

National

Talks may have been secret

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Cuba and the United States negotiated secretly during Jimmy Carter's presidency through a back channel Fidel Castro wanted kept secret from the Soviet Union, a former top administration official says.

On Castro's initiative, top-level meetings aimed at the eventual goal of normalized relations were held in New York, Washington, Atlanta and Mexico City in 1978 and 1979, the former official told United Press International.

But the talks floundered after less than two years when the Castro government refused to curb its support for Latin American and African revolutionary movements.

"They didn't go anywhere because the Cubans were not willing to address improving their behavior," said the former Carter administration official who asked not to be identified.

Sources said Cuban emissaries asked the talks be kept secret and the Soviets not be informed. The United States agreed, although the ex-official said it was never really clear whether the Soviets knew what was going on

and Carter considered the question moot.

Former Carter aides expressed concern that disclosure of the meetings now might undermine U.S. credibility in future negotiations. CBS News first reported the meetings, and said, "The impression in Washington is that Moscow didn't know what Castro was doing."

The contacts began in March 1978, when Castro sent word through law enforcement agencies involved in airplane hijacking cases that he wanted a secret negotiating channel.

David Aaron, deputy to White House national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, was put in charge with Undersecretary of State David Newsom working with him. Carter "closely followed" the developments, the former official said.

In early 1977, Carter spoke of possible improvements in ties with Cuba, but expressed concern about Castro's policies on human rights and political prisoners and Cuban behavior in Latin America and Africa. Castro released some political prisoners and Carter lifted a ban on American travel to Cuba.

"The message from the Cubans in early March (1978) was they were prepared to discuss movement toward normalization consistent with the president's public statements. That's what got the thing rolling," the former official said.

"We had indications prior to that point the Cubans might be uneasy — their casualties kept coming in from Angola and they they might be looking for a way to move toward a more non-aligned posture," he said.

But the negotiations collapsed after a Mexico City meeting over the foreign subversion issue, he said.

"After a series of meetings, we became convinced Castro was not prepared to take steps we felt necessary for substantial improvement in relationships. So for all practical purposes those discussions went into limbo," he said.

Lower-level contacts were maintained, but were not substantive.

In a gesture last year, Castro agreed to stem the flow of Cuban refugees from Mariel Harbor. But the Carter administration saw that as too little, too late.

Future benefits won't be paid

Social security in danger

United Press International
WASHINGTON — The annual government report on Social Security paints a bleak picture — predicting bankruptcy next year if nothing is done and offering a cut in future benefits as the only realistic way to prevent it.

Congress, which balked at the administration's plan to rescue Social Security by penalizing early retirees, Tuesday resumed its review in the aftermath of Monday's pessimistic report.

Sen. William Armstrong, R-Colo., chairman of the Senate Social Security subcommittee, said, "disbelievers, avoiders and procrastinators can no longer deny that the system is on the brink of disaster."

Although its prediction of bankruptcy was not new, Social Security Commissioner Jack A. Svahn said the latest report proves the Social Security retirement fund "will not be able to pay benefits next year."

"That's not a prediction, that's a certainty."

The report makes it clear the only hope of saving the system rests with two alternatives — benefit cuts

or higher taxes.

"Congress has been promising benefits it just can't deliver," Armstrong said.

Because of the ailing economy, some 35 million retirees now get about \$10 in benefits for every \$9.50 the system receives in taxes from some 115 million workers.

The report by the secretaries of labor, treasury and health and human services said the idea of borrowing from the disability and Medicare trust funds to continue paying retirement benefits will not work.

It also said Social Security faces major problems next century as more retirees draw benefits from a system supported by fewer workers.

"To finance the benefits scheduled over the long range, much more income to these programs will be needed from taxes unless benefit outlays are substantially reduced," the report said.

"Action to remedy the short-range financial crisis by lowering the benefit outgo could well carry over to the long range and solve its problems as well," it said.

Offshore leases

Plan to offer 200 million acres per year unchanged

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Interior Secretary James Watt won't budge "one iota" from his pledge to offer 1 billion acres of federal land for offshore oil leasing by 1986, despite reports he was ready to compromise, an agency official says.

Douglas Baldwin, the Interior Department's director of public affairs, said Monday that Watt's plan to offer 200 million acres a year for lease "has not changed one iota."

Earlier in the day, an agency spokesman said Watt probably would issue a modified leasing plan offering substantially less land, partly because of opposition from the oil and gas industry.

The spokesman, Ed Essertier, said the modified plan could be

issued as early as the middle of the week.

"That is completely in error," Baldwin said later. "The fact is we have not backed away from this billion-acre figure by one iota. There is no revised plan coming out in midweek."

Although public comments on the Watt proposal were overwhelmingly critical of the vast tract slated for leasing, Baldwin explicitly denied it was being watered down.

Baldwin said he had no idea why Essertier had provided conflicting information.

Essertier had said the revised plan was likely to include "a lot more than what would have been offered under the (Carter administration) program but it's still a lot less than 200 million acres a year."

"Industry did not accept our plan. They couldn't handle analyzing all that acreage to see if they should bid on it."

Phil Clark, deputy director for exploration at the industry's American Petroleum Institute, said 200 million acres of potential leases represented "an enormous change" for the industry.

"The last five years, we've averaged five or six sales a year with a couple of million acres leased," he said. Of the report that Watt intended to scale down his 200 million-acre-a-year plan, he said, "I just don't think they (Watt) planned to offer anything there wasn't any interest shown in."

Since the first federal offshore oil and gas leases were offered in 1953, only 42.8 million acres have been leased, about 22 million of which are leased to oil and gas exploration and production firms.

Clark said the industry was confused as to whether Watt's initial proposal contained some device to narrow down the 200 million-acre offering.

"It wasn't clear," he said. "You've always had about a four-step winnowing process that took a large amount (of acreage) way down."

He said he did not think a modified plan signaled a retreat by Watt from his pro-development

stance, as one published report suggested.

During Cecil Andrus' tenure as Jimmy Carter's interior secretary, some firms complained that not enough choice federal land was being offered for lease.

But when Watt unveiled his billion-acre proposal in April, he drew fire from the industry as well as conservationists, state governments and federal officials.

"It is a measure of the outrageousness of the plan that we find so much common ground between ourselves and the oil companies," said Michael Weber of the Center for Environmental Education.

Catholic priest now a bona fide father

United Press International
CHICAGO — The Rev. George Clements has become the first Roman Catholic priest in the United States to become a bona fide father. He and a 13-year-old orphan are now a family.

Clements, once chaplain for the Black Panthers organization and known for his crusades on behalf of the underprivileged, Monday signed the adoption papers officially making Joey Clements his son.

"It's finally happened," the balding priest said, hugging the youngster who had spent two years in an orphanage before coming to live at Holy Angels Church rectory. "Joey is now my son."

The boy, who will be a freshman this fall at Hales Franciscan High School, moved into the church rectory last month but the formal adoption was held up pending a routine 30-day waiting period.

"I had given up hope of finding a family," he said. "I am very proud to have him as my dad."

"I don't advocate priests adopting children," Clements said in an interview after he signed the adoption papers. "I advocate couples adopting them. There are hundreds of black children just waiting to be adopted in the Chicago area."

Clements rocked the religious community in November when he announced he would adopt a child to call attention to the plight of black orphans.

Officials of the Chicago Roman Catholic Diocese initially indicated a priest is not free to adopt a child, but did not stand in the way of the adoption proceedings.

"If the church had blocked me, I would not have defied them," Clements confided. "But they didn't. Thank God they didn't."

"On May 3, 1977, I was ordained into the priesthood. That was the happiest day of my life. Today ranks with that day. I'm proud to have Joey as my son."

Joey said his new father "changed my life a lot from two years in the orphanage," but said he had no plans to follow in his dad's footsteps.

"No, thank you!" he replied when asked if he was going to be a priest, adding, "If I do something wrong, the kids say, 'Oh, oh, oh, and you're a priest's son!'"

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