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The right to disagree on Cuba

The main lesson to be learned from Mr Dean Rusk's speech at the NATO council on Tuesday is that American policy towards Cuba is as stubborn and misguided as ever—which is to say that it is almost as stubborn and misguided as British policy towards Egypt. The general propositions on which Mr Rusk claims to have based his policy are sensible, if not exactly novel: the trouble is that the conclusions he drew from them do not follow. It is quite true, as Mr Rusk said, that the main threat of Communist expansion is no longer to be found in Europe but in other parts of the world. It is equally true that Dr Castro would like to win the rest of Latin America to the Communist camp just as the American revolutionaries in 1776 wanted to win over the rest of the world to their camp. It may also be true that the Cubans are exporting subversion to six Latin-American countries, just as Tom Paine and Thomas Jefferson exported subversion to the Old World in the eighteenth century. All this is very wicked, no doubt. Does it,

however, justify a total embargo of the kind which the United States wishes to employ against Cuba?

One of the major weaknesses of American policy is that it is not at all clear what it is supposed to achieve. A total blockade of Cuba, applied to Cuban commerce with the Communist world as well as with the Western world, might bring Dr Castro to his knees. But a blockade on that scale would have to be applied by force, and would constitute an act of aggression as indefensible as the Anglo-French attack on Egypt in 1956. It is obviously out of the question. But in that case, what is the United States trying to do? If a total blockade of Cuba is ruled out, what is the point of trying to impose a partial one? Even if all economic contact between Cuba and America's NATO allies were cut off, Dr Castro would still survive. The only result would be that he would be even more dependent on the Soviet Union than he is now. Mr Rusk talked ominously of Castroite agents in Latin America, but he failed to show how a

NATO boycott of Cuba could affect their activities one way or the other. Or is it suggested that Castroite agents travel by bus?

The truth is that American policy towards Cuba is not a rational policy at all. It is not a considered attempt to reach a definite objective so much as an act of exasperated pique. As such it is perfectly comprehensible. It is galling for the Americans to see a ruthless dictatorship established on their doorstep; and doubly galling to know that it has been established in what was, to all intents and purposes, an economic and political dependency of the United States. But although these factors can make one sympathise with the Americans, they should not make one support them. In the long run, it is in the interests of the United States that her allies should decline to follow mistaken American policies, just as it is in their interests when the Americans do likewise. The alliance must include the right to disagree.