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TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE ON VISIT TO CUBA

SENATOR JACOB K. JAVITS AND SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL

JAVITS: We have had a press conference in Havana, as you all know, and, hence, we felt it was only fair to have a press conference here. In addition, as we have come back and gone through our notes, etc., naturally, we have crystallized our thinking. And, finally, we said in Havana that we would not offer recommendations or suggestions there. That we would offer them here. So this is the opportunity.

Now, for myself, very briefly and Senator Pell will follow me, we considered our purpose accomplished in respect of this visit. It was strictly exploratory. But, obviously, the origin came out of what happened in the Foreign Relations Committee, which in April— in the course of considering a resolution by Senator Pell to repeal the so-called Cuba resolution which is the basis of our current policy— found that it was modified by the Committee based upon a proposal which I made— which traced the experience in mainland China— to review the policy with Cuba. When that was adopted Senator Pell felt that he would like to go and see the situation on the ground. He invited me to go with him and I felt it my duty to do it, strictly in my course of work as a member of the Foreign Relations Committee. It took us some months before we could make all the detailed arrangements, but we finally did.

The summary of my own feeling is as follows. I believe that there is a desire on the part of Premier Castro and his regime in Havana to come to a better accommodation with the United States in terms of policy. We believe that the moment is propitious to begin that progress. We believe there are major issues, such as the problems involving the security of the United States and the security of Cuba, as they see it; the problems of exporting revolution as it called by Cuba, which has happened before; the problem of the human rights which are involved in so far as political prisoners are concerned, and reunification of families and the other relationships which the very large number of Cuban refugees in the United States may have with Cuba. Finally, there is the question of compensation for seized American property, and, indeed, property now of Cubans in this country which was seized from those who are now American nationals. So there is an enormous problem. Then there are smaller steps which might be taken to sort of signal the thaw between the two countries. And, again, Senator Pell has delved into those very, very deeply and will specify those to you.

I believe that there are two other factors of great importance. One, that the Russians are omnipresent in Havana. There's no question about that. We saw the harbors full of Russian ships. The amount of money pouring in from the Soviet Union is very large and other influences are very great. We don't think that this is a good thing for the Americans. It's right on our threshold. It's brought on one crisis that could have lead to an atomic war in 1962. And one doesn't want that kind of omnipresent danger around if one can help it. Not that the Soviet Union can be displaced in Cuba. I don't believe it can. But at least a better relationship can exist with the United States which is not inconsistent with some much reduced presence of the Soviet Union in Cuba.
JAVITS: Probably, the Soviet Union might not be unwilling. It's spending an awful lot of money down there. Not that we would step in and spend the money, but rather that American tourism and other aspects of American commercial relations, if they ever occurred, would be a much more logical way of financing Cuba's development.

The second point is the Americas. There's going to be a meeting at Quito in November at which there are great stirrings about repealing the sanctions imposed on Cuba by the Organization of American States. This could become a sharp bone of contention between the United States and our Latin American brethren. Much more advisable that it should not become that and that, in so far as possible, consistently with our principles and our national interests, that there be a harmonization—if that is possible—of policy in the Americas. All of that leads in the direction of trying to find ways in which we can begin to have better relations. Our impression, both Senator Pell and myself, is that Premier Castro is interested in working toward that end.

PELL: I'd like to interpolate here my own interest in Cuba. It's not of recent origin. I was the last member of Congress to be there before we went back in time. I was there in December, 1960, and I was very struck at that time that the majority of the people that I saw seemed either acquiescent or favorable to the regime. Those who were opposed were either not visible, dead, fled, in jail. But, nevertheless, the regime seemed in control. I came back and reported that to Dulles of the CIA and his high command. My advice was ignored and about three weeks later the Bay of Pigs occurred. And ever since that time I have followed Cuba perhaps more closely than many. On this trip to Quito...I received authority from the State Department for the validation of my passport on May the 5th of this year. And we have been working on this trip together, Senator Javits and I have many interests in common as well as being friends, ever since. When it came to the choosing of the actual date—and this is a very important point—twice we chose other dates to go and each time, at the request of the State Department, the trip was aborted. We finally chose this week-end, because Senator Javits had some other problems he was working on in New York and it was the last week-end that we could go. We were not aware when we went that September 28 is the standard day each year when they give the anti-American speech. We were told of this two days before we left in a briefing we got, by which time it was too late. The speech was about the same that Mr. Castro gave last year and that he will give next year. It had nothing to do with our being there and he was very gracious in his personal relations with us and seemed genuinely embarrassed—not at having given the speech—but that we should have been in Cuba when he gave it.

Now, when we were there, he was very cooperative in making arrangements for us to see just about everything we wanted. We even went and spent three-quarters of an hour at a prison camp for political prisoners, talked in English with some of them, asked them about their food, looked at them, talked with them. If you have any questions about that, I'll be glad to answer them more specifically. And I think when it comes to the movement, as I see it, it will be these little steps and from these little steps we move into some of the bigger ones.

The first and most important little step was the very fact we were there, with an outside valid passport and on their side the arrangements they made to bring in your own colleagues in the press and us and the welcome that they gave us. From these steps we will move along and I would say that the major steps are still a long way off. Compensation is a long way off. That $2 billion, whatever we get on the dollar, a long way off. And I give you the example of what has happened in many of the Eastern European countries, where we had relations with those countries but not a settlement of trade patterns or compensation until long after those relations had been established.
Q. Senator Javits, your colleague Senator Buckley said yesterday that he might be prepared to accept a change in relations with Cuba in the future. The United States should require that Cuba order the Soviet Union military technicians and intelligence operators to withdraw and to deny the use of Cuban territorial waters and base facilities to the Soviet navy. What is your reaction?

JAVITS: My reaction to that is that it's a condition precedent which would abort the talks entirely. For the same reason that if the Cuban government and Premier Castro insisted that we had to repeal the embargo before he would talk to us--that would abort the talks and they would not take place. Therefore, we believe that without in any way deciding that question now the desirability of beginning to discuss some of our problems which were opened up by our visit there is superior to either country taking some flat position which will make it impossible to talk because neither country can do what the other demands, as a condition precedent. But I am confident--Senator Pell, of course, will speak for himself--that if this process which we believe was sort of sparked by our visit, actually commences, that it will result ultimately in a very material reduction of the Soviet presence in Cuba--a reduction of such magnitude as to make that whole situation much more agreeable to us. Similarly, it is bound to result in the same way in the major sticking points the Cubans have with respect to our own embargo. But I wish to emphasize that all of these things depend upon these talks which will ultimately lead to negotiations. And to set flat conditions precedent is only another way of saying that nothing's going to happen. I really would hope very much that the openness which resulted in what Senator Pell and I consider the usefulness of our trip may continue.

Q. One of your junior colleagues, the Senator from Florida, said this morning that he felt you were used by Castro and that you were going on this trip 'carrying your hat in hand'. Will you respond to that?

PELL: That was maybe his interpretation, but it certainly is not the fact and it is certainly not the impact on the Cubans. Because we talked just as vigorously as possible to the Cuban officials we met with as to what our position was, not what our position was but what our views were.... the need for some justice to be accorded our prisoners who are there, the need to give better conditions to the people who are in jail there, the problems of indemnification, and we did not go with our hat in our hand. In whatever you do, you have to see it through the other man's eyes and I'm sure that he believes that, but it is not a fact.

Q. It is widely believed that chances for better relations with Cuba now are better under the Ford Administration, because of Richard Nixon's widely known dislike, personal dislike, for Castro. These two previous unsuccessful trips you tried to make, were they before or after Nixon was out?

PELL: One was before and one was after.

JAVITS: In all fairness, we do not believe that the personal predilections of former President Nixon really had anything to do with this. This was the determination of the State Department through Secretary Kissinger as to when the time might be propitious. That was his judgment. We were not prepared to forego this trip by his judgment but we were prepared to accommodate, as far as we could without disturbing the substance of what we were seeking to accomplish by the trip, the State Department view. I believe that that was successfully done. We have made the trip. They facilitated us in making it. They could have stood in our way and said flatly, "no." And at the same time they were not in any way committed to it or committed to anything we did. And we think the balance was maintained and we showed restraint and so did the State Department.
PELL: I think Senator Javits is much more kindly in this through his administration. But I do think that with the departure of President, the possibilities of action being taken to improve relations are better than they would have been otherwise.

JAVITS: I concur with that completely.

Q. Senator Javits, have you briefed Secretary of State Kissinger and if so, did you offer any specific recommendations to him and what was his reaction?

JAVITS: I have been in touch with the Secretary of State for both of us and we have also appeared before the foreign relations committee yesterday afternoon. We, I think, can fairly be said, feel that the ground is now prepared by which there may be talks with respect to specifics and the generality of how relations might be improved without in any way committing either side. My general impression is that that is being favorable considered...it may not be acted on. And I think that is about all we ought to or could say on that score now.

Q. Senator Javits, ....before we lift embargo....(inaudible)

JAVITS: I do not wish to characterize Castro or to characterize us. However, I do not believe that it is necessary to deal with preconditions for talks. It is necessary to deal with preconditions for negotiations. As far as Senator Pell and I are concerned, this is at the talk stage.

PELL: Also there are a lot of little actions that can be taken that have nothing to do with embargo, like letting the Cuban diplomats move around with greater freedom than now, where they are restricted to five counties in New York. With all respect to the State of New York, that is a small area for them to be in, in New York. The restrictions on visas that are given on both sides; the question of the unification of families--either allowing Americans to go to Cuba to see their families or permitting them out to come here. These are little steps that could be done, taken as signals to improve relations. And in addition to that, when it comes to the embargo, it's not one big curtain that you pull up as you pull up a shade. But it's a whole lot of different measures. There are little executive actions that can be taken. There are different degrees on which the embargo is applied. So I think the thought that suddenly we will lift up the shade and then we'll have good relations is not correct. You'll find that the shade will get gradually more and more translucent and relations will improve as we move.

JAVITS: I'd like to add to the list of measures which Senator Pell has specified. And he has been especially concerned with those with great specificity.... the human rights of prisoners and others whose human rights may be involved, the willingness to listen and respond on human rights and compassionate grounds and individual cases, of which there are quite a number. These are also important in the thaw.

Q. Senator Javits, did you discuss with anyone in Cuba about having the kind of diplomatic mission just short of diplomatic recognition, comparable to what we have in Peking now?

JAVITS: That would have been inappropriate for us. We were not there representing the United States government as negotiators. We were two members of the Foreign Relations Committee who were there really with the acceptance--I think, because there had to be some cooperation of both governments to open the door to what might follow and what you have asked about a mission is something which might follow but certainly was not a proper subject for us.

Q. As a member of the Foreign Relations Committee and as an individual Senator, do you think it would be wise or appropriate for us to have such a mission there now? You speak of negotiations...Wouldn't it be easier for someone with the rank of Ambassador Bruce to answer to negotiations there, instead of your going second or third hand?
JAVITS: For myself, and I wish Senator Pell would answer this too. I don't believe we're ready for that yet. I believe we said talks, not negotiations, and therefore we mean talks. And we believe that negotiations if tried now would fall on their face because of an insistence on a condition precedent — lift the embargo, throw out the Russians or something like that. Neither is going to happen.

PELL: It would be premature, no question about it, to move as we have in Peking at this time. But there's no reason in the world why talks can't take place in corridors of the United Nations and many other places where Cubans and Americans are together.

Q. Senators, you said that you're being there just happened to coincide, it was just a coincidence that you happened to be there on this annual day where Castro lets loose on the United States. But it was described in news reports as the most bitter attack in five years. Do you have any inkling as to why that is?

PELL: We listened to it on the TV, with the help of the Swiss Charge who looks after American interests there, and we've shown the content of the speech. Between the time when he had originally wanted us to come, which was the end of August, and when he gave the standard anti-American speech, you've had the problem of the CIA in Chile coming out and President Ford has mentioned that we had used CIA funds to support press and involve ourselves in the domestic problems of Chile and in addition to that there being a ... there's one other factor here.

JAVITS: The other factor was, of course, Ford's statement about OPEC countries which he chose to interpret as being a threat to the Third World of which he defines the oil producing countries as a part. Now, of course, that is really standing the world on its ear and it's untrue, but that was his thesis.

PELL: These two factors occurred after the date he wanted us. He had originally asked us to come at the end of August. He never asked us to come at the end of September. Then, in addition to that, as far as his anti-American tone was, it was I think the shortest anti-American speech given. So it may have been intense, virulent, but it was short. And in addition he read the text very carefully. He did not go into any of these hysterical, colloquial gestures and he read it word-for-word. So I think that he was conscious of our being there, otherwise it might have been even more bitter and more long and I think he was personally—I can't say this for sure—but I think he was personally embarrassed that we should have been in his country on that date. Looking back, I rather wish we had been briefed as to the standard anti-American speech day more than two days before we were scheduled to go.

Q. Senator Javits, it would appear that the American people have you and on the other hand this speech. Could you give us some specific evidence you saw there to suggest that this is the time to do something with the Cubans.

JAVITS: I believe that that's a very fair question. In the first place, let us remember that notwithstanding our great efforts at detente with the Soviet Union and the opening with mainland China, that those same speeches are still being made at the highest level in both quarters. And that hasn't thrown us. That hasn't dissuaded us from the fact that our moment was right with both of them. So why should there be any different standard as to Cuba? Secondly, we are satisfied from the fact that we made the visit at all... the first time legislators like ourselves have been there in all these years. And the fact that we were very well received by all ministers and by Premier Castro himself, that the discussions were very frank and open, and that we certainly heard the story—we know what they want—and I think they know what we believe, that if Senator Pell and myself, might be the U.S. attitude, generally; the admission of a large body of the press and our general feeling of responsiveness by all the ministers. We believe, therefore, that the impression we have is entirely correct and valid.
JAVITS: I cannot say that Premiere Castro has taken that decision. But I believe that for the purposes of our advice on future U.S. conduct, we can assume that that decision somewhere, somehow, has been taken.

Q. You say that we know what they want. Could you be more specific?

JAVITS: Well, they obviously—as I said, they'd like the embargo lifted. They want to trade with the United States. But I think we have done one very, very important thing. And that is that we have made it clear to them that this is very much a two-way street and there is not going to be any unilateral action by the United States and that any effort to paint the United States into a corner through isolating us in the Organization of American States will be counter productive, rather than productive.

PELL: I'd like to add to that. Obviously, we get along without Cuba and Cuba has established the fact that they can do it alone too and get along without us. So we do engage in talks and better relations with each of us, with a sense of pride and nobody is overruling anybody. But if you were a Cuban and no matter how good the doctrinaire communist you might be, you found that 80% of your trade was involved with a country that was three thousand miles away and only 20% of your trade and economic relations coming from within your own hemisphere, you, too, I think, would feel the time is right for some improvement of your own trade relations and some coming back into the American family.

Q. You said this is a two-way street, Senator Javits. What points did you discuss?

JAVITS: Well, the second track, if you use Mike Mansfield's word, would be, one, the human rights like the reunion of families; treatment of prisoners, etc; and many other aspects of that in general and individual cases. Assurances that Cuba would not be fomenting revolution in other American states; that she would not be harboring threats to American security, such as were characterized by the missile crisis; and that there was a recognition of the fact that vast amounts of property have been confiscated, belonging to Americans, the estimate is two billion or more in dollars, and that there are vast amounts of property owned by American nationals now Cuban refugees which have also been confiscated. I'm sure I haven't given the complete catalog, but those are some of the things. On the other hand, Cuba would want to be sure that we would have no designs on it... that there wouldn't be another Bay of Pigs or another operation such as Castro accused us of in Chile. So that there is lots to what I call the two-way street. The important point Senator Pell and I believe we have gotten very firmly before Premiere Castro is that it's got to be a two-way operation. That it isn't going to work just by Cuba jumping up and down saying, "repeal the embargo and then we'll talk to you" It isn't going to happen. Any more than our jumping up and down and saying, "throw out the Russians and we'll talk to you" That isn't going to happen. So I believe that we've brought this to the stage of realism. And I'd like to add, too, that I really think this hat in hand business is really, ladies and gentlemen, for the birds. I've been on a lot of missions and I've rarely seen one that had the force and the dignity and the equality of presentation that this one had, fully respected on both sides, with absolutely no nonsense. If it isn't that, why, it will never get anywhere.

Q. Senator, did you make these points to Premiere Castro?

JAVITS: Yes.

Q. And what was his reaction? Specifically, to point A, B, C?

JAVITS: I cannot give it to you and it would be unfair to what we were trying to do, if I went into that catalog. Except to say, and that's all I can say, is that our impression is that he is interested in working toward a betterment of relations between us, period.

PELL: And the flavor of what we said is exactly the flavor of what we're trying to give here. And in connection with his speech, diverting to that for a moment again, we stressed very specifically to him that we took exception to his speech and to what was said and he understood this.
Q. Senator Pell, that gets into the good will toward our Latin neighbors, all that discredited thing we were taught in grade school. I'm interested in what the Cuban reaction was to the specific proposals made by you and Senator Javits, such as the confiscated American property, such as reuniting families.

PELL: I'm sure you're interested in the reaction to them...but he would not have talked frankly as we talked. So we're not giving you his reactions. We're saying what we discussed. There were no commitments made on either side. We were not in the position to do it. And I just want to emphasize what the points were and he's aware of what the problems are from our viewpoint. We're aware of what the problems are from his viewpoint.

Q. Can you tell us what the price of sugar was in Havana?

PELL: That's a good question and I think we failed to ask.

Q. Where does the Soviet presence fit into this two-way street?

JAVITS: Well, I believe the Soviet presence which is an omnipresence in Cuba is a very important factor. One, it's a reason why an effort should be made to begin the thaw of relations between. And, two, it will be undoubtedly effected by the thaw. In my judgment, it will be very materially reduced as time goes on. I think that's a good thing, frankly. I don't want to seem presumptuous. I think it's not only a good thing for us, I think it's a good thing for the Russians. The less points of friction like that that we have, the better. After all, the presence of the Soviet Union is still there; the missiles are out, but the Soviets are still in Cuba. You can bet your bottom dollar on that. And that's the big one for us. Just like the big one for Castro is now that he's thoroughly in bed with them and he's got to absolutely depend on them. And to use an American colloquialism, they can pull the plug on him, too, and then he's in deep, deep trouble. And I think he's beginning to think that he'd better not try to cut that off, because I don't think it's going to happen. But at least to begin to try to associate more in the American family. That's why the other American states are so critically important.