961 is constantly nourished, and the symbols of Castro's rise to power are a national shrine. The revolution is still young enough to enjoy tweaking Uncle Sam's beard. This poster says, "Mr. Imperialist, we are absolutely not afraid of you." It is located close to the U.S. Mission, now called the U.S. Interest Section because there are no full-scale diplomatic relations, where U.S. officials try to read the signals that Castro is sending.

On Friday night President Castro sat down with me for the first major American television interview in six years. With a Cuban government interpreter, we talked for more than four hours, first about relations with the United States.

Mr. President, every time that you begin to talk about improving relations with the United States, Washington says, "Show us deeds, not words." What actions or deeds are you prepared to make to improve relations with the United States?

FIDEL CASTRO: You said many times I speak of improving relations. Actually, there are not many times.

Now then, I have read a few statements in which it is said that they want deeds and not words. I believe that that is a style of speaking. I would say a style of a great power. I understand that it is not easy for the United States to change its style. We are a small country. We cannot speak in those terms. But we are also a country with a lot of dignity, and no one can suppose that we would beg the United States for an improvement of relations. We have never done so, and we shall never do it.

My intention is not that they believe what we say; but, rather, simply to analyze our ideas and to go deeper in them, to make objective analyses of events. It is not a matter of faith, of confidence. It is a matter of objectivity.

MACNEIL: Let's go through an objective analysis. The State Department and the White House always say that there are three obstacles to improving relations between Cuba and the United States, and they are your allegiance to the Soviet Union, what they call subversion in this hemisphere, and the large number of your troops in Africa. Sometimes they also mention human rights in Cuba. The White House mentioned human rights in Cuba this week again.

Can we discuss in detail each of these, starting with relations with the Soviet Union?

Is there a formula by which you could keep your ties to the Soviet Union and improve relations with the United States?

CASTRO: If the United States believed that there are three obstacles, actually there are quite few -- quite little. I thought there were much more.

Now then, if we analyze these three types of obstacles, the first -- that is, the relations that we have with the Soviet Union, with the socialist countries, and with any other country are matters of our sovereignty, and in fact cannot be questioned; or, at least, we are not ready to discuss that.

And this is always -- this is something that I always say in a very frank way. If in order to improve our relations with the United States we must give up our convictions and our principles, then relations will not improve on those grounds. If we are going to question our sovereignty, then they will not improve, either. Relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union are based in the most strict respect for independence and sovereignty of our country. We have friendly relations, very close relations, and these relations cannot be affected in order to improve relations with the United States.

I believe that the United States would not respect a country that would do such a thing. The countries that do those things simply are not respected. And actually, we are not going to change neither our flag nor our ideas. And our relations with the Soviet Union and our friendship will be maintained intangible [sic]. I say this being fully frank and fully sincere. And it is necessary that this be understood.

MACNEIL: The Director of Cuban Affairs in the State Department, Kenneth Scoog (?), he said in a speech in December, "What Cuba could not do and still retain Moscow's favor is to alter its fundamental commitment to unswerving support for Soviet policy."

And so my question is, isn't that unswerving support for

Soviet policy the price of the Soviet aid that keeps the Cuban economy going?

CASTRO: Well, we coincide in many things with the Soviet Union because we have a community of political principles. It is a socialist country. We are a socialist country. We do have many things in common with the Soviet Union. And in many international problems, we have our common stands. That is based on political ideas and principles. It is a friendly country of whose friendship we will not reject and of which we cannot feel ashamed of. Because, actually, we are not going to fight with our friends to become friends of our adversaries. That we shall never do. And the Soviets have never imposed any conditions on us, on their assistance. And they have never attempted to tell us what we should do, what we must do, with which countries we ought to trade, and with which countries should we have relations.

So, I simply can't understand where these theories come from -- that is, that our relations with the Soviets are an obstacle. And if someone thinks that we are going to sell out or that we are going to give up our banners or our flags or that we are going to change our ideas, that is in error. Cuba is a country that cannot be bought. And countries that are bought are simply not respected.

MACNEIL: I think what the United States Government is saying is that your economic dependence on Moscow makes you automatically a part of the Soviet camp, in having to agree to policies like the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

Would you, Fidel Castro, who values the independence and integrity of a small country, would you alone have approved the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan if you had been free to make your own choice? Did you, privately and personally, approve of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan?

CASTRO: When it was put forth at the U.N. -- that is, the question, the issue -- we said clearly that in that conflict, in that attack, that tremendous attack against the Soviet Union led by the United States, we were not going to be on the side of the United States, simply not. And we were then on the side of the Soviet Union. In other words, we did not deal or delve on the topic. That is what we said: This is our position because of this.

MACNEIL: But isn't that the point, that your friendship and dependence on the Soviet Union makes you part of the camp, and therefore take positions which Washington regards as anti-American positions?

CASTRO: You establish this dependency, or something,

that is actual. In fact -- but in today's world, in the economic arena, no one is absolutely independent, not even the United States, nor Japan, nor Western Europe. They depend on oil, raw materials. And from many other countries, they need markets, they need trade. That is, no country is totally independent economically.

MACNEIL: Is it not true that your role, in return for all the aid you get from the Soviet Union, is to be a thorn in America's side?

CASTRO: If that were true, we would not be talking about improving relations with the United States. If our role is to be a thorn, then it would not be convenient for us.

Actually, it does not bring us great benefits, either. That is, we are based on a conviction and it is the necessity to struggle in our area, in Central America, throughout the world. It is a duty, actually a duty that we have in order to lower tensions and to achieve relations of peace as well. And I say this sincerely, although I am a revolutionary, I was a revolutionary, I am a revolutionary, and I shall always be a revolutionary, and I will not change a single of my principles for a thousand relations with a thousand countries like the United States.

MACNEIL: Will the Soviet Union continue to provide you with the aid and support it does, do you believe, if you have good relations with the Soviet -- with the United States?

CASTRO: Look, our relations with the Soviet Union, with the socialist countries are solid things based on principles and have absolutely nothing to do with our economic and political relations with the United States.

I will say one thing, though. The Soviet Union and the Soviet people feel great appreciation and great respect toward Cuba. But it is -- they respect Cuba because they admire us, others people do, the courage of Cuba, Cuba's staunchness, and Cuba's capability to resist for over 26 years the aggressions, the economic blockade, and the brutality of the United States.

MACNEIL: Would the Soviet Union like it if you had better relations with the United States, the blockade perhaps were lifted, and the economic burden on the Soviet Union were shared or lessened?

CASTRO: The United States will pay us for our sugar at the price of the Soviets, or will they be buying the nickel, and they will be maintaining the type of relations and trade that we have with the socialist countries? But I believe the idea

that we have any needs to trade with the United States should be totally eradicated. Everything we have done during these 26 years, we have done it without trade with the United States. And our future has been conceived without trade with the United States.

Actually, we have not asked from the Soviet Union. Generally, we don't ask their opinion on our economic or political relations in an international arena. But I know the Soviet Union very well and I know the policy of the Soviet Union. And the Soviet Union would never be against Cuba's developing its economic relations with the other capitalist countries, including the United States.

MACNEIL: So, to move on to the second point that Washington says is an obstacle to better relations, what the White House spokesman, Larry Speakes, called this week your subversion in the hemisphere.

Let me quote you again Mr. Scoog of the State Department. "It is Cuba's striving, with Soviet support, to introduce Marxist-Leninist regimes throughout the hemisphere which still lies at the heart of our differences."

Would you comment on that?

CASTRO: Well, I could also accuse the Pope of practicing subversion in Latin America and preaching Christianity and Catholicism. He has visited the countries even recently. He met with natives and said that the land had to be given to the natives, and the land properties. And he declared that schools were necessary for the children, jobs for the workers and for the families, medicine and doctors for the ill, and also foodstuffs or housing.

What we preach is more or less that. And besides, it is what we have done in our country.

So then, we will continue being Marxists and we'll continue being socialists. And we will always say that our social system is more just. But we have said also, because we are convinced about it, we have said the following, and which is my answer to that: Neither can Cuba export revolution, because revolutions cannot be exported. And the economic, social factors, the cultural, historical factors that determine the boom of the revolution cannot be exported.

The external, the huge external debt of Latin America cannot be exported. The formula applied by the International Monetary Fund cannot be exported by Cuba. The unequal trade cannot be exported by Cuba. Underdevelopment and poverty cannot

be exported by Cuba. And that is why Cuba cannot export revolution. It is absurd. It is ridiculous to say that the revolutions can be exported.

But the United States cannot, on the other hand, avoid them, either. The United States accuses us maybe of wanting to promote change. Well, we would like to see changes occur. But changes will come whether the United States likes it or not, whether or not Cuba likes it.

I could answer by saying that the United States wants to maintain an unjust social order that has meant for the people's of this hemisphere poverty, hunger, underdevelopment, diseases, ignorance. And the United States wants to maintain that.

And we could also say that the United States wants to avoid change. We are accused of wanting to promote change. We can also accuse the United States of wanting to avoid change and of wanting to maintain an unjust social regime.

But actually, neither can we export it, nor can the revolution avoid it -- nor can the United States avoid it.

MACNEIL: In supporting militarily the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, is Cuba not helping to sustain and introduce a Marxist-Leninist regime?

CASTRO: In helping Nicaragua, by offering military cooperation? Well, we are helping an independent country. We are helping a just revolution to defend itself. That's simply what we're doing. In the same way that, for example, the United States has also sent their weapons to this hemisphere to other people. It sent weapons to Somoza. It sent weapons to Trujillo when Trujillo was there. It sent weapons to Pinochet. It sent weapons to all of the repressive governments of Latin America, governments that murdered, tortured dozens of thousands of people, governments which disappeared tens of thousands of people. They had no moral obstacle in giving any economic, financial, and military assistance to these governments.

So, with what moral grounds can it be questioned -- that is, can our right be questioned to help Nicaragua, and Nicaragua's right to receive that aid?

I ask the following: Can the United States help the counterrevolutionary bands, supply weapons to them, explosives to fight inside Nicaragua, something that has meant the lives of thousands and thousands of people, and on the other hand question Cuba's right and Nicaragua's right for us to give them economic, technical aid, and even some cooperation in the military field?

MACNEIL: So you would not stop giving such aid as a condition of improved relations with the United States.

CASTRO: We shall not make any unilateral decision in our relations and cooperation with Nicaragua. What we have said is that in Central America a political negotiated solution is possible. What we say is that we support the effort of Contadora to seek solutions of peace in Central America, that we support it staunchly, sincerely, and that we believe that political solutions exist and peace solutions exist that are convenient for Nicaraguans, for Central America, and for the United States itself. And we are ready to struggle for that. And also, in fact, the agreements that are reached shall be complied by us in a determined way. That is, any agreement reached between Nicaragua and the Contadora framework shall be complied by us to the very limit.

MACNEIL: How hopeful are you that -- now that some political settlement can be reached in Central America?

CASTRO: I am absolutely convinced. I have a lot of information about the work of Contadora effort or the discussions of the burning issues there, the positions of the United States, Nicaragua's positions. And I am convinced, fully convinced, that it is possible to find formulas that will be acceptable by all parties, or to all parties. I have that conviction. I'm convinced about that.

Now then, for it, it is necessary for the United States to want to really cooperate in finding a political solution. I believe that as long as the United States is convinced that it can destroy the Sandinista revolution from within by combining the effect of the economic measures against Nicaragua with the economic difficulty inside Nicaragua and the actions of the counterrevolutionary bands, as long as they're convinced that they can destroy the revolution from within, it will not be seriously ready to seek a political solution to the problems of Central America. Because if it believes that it will destroy the revolution, why negotiate, then? Why reach agreements?

Now then, now, when the United States becomes persuaded that it shall not achieve that goal, that the Nicaraguan revolution cannot be destroyed from within -- because of the questions I mentioned, problems I mentioned, I believe that they can face the economic problems with what they produce and with the aid they are receiving, the economic aid they're receiving. If they handle it correctly, efficiently, they can face the economic problems. I'm convinced of that.

I am also convinced that they can defeat the bands, and that the bands will never be able to defeat...

MACNEIL: Excuse me. By "the bands" you mean what are called in the United States the Contras.

CASTRO: Yes. The counterrevolutionary bands. That will be defeated -- they will be defeated.

So, then a situation will come up before the United States -- that is, the United States will have no other alternative but to negotiate seriously to seek a solution, or invade Nicaragua. And since in my view, in my criteria, a U.S. invasion in Nicaragua is unconceivable, since it would mean such a serious mistake, a terrible mistake, that I do not simply think that the United States would really get to the point of making that mistake. I cannot assure you that it might not do it, but I say that it is unconceivable that under the present circumstances in Latin America, under the present circumstances of crisis, with the present feeling on the part of the Latin American peoples, at the times we're living in, the aggression and invasion against a Latin American country would be as catastrophic, in political terms, it would mean such a political cost, and not only a political cost, but also in terms of U.S. lives.

MACNEIL: Let me turn to Africa. The third of those obstacles that Washington sees to improving relations with you, your troops in Angola. You talked recently about circumstances arising which would cause you to bring them home. What would happen -- what would have to happen to start bringing the Cuban troops out of Angola?

CASTRO: What is needed there? Well, discussions have taken place, with the participation of the United States. The United States has had dialogues, talks with Angola's leadership. We are informed, through the Angolans, about these negotiations or talks that have been held, with our support and with our full cooperation. That is, they have carried out these negotiations in close contact with Cuba.

MACNEIL: Could you withdraw any of your troops before there is agreement?

CASTRO: No. No. The Angolans would not agree with that. And from our point of view, it would be a mistake. And the Angolan proposal -- that is, if those circumstances come up, then Angola commits itself, then Cuba, of course, would support it, to withdraw in a period of three years what is called the grouping of troops in the south, which is made up by approximately 20,000 men. And even the figure was given.

This is the bulk of our troops, actually. But there are still troops in the center and to the north of Angola, including Cabinda. The Angolans have not included these troops in the

negotiations, these present negotiations. And their position is that to withdraw those troops, it will be something that would have to be discussed between Angola and Cuba, whenever it is considered that they can dispense of these troops.

MACNEIL: Do you think that this projected settlement of the Angola situation, does that erase Cuban troops in Angola as an issue between you and the United States?

CASTRO: Before, there were no troops in Angola, and relations were very bad with the United States. Today, were there no troops in Angola, or in some other place, or there are no advisers in Central America, maybe the United States might invent something else.

MACNEIL: Just to sum up our conversation about improving relations with the United States, why is this the right time to raise this? And realistically speaking, how hopeful are you that it can happen?

CASTRO: Whether this is the right, best moment, I believe that if the United States is objective, if it is realistic, I would say that it is the best moment for the United States. Not for us. Actually, we can go on for five, 10, 15, 20 more years.

The only obligation on our part, really, is toward peace. If there's peace here and in other areas, we will feel more pleased. If the relations are normalized, even more pleased. Because it would be, then, a progressive progress. Peace is convenient for all. But from the political point of view, I'm convinced, and I'm saying this frankly, I think that the United States benefits most than us. We can sit here and wait calmly and see what happens in the coming years.

MACNEIL: Tomorrow night Fidel Castro talks candidly about human rights in Cuba, political prisoners, dissent, the controlled press, and the mistakes of his revolution. He also discusses what he sees as an explosive economic situation in Latin America.

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SUBJECT Fidel Castro Interview: Part 2

ROBERT MACNEIL: Tonight we have part two of our newsmaker interview with Cuban President Fidel Castro. It is the first major American television interview Castro has given in six years. It was recorded last weekend in Havana.

Last week White House spokesman Larry Speakes said that one of the obstacles the Reagan Administration sees to improved relations with Castro is what Speakes called violations of human rights in Cuba. I asked Castro about that.

[Castro speaks through a translator]

FIDEL CASTRO: Which are the violations of human rights in Cuba. Tell me which. Invent one. Do we have disappeared people here?

Look, if the United States...

MACNEIL: Well, let me give -- you asked. I'll give you an example of what is said. For instance, human rights organizations, like the Amnesty International, estimate that you have up to 1000 political prisoners still in your jails here.

Do you have political prisoners still in jail in Cuba?

CASTRO: Yes, we have them. We have a few/hundreds political prisoners. Is that a violation of human rights?

MACNEIL: In democracies it is considered a violation of human rights to imprison somebody for his political beliefs.

CASTRO: I will give you an example. In Spain there are

many Basque nationalists in prison. They're not political prisoners? What are they? Because you also have to analyze what is a political prisoner and what is not a political prisoner.

Now then, those that committed crimes during Batista's time, did we have the right to put them into trial or not? Okay. Those that invaded Cuba through [unintelligible]. Did we have the right to try them? Oh, no. Those that became CIA agents, those that placed bombs, those that brought about the deaths of peasants, workers, teachers. Do we have the right to put them into court or not? Those who, in agreement with a foreign power like the United States and backed by the United States and inspired by the United States, conspires in our country and struggles and fights against our people and its revolution --because this revolution is not of a minority. This is a revolution of the overwhelming majority of the people. What are these people? What are they, political prisoners?

Those that have infiltrated through our coasts, those that have been trained by the CIA to kill, to place bombs, do we have the right to put them to trial or not? Are they political prisoners?

They are something more than political prisoners. They are traitors to the homeland.

MACNEIL: Is there anybody in jail simply because his political beliefs are -- he dissents from you politically?

CASTRO: No one. Not because of political beliefs, nor because of religious beliefs, that are in prison.

MACNEIL: After Jesse Jackson came here last summer, you released 26 political prisoners. Are you going to release more of the kinds you were describing a moment ago?

CASTRO: Of course we cannot be willing to release them. It's a bit under 200, actually, on that situation. These are people who are potentially dangerous. We're not going to release them and send them to the United States for them to organize plans against Cuba, or for them to go to Nicaragua or Honduras or Central America as mercenaries, or as a guerrilla for any country, to prepare attacks, so that when I visit these countries, as they have done on other occasions, organizing a true human hunt. That's the psychology instilled in them by the CIA and the U.S. authorities.

MACNEIL: The other human rights question that is raised by the United States is that you don't have a free press. Your revolution is now 26 years old. It's very stable. In your recent speeches you've told of how successful it is. Why

wouldn't you feel confident about allowing a press to have a full expression of ideas and discussion and opposition?

CASTRO: Well, you are right. We do not have a press system like that of the United States. In the United States there is private property over the mass media. The mass media belong to private enterprises. They are the ones who say the last word.

Here, there is no private property over the mass media. There's social property. And it has been, is, and will be at the service of the revolution.

Here, we do not have any multiparty system, either, nor do we need it. The political level of our people, the information level of our people is much greater. In surveys that have been made in the United States, an astonishingly high number of people do not know where Nicaragua is, where the countries of Latin America are. They don't know what countries belong to Africa, what countries belong to Asia. There is an incredible ignorance, astonishing. That does not happen here.

Your system might be wonderful. But we -- at least the results of ours are better, undoubtedly.

MACNEIL: May I raise a point? Your system, which you say works very well, it does presuppose that the leadership of the country, you, are always right, that you are infallible. Is that not so?

CASTRO: No, it does not presuppose that, because we're not as dogmatic as a church -- although we have been dogmatic. And we have never preached the cult of personality. You will not see a statue of me anywhere, nor a school with my name, nor a street, nor a little town, nor any type of personality cult, because we have taught our people to -- we have not taught our people -- we have not taught our people to believe, but to think, to reason out. We have a people that thinks, that thinks. It's not a people that believes, but rather that reason out, that think. And they might either agree or disagree with me. In general, the overwhelming majority has agreed, has been in agreement.

Why? Because we have always been honest. We have always told the truth. These people know that from the government a lie has never been told to them.

And I ask you to go to the world, tour the world and go to the United States and ask if they can say what I can say, that I have never told a lie to the people.

And these are the reasons why there's confidence. Not

because I have made -- have become a statue or an idol, but rather simply because of the fact that they trust me.

And I have very, very few prerogatives in this country. I do not appoint ministers nor vice ministers nor directors of ministries nor ambassadors. I don't appoint anybody. That's the way it is. We have a system, a system for the selection of the cadre based on their capacity, etcetera. I have less power, a hundred times less power than the President of the United States, who can even declare war, and nuclear war.

MACNEIL: But doesn't the system mean that the revolution is always right?

CASTRO: You, when you made your independence wars, you did not even free the slaves, and said that you were a democratic country. You, for 150 years, did not even allow a black man to participate and be part of a baseball team or a basketball team, to enter a club, to go to a white children's school. And you said it was a democracy.

None of those things exist here, neither racial discrimination nor discrimination due to sex. It is the most fair, egalitarian society there has ever been in this hemisphere. So we consider that it is superior to yours. But you believe that yours is the best, without any discussions whatsoever. Although there might be multimillionaires and people barefooted, begging in the streets, without any homes, people unemployed, and you believe it's perfect. Because you believe things, things that I don't think that that type of society is perfect, really.

I think that ours is better. We have defended a better and more just society. We believe in it. Now, we make a mistake. But whenever we make a mistake, we have the courage to explain it. We have the courage to admit it, to recognize it, acknowledge it, to criticize it.

I believe that very few -- there are mighty few people, like the leaders of a revolution, who are able to acknowledge their mistakes. And I first of all acknowledge it before myself, because I am first of all more critical with myself than with anybody else. But I'm critical before my people, critical before the world, the U.S., everybody.

But don't worry. If this analysis had not been correct, the revolution would not be in power. The revolution would not be in power.

MACNEIL: How do you measure that? How do you, as the leader of this country, know that for so sure, when you don't have the vehicles for public expression and open discussion of

issues that the democracies have, for example? How do you know that the people feel that way?

CASTRO: We have a party with almost half a million members. They're everywhere, in every factory. We know more than the United States about the things that happen there.

MACNEIL: But isn't the dynamic, isn't the dynamic of a one-party state that the instruction and information goes downwards. And if people disagree with it, they don't dare say so? And so dissent which may exist doesn't come back up the system.

CASTRO: Actually, we know what there is and we know the way our people think much better than what the President of the United States knows about the way the U.S. people think. You should have no doubt whatsoever about that. We have many ways of knowing this. The facts prove it.

Let's suppose that people might not agree with the revolution. How could we have millions of people organized to defend the country? How could we have an armed people?

Tell the South Africans, the South African friends that they give the weapons to the blacks in South Africa. Tell your friend Pinochet to give the weapons to the people of Chile. Tell your friends in Paraguay or in Haiti to give the weapons to the masses, to the people. Tell many of the friends that you have in Europe, you who speak of democracy.

And the first and the most important form of democracy is for the citizens to feel part of power and part of the state. And how do we prove this? We have an armed people, men and women, millions of people. If they would not be in agreement with the government, they could solve things rapidly. We would not be able to stay in power for 24 minutes. Do you want more proof of that?

MACNEIL: I have seen it reported that, increasingly, Cuban troops are refusing to go for service in Angola, that the families of troops who are there and have been there are getting more and more unhappy over the Angolan experience. Is that true? That you're feeling public pressure to end this?

CASTRO: For revolutionaries to fulfill an international mission is something that is considered a great honor, and that should not make anyone feel strange about it, when people have motivation and when people have ideals. Of course, that implies sacrifices. It implies sacrifices from families, as they separate from their relatives for a certain period of time. In some cases, it means risks, undoubtedly, and it means sacrifices.

But our people can carry on these missions because they are prepared to do so.

MACNEIL: How many have been killed in Angola?

CASTRO: That question has already been asked by a journalist, and I told him I was not going to answer the question. Because our rule has been that we would not publish the number, that the enemy should not have that information. And we are maintaining it secret. Someday all of that might be published.

The family knows when there's a loss. They are informed about it immediately.

MACNEIL: But isn't it a matter of public interest and the concern of the Cuban public as a whole, the cost in lives of your activity in Angola?

CASTRO: No, no. They know well that this is a policy that is followed and that it is a correct one, because we base ourselves on the confidence and the support of the revolutionary policy by the people.

MACNEIL: Tell me an example of a mistake you feel you made and admitted.

CASTRO: In politics we have committed few mistakes, fortunately. We have been quite wise in the decisions we have made.

In the economic field we made mistakes, and these were mistakes that resulted from our ignorance because, in general, revolutionaries have ideas, very noble ideas: to have education, to have health for all, to have work, to have jobs, to have development. That is, very noble ideas, but very general.

MACNEIL: You said in your speech to the National Assembly, "We do not become capitalists." Do you begin to lean a little capitalist?

CASTRO: On the contrary, totally the contrary. I'm increasingly happier, mentally, spiritually, philosophically, of capitalism [sic]. Every day, I'm more convinced about the advantages of the socialist system over capitalism, more convinced about the fact that capitalism has no future. Well, I say no future on a long-term basis. I'm not saying that capitalism will disappear in ten years. But the present capitalist system is no longer the capitalist system of the past century.

MACNEIL: Aren't you allowing creeping private enter-

prise, to permit free markets where vegetables and food and things can be wold by the people who -- to open new supermarkets where goods, consumer goods which are otherwise scarce are priced at full market prices and not at supported prices? Is this not creeping private enterprise?

CASTRO: When you asked about mistakes, I said that in politics we had not. But you did not allow me to continue, because you asked me other things. But that item was not dealt with.

In the development of the economy, where at the beginning we did not have any experience, and where we even had an attitude of certain disregard for the experiences of other socialist countries, actually, we were a bit self-sufficient. Actually, this is something that has happened to many revolutionaries. At times they believe that they know more than the rest.

In the economic field we made mistakes, which we call idealistic mistakes. In essence, these were of wanting to jump over historic stages and trying to get to a more egalitarian society, even more egalitarian. We had gotten to the point of distributing almost to depending on the needs of the people, not according to their work, the amount and quality of their work.

When we came to the point of understanding that that had negative effects, that our society was not yet a society with the necessary communist culture and consciousness, we rectified things.

But it's not that we are leaning to capitalism. The more I analyze today's world, Third World, and even the problems of the industrialized countries, unemployment has not been solved. In Europe unemployment is growing yearly. And you can plan, and they can plan how many unemployed they can have in 1990 and the year 2000.

The deeper I think and the deeper I meditate, the least capitalist I feel.

MACNEIL: Can we move to defense? In the last year or so, you have greatly increased, as you said, your military capacity. You said on January 2nd you've increased your weapons, the number of weapons by three times. You have roughly a quarter of a million men on active duty, 190,000 reserves, a million people as militia -- 190,000.

My question is, my question is, why does Cuba need this very large armed force?

CASTRO: Of course, I will rectify something. Armed

forces and reserves are more than half a million. Militia, territorial troops, over one million. We have tripled the number of weapons, but we have multiplied many times our resistance capability by changing the conception.

In the past, the conception was the army and the reserve are the ones to defend the country. The conception is all of the people today defend the country, in every corner, in every city, in the countryside, in mountains. And they're actually organized. The idea is that every citizen in this country is armed.

MACNEIL: Is this a lesson from Grenada?

CASTRO: No. After Grenada we intensified it. Yes. The Nicaraguans also. The Grenada thing did not weaken us. It actually made us feel stronger and multiplied our determination and our will and our readiness to become stronger and fight.

You asked why so many weapons? The United States, our adversary, being such a powerful country, the country that harasses us, the country that blockades us, the country that threatens us by invading us, through an invasion, they don't understand why we make this effort? The country that is investing in peace [sic] \$313 billion, one-third of the budget, taking that away from ill people, from aged? We don't do that. At least we don't do that. And they don't understand that us, being neighbors of the United States and feeling threatened by facts and the words of the United States, that we make an effort to defend ourselves? Actually, do we have to explain that?

MACNEIL: You had an invasion scare last fall, last autumn. You had exercises. You had people, including children, digging air raid trenches. Have you relaxed now? Are you now not fearing an American invasion?

CASTRO: Look, we were relaxed, we are relaxed, and we will always be relaxed. We have been for 26 years relaxed. That's one thing.

Another thing. The measures we have taken to defend ourselves, we are not going to wait for a government of the United States to decide to attack the country for us to then start preparing ourselves? We have prepared ourselves, we are preparing ourselves, and we will continue preparing ourselves always.

So, hypothetically, if the United States were to become, let's say, in the world -- not a socialist country, let's say a Marxist-Leninist country and more communist than the U.S.S.R. and China, we, here next to the United States, would not disregard our defenses. It is a philosophical principle.

If one day...

MACNEIL: So one of your -- excuse me for interrupting. So one of your motives for seeking or suggesting improved relations with the United States is not so that you can relax your military investment.

[Technical difficulties]

CASTRO: Do you ask if I feel any frustration? No. I have no frustration. I feel no frustration whatsoever.

I can tell you this directly. We have done more than what we dreamed of doing. Many of the things we're doing now, we had some general idea, but not as precise and concrete as we have now. I can tell you that reality has surpassed our dream, in what we have done. And we're not speaking about the future.

It's not the same as at the beginning, that we spoke of our good intentions, but rather we now speak with a revolution that has been made after 26 years. And it has certain advantages not to speak of things that we were intending to do, but rather to speak of things that have been done.

MACNEIL: Finally, let me ask you a couple of personal questions, if I may.

Do you want to go on being the President of Cuba until you die?

CASTRO: It depends on how many years I live. If I'm told that I can be now, I would say, yes, I think I can be. If I could not do my job, because of the experience I have now, I would also tell you that.

I think that I am useful. I don't think I am indispensable. Nothing opposes my philosophy more than that. I believe we have done a lasting work that goes beyond us, beyond all of us. And if it were not so, why have we worked so much? If it were not so, we would have failed.

But our work is not a work of stone, is not of materials, but of consciousness, of moral values. And that is lasting.

Either being President or not being President, I'm fully hopeful that the others will be better. And the sooner a new generation that is better than us comes, a more capable one to replace us, the better. If we live three, four, five years, maybe ten, I don't know. But the day when I do not feel, really, because of my physical capabilities or mental capabilities, that

I could fulfill my duty and do my work, I will be the first to say it. If I live many years, you can be sure that I will not die as the President of this country. And the first that would not want that, for sure, it's me. If I want my mind to maintain itself clear and illuminated, it's precisely to come to that very minute, to that very minute in which I'm able to notice that I have already done my work, and that others can do it.

So, if I tell you now that I will resign, I'm a soldier of the revolution and I think I can still struggle. But I have no personal affection for honors and power or force, or the force in power.

You have a President that is older. Maybe at that age I do not have the physical or mental capabilities to do my work.

MACNEIL: Tomorrow night Fidel Castro predicts violent political explosions in Latin America. And we have an official U.S. response from Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Kenneth Dam.

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SUBJECT Interviews with Fidel Castro and Secretary Dam, Part III

ROBIN MACNEIL: Cuban President Fidel Castro predicts there will be political explosions in large Latin American nations like Brazil, Argentina or Chile if a solution is not found to their large debts.

Castro made the statement in the latest segment of an extended interview with this program. He said it would be necessary to give the debtor nations a grace period of up to 20 years just on the interest on their debts.

FIDEL CASTRO [Through Translator].

TRANSLATOR: It is the most critical and serious situation that history has ever learned up -- the history of this hemisphere. I firmly believe this. And, if a solution is not found on the problem of debts these Latin American societies will explode because there is a situation of fear among the workers, among the middle strata and even in the oligarchy.

In our first focus session after this news summary, we have an amplified version of Castro's remarks and a U.S. official's response.

* * *

MACNEIL: For our lead focus session tonight, we return briefly to our interview with Cuban President Fidel Castro. Then we have an official State Department response.

Our four-hour conversation with Castro in Havana last

weekend touched on many subjects.

In our Monday program, we covered relations with the U.S. Last night, human relations -- human rights in Cuba. Castro kept saying ask me anything, and one of the few questions he refused to answer directly concerned El Salvador. I asked him specifically what aid Cuba was giving to the guerrilla groups in El Salvador.

TRANSLATOR: I do not want to make any declarations or any commitments about that. I'm not saying yes. I'm not saying no.

In reality, it is almost impossible to spend for military supplies to reach these revolutionaries in El Salvador. That's what I say, because it is practically impossible to have military supplies reach them. The revolutionaries in El Salvador have the capabilities to resist indefinitely if they would not receive any military supplies. Even if they would not receive any supplies, even a single bullet, they are in a position to resist indefinitely.

They are also in a position to issue supplies -- that is, the way we did in our struggle -- with the weapons that belong to El Salvador. And I believe I am absolutely convinced about the fact that the revolutionaries in El Salvador can indefinitely resist without receiving any other supplies of weapons. And that is not the essential issue.

MACNEIL: I also asked the Cuban leader -- looking at the hemisphere as a whole -- which countries he considered ripe for revolution right now.

TRANSLATOR: I would say that from the point of view of social positions, and objective conditions [sic] -- objective conditions, not only in Central America, but actually and more important South America. In that area, a situation has been created from the objective point of view that is a pre-revolutionary situation. I am absolutely convinced of that.

I'm not wanting to say that this hemisphere will unavoidably explode, but I am absolutely convinced of that, that the problems are very serious, that the social problems have tripled, that the calculations have doubled and that they face situations in which you find no way out.

During Kennedy -- when Kennedy put forth [words unintelligible], he thought -- he thought he could try to avoid a revolutionary situation. He believed that by injecting 20 billion dollars for certain social reforms the problems of Latin America could be solved.

Twenty-four years have elapsed. You understand that the populations have doubled, and so the social problems have tripled. The debt is 350 billion, and only in interest they must pay 40 billion dollars per year, double that of what Kennedy thought was going to solve the problem. To this we must add the flight of capital, the repatriation of profits and other problems. And, in my opinion, it is the most critical and serious situation that this hemisphere has ever learned of -- this hemisphere. I firmly believe this.

And, if a solution is not found on the problem of debts, I am convinced that the Latin American societies will explode because there is a situation of fear among the workers, among the middle strata and even in the oligarchy. But, in this case, the problem is general. It's a general problem, and it may explode in one country. I believe that the debt makes it. They cannot pay for the debt. It's not that they don't want to pay for it. No, they can't pay it.

But I'm not only referring to the debt -- the interest, the 40 billion in interest -- they cannot pay for it, even if they wanted to, they cannot pay for it. And the experts who are in a position to force them to pay for it will actually bring about a social convulsion and a revolutionary explosion. I believe that it would be necessary, at least to have a 10-to-20 years of grace that would include interest.

MACNEIL: Let me understand you. You're saying that to prevent an explosion in Latin America, that the the international banking community needs to give them 20 years of grace on interest. Is that what you mean?

TRANSLATOR: Correctum. I am absolutely convinced that under the present circumstances they are obliged to pay not the debt, because they could postpone the debt for 10, 15 years, and it could actually as long as up to 25 years. The interest on the debt, they cannot pay for it. And if they continue demanding on the payment of these interests, an explosion will take place.

As long as it's a question of social changes in small countries, in Grenada and Central America, you think it can still be made up in madness by solving them through invasion. But, one day as the change takes place in South America, in Brazil, in Peru, in Chile, that I forgot to mention, which is really one of the countries where in my opinion there's a pre-revolutionary suspicion, the United States knows now -- at least understands that -- that if the situation in Chile continues, in the not-to-distant future they might face in Nicaragua or either somewhere else than Nicaragua another problem. This is the situation that we see.

How will they solve it?

Will they send in a battalion of the 82nd Airborne? Anybody understands that that cannot be. And in those respects, I think it will be convenient for the United States to change its condition on this hemisphere stop being the strong enemy for special interests and learn to coexist with us. That's my reasoning.

JIM LEHRER: Now, to an American response to and comments on what Fidel Castro had to say in our extensive interview. They will come from the number two man at the State Department, the Deputy Secretary of State, Kenneth Dam.

Mr. Secretary, welcome.

Let's begin with what he said tonight and work backward.

First of all, do you agree with his assessment that South America is in a pre-revolutionary situation and the whole, all of Latin America is about to explode?

SECRETARY DAM: I don't agree with that. I do believe that there is a debt problem. But, frankly, I think a lot of progress has been made on that. I think the program of the United States and of the International Monetary Fund and other creditor countries have provided an approach which has relieved the pressure. But there remains a serious economic problem.

We really need more growth in Latin America in order to provide jobs for the populations of those countries.

LEHRER: What about his suggestion of a 20-year grace on the -- on the debt, the international debts to these Latin American countries?

SECRETARY DAM: One of the things that has been done for those countries that have been willing to help themselves by getting their own house in order has a negotiation on multi-year debt rescheduling. That is rescheduling of the principle of the debt.

I think that if there were to be a moratorium on interest that would simply result in the countries not being able to -- to borrow anymore and, frankly, they need more capital in order to expand. Now, most of that capital, it's true, is going to have to come from domestic savings in those countries, and that will require some economic reforms in many of the countries.

LEHRER: What about his final point that the United States has always positioned itself in opposition to social change, that we should get out in front and help social change? What's your response to that?

SECRETARY DAM: I don't really think that that's true. There have been a number of countries that have moved from authoritarianism to democracy in the last five years, as we saw earlier on this program. The United States has strongly supported that kind of change and supports that kind of change in Latin America today.

We are on the side of democracy development, human rights and the like.

LEHRER: The specific point on El Salvador -- do you think the Cubans are supplying direct military aid to the rebels in El Salvador?

SECRETARY DAM: I think there's not much question about the fact that the rebels in El Salvador are receiving a good of assistance. Some of it is military equipment. A lot of it is command control and the like. I think there's no doubt at all that the Cubans are contributing greatly to the Nicaraguan ability to do that.

Now, I'm not prepared to say that the Cubans are shipping directly into El Salvador, but you notice that Mr. Castro did not deny that there was assistance going from Cuba to the guerrillas in El Salvador.

LEHRER: What about his point that the -- the rebels could holdout forever, you know, even without any more military aid?

SECRETARY DAM: Well, we have pointed out that they have received a great deal of equipment in the past. They have captured some. Undoubtedly, they have an ability to withstand battles for a time without any additional assistance. All of our intelligence indicates that there's been substantial flow in the past and it continues to this day.

LEHRER: In a general way, in the piece that we ran the other night, he told Robin -- Castro told Robin that it is impossible for Cuba to import revolution into any of these Latin American countries, and that it's equally impossible for the United States to stop a revolution if in fact the situation on the ground is there.

Generally, do you agree with him?

SECRETARY DAM: I don't agree that he can't play a role in turning revolutions into authoritarian situations. It -- it is certainly true that local conditions are very important, economic conditions, social conditions and so forth. But even when there is a revolution, there are several ways in which things can go. That was true at the beginning of the Sandinista revolution.

LEHRER: In Nicaragua.

SECRETARY DAM: Yes, in Nicaragua. And the United States government did support the Sandinistas, you will recall, at the beginning. But, certainly Cuba used its influence and its equipment and so forth to turn that Sandinista revolution into one which did purport to and -- as well as actually doing it -- export revolution into neighboring countries and made it into a more authoritarian regime. I think he can -- at the very minimum, Cuba can have a tremendous impact on what happened in a situation of -- of uncertainty.

LEHRER: Now, what Castro said was that all he's doing is helping Nicaragua defend itself from the anti-Sandinista guerrillas that the United States is arming. What is your comment on that?

SECRETARY DAM: Well, I think it's important to look at the historical records there.

First of all, the Cubans were helping the Sandinistas even before they ran the government. At the beginning -- and at the beginning of the Sandinista government, the United States was helping the Sandinistas. In fact, we were the major donor.

From the very beginning, the Cubans were starting the military buildup there, cooperating with the Soviets and Eastern Bloc countries. And while we were -- at the end of the Carter Administration -- helping the Sandinistas on the economic side, the military buildup was going on. Now, there were no conquerors. The United States was supporting the Sandinistas.

So, I don't think historical records will support what he's saying.

LEHRER: A direct charge he made is that the United States would never be interested in a peaceful solution to the Nicaraguan situation, to negotiating a way out until they were convinced a military way could be -- a military way could not be used to get rid of the Sandinista government.

SECRETARY DAM: I think that just turns our position on its head. What we've been trying to do is to find a peaceful

solution. We've done that in a variety of ways. We have met with the Nicaraguans. We have supported the Contradora process. So it seems to me that that's just the inverse of the truth.

LEHRER: He says he supports the Contradora process. Do you agree that he supports it?

SECRETARY DAM: I don't see much evidence of that. As a matter of fact, insofar as his support for Nicaragua, I think we're seeing the contrary, because the Nicaraguans have been taking a very hardline position. They want to sign the first draft. They don't want to have any improvements. They don't want to have things on verification and the like, and through their actions with respect to the Costa Ricans who've sought asylum in Nicaragua it appears that, maybe the Contradora process will be solid. I'm not exactly sure how that's going to work out, but I think that indicates the [word unintelligible] benefit to the Contradora process.

LEHRER: So, he was wrong when he says the U.S. purpose is to get rid of the Sandinista government?

SECRETARY DAM: That is not our purpose. We want to see a peaceful solution. We want to see reconciliation as the -- in Nicaragua between the various factions that the government and the opposition and indeed the Nicaragua bishops have called for. We would like to see a regional solution.

LEHRER: Now, speaking of reconciliation, our first segment that we ran on Monday night dealt almost extensively with reconciliation between the United States and Cuba. He says he's ready. Is the United States ready?

SECRETARY DAM: We are ready. But the question is, ready for what?

We are prepared to talk to the Cubans. We have a way of doing that. If he wants to talk to us, we're there. We have what you call an "Interest Section" in Havana, and they have an "Interest Section" in Washington. These are diplomatic establishments fully equipped for diplomatic dialogue. So, he doesn't need to talk to visitors to Cuba. He can talk to the U.S. Government. He doesn't have to talk on television. It's, of course, his privilege, but he can talk directly to us. And, as a matter of fact, we have tried to talk.

And I would say the second point to bear in mind is that the historical record is very bleak in this respect. The Ford Administration tried it. The Carter Administration tried it, and this Administration has tried it.

In the Ford Administration, they tried and it ended when they moved into Angola. The same thing happened in the Carter Administration when they moved Cuban troops into Ethiopia. And we've had several occasions in this Administration where we've had high-level talks with the Cubans -- one by Secretary Al Haig and another involving Vernon Walters.

But, in every case, when the chips were down, not only was there no substance there but usually there was a slap in the face, like the Mariel Boat mess which ended the Carter Administration's second try.

LEHRER: Is there any -- is there any indication from your point of view that this particular initiative -- and it's clearly an initiative on his part -- is anything different from the prior ones?

SECRETARY DAM: We haven't seen anything. We will examine very closely what he has to say, and we will have to see. But, we don't see any evidence, and the historical record is not encouraging.

LEHRER: Well, specifically, he said that one of the United States conditions for better relations is that he turn his back on Marxism and Socialism. Forget it. He isn't going to do that. Is that a condition?

SECRETARY DAM: We believe that if you interpret that as the following, if that is a condition, we don't believe that he can continue to be a conduit toward supporting Marxist-Leninist movements in this hemisphere. We believe that that....

LEHRER: You want him to stop that?

SECRETARY DAM: We want him to stop that. And we think if it's really -- if his position is really bona fide, he will separate himself in some way from the Soviet foreign policy. In vote after vote, for years and years and years, he has never deviated one inch from the Soviet position.

LEHRER: Well he says -- he told Robin that the Soviet Union is his ally. Why should he turn his back on a friend after 26 years?

SECRETARY DAM: We're not asking him to turn his back. We're just simply telling him if he really is serious then he has to have some kind of an independent foreign policy. He certainly has to give up on trying to produce other Cubas in this hemisphere.

LEHRER: What would he have to do to prove his independence from the Soviet Union to the U.S. satisfaction?

SECRETARY DAM: Well, I think he can start behaving differently, and particularly with regard to using this massive Soviet economic and military assistance to him as a way of financing the kinds of activities that have been going on in Central America, in Angola, in Ethiopia and other places where there are Soviet troops and Soviet military advisers.

LEHRER: He told Robin that he was willing to talk about the Angola situation. Is the United States willing to talk about that?

SECRETARY DAM: The situation is this. We're very actively involved. It's a regional problem to begin with, and one aspect of it does involve Namibia and its independence. And part and parcel to that is some solution to the problem of Soviet troops in Angola. And he has said that he is prepared to withdraw the Cuban troops but, of course, only if the Angola government asks him to, and he seemed quite reluctant at that.

We're working very hard with the parties in that area to trying to bring about a resolution to that situation.

LEHRER: Mr. Secretary, what is your own feeling about whether or not anything is really going to come of this -- of this latest initiative of Castro's? Do you think that it's possible there could be some kind of lessening of the tension between the two countries?

SECRETARY DAM: I think that it's prudent for us to examine carefully what he has to say, particularly what he has to say to us diplomatically where it isn't just a big public blitz. We have been able to -- on small things deal with Cuba. Of course recently we had the negotiations about the return of the Mariel Boatlift people, the so-called excludables, and they will be going back to Cuba and we will be permitting political prisoners and other immigrants into the United States, according to the agreement. That's a small agreement.

But, to go beyond that into large subjects having to do with the general political positions....

LEHRER: Trade -- lifting the trade boycotts, diplomatic relations, et cetera, that's not in the cards anytime soon?

SECRETARY DAM: No, until there is some change in the behavior of Cuba.

LEHRER: Finally, let me ask you this. Fidel Castro's

been in power for 26 years. Every administration, going back to the very first one -- Eisenhower's Administration -- has been essentially trying to get rid of him one way or another, and yet he is still there. What is your own analysis of why he's been so successful just in terms of having staying power ninety minutes from here -- ninety miles from here, I should say?

SECRETARY DAM: Well, first of all, he has an authoritarian state. It's a little easier to stay in power whenever there's an opponent who speaks out he's thrown in jail, or he can have massive depression of the normal civil liberties. That's point one.

Point two is he, as we've seen, a personality, and no doubt that helped particularly in the earlier part of his career to stay there.

And, thirdly, he's determined to stay. He more or less said in one of these segments that he's going to stay in power until he felt like leaving.

LEHRER: O.k., Mr. Secretary, thank you.