

Quiet Moves Made on Restoring

By Laurence Stern
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Quiet but significant initiatives are under way toward ending the 13 years of hostile relations between the United States and Cuba.

Conciliatory signals are being flashed between Washington and Havana through a variety of intermediaries. Although these probes have been unofficial in nature, they are being monitored and evaluated at the highest levels in both capitals.

The next development in what Latin American specialists here regard as a fast-moving though low-keyed scenario is expected to be a call for normalization of relations between the two countries by the prestigious Commission on U.S.-Latin American Relations.

That panel is composed of prominent businessmen, financiers, publishers and academic figures some of whom have held high governmental policy jobs in Latin American affairs. It is headed by former Xerox Corp. board chairman Sol Linowitz, who served as the Johnson administration's ambassador to the Organization of American States.

Within the next few months the council is expected to produce a wide-ranging review of U.S. relations with Latin America that is bound to have considerable impact on the Ford administration.

"It is no secret that we are going to recommend normalization as fast as possible, although we've made no public statement to that effect," said one member of the council. "The only question is whether we issue a statement now or wait until we are ready to issue the full report."

"The whole Latin American position on Cuba," said another participant in the work of the council, "is moving so fast that there is considerable feeling we should say something now or we'll be caught in an undertow of reaction."

Officially, the position of the U.S. government is still to look upon Cuba as a revolutionary pariah in the hemisphere. The line—from the lowliest desk officer to Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger—is that "no change" in U.S.-Cuban relations is under way. Though this may be true, in the most literal terms, it is far from the whole truth.

Kissinger is known to have been aware of recent contacts by Americans with top Cuban officials, including Premier Fidel Castro and his influential chief economic adviser, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez. The Secretary of State is reliably reported to have given private encouragement to those contacts.

Kissinger is also understood to have told both private and governmental acquaintances that, while he personally favors normalization of relations with Cuba within the general framework of detente diplomacy, President Nixon was inflexible on the subject.

With a new President in the White House the flexibility quotient of the U.S. government is now thought to be much higher, and Kissinger's hand considerably freer.

Castro, for his part, has expressed admiration in the recent interviews for Kissinger's ability and diplomatic objectives. High-ranking Cubans have recently told their American visitors that Kissinger's sympathetic

attitude toward conciliation between the two countries has been relayed to them through second-party, official channels such as Mexican Foreign Minister Emilio Rabasa.

Because of the sensitivity of the current contacts, few of those who have been associated with them are willing to speak for attribution.

But the consensus of their reporting is that Premier Castro has substantially lowered the temperature of his rhetoric toward the United States and softened the public terms on which the Caribbean cold war might be ended.

The strongest public indication of this was the recent findings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's chief of staff, Pat M. Holt, a Latin America specialist, who concluded in his formal report to the committee that "the Cubans are correct when they say . . . that the U.S. policy of isolating Cuba has been a failure. If this is so, then it follows that a new policy should be devised."

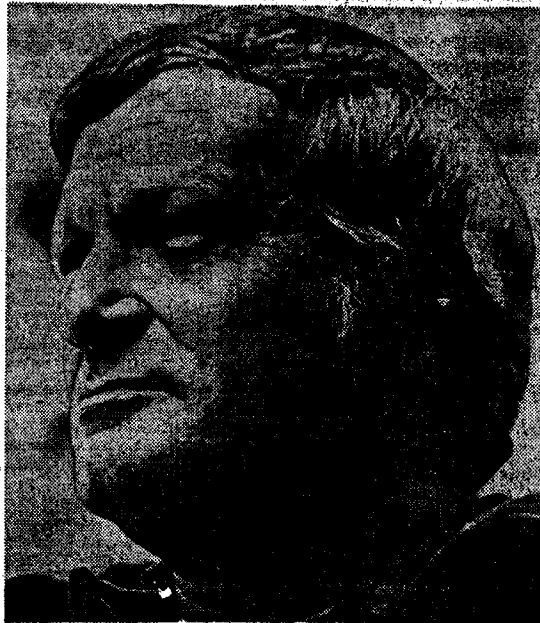
Holt, the author of a memo. Foreign Relations Committee chairman J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.) handed to President Kennedy in 1961 opposing the Bay of Pigs invasion attempt, is the highest-ranking U.S. official to have visited Cuba since the rupture of diplomatic relations that same year.

In addition to the Holt trip, a 15-day visit to Cuba was made last month by Kalman Silvert, who traveled as a visiting New York University professor but is also a member of the Commission on U.S.-Latin American Relations and Ford Foundation program adviser for Latin America. Silvert is a former academic colleague of Kissinger's Latin Ameri-

Relations

With

Cuba



FRANK MANKIEWICZ
... made films in Cuba

can policy planning adviser Luigi Einaudi.

And another unofficial journey to Havana was made last month by a Washington-based television team led by Frank Mankiewicz, former Peace Corps director for Latin America and a social friend of Kissinger's. He was accompanied by his former Peace Corps deputy, Kirby Jones, and film producer Saul Landau of the Institute for Policy Studies whose work Castro personally knows and admires.

The Mankiewicz team had a rare four-day filming session with the Cuban leader during which he expressed his admiration for Kissinger and John F. Kennedy, and enunciated terms for rapprochement with Washington that are understood to

be couched in far less reproachful terms than he has ever publicly stated them. Negotiations are being conducted with CBS for airing the interview.

Castro's choice of the Mankiewicz group upon which to lavish four days of personal interview time over the numerous requests that pour into Havana for such sessions cannot be considered a matter of coincidence. It suggests a strong desire on his part at this time to reach through the airwaves to American public opinion.

During that interview Castro openly alluded to his keen interest in U.S. opinion in speaking of the hijacking agreement between Washington and Havana.

"We took an important

step when we signed the hijacking agreement," Castro told Mankiewicz in the still-unpublished interview. "We have no major airlines and the hijackings were hurting the United States, not us. The determining factor that led us to sign the agreement was really a concern for international public opinion—for the people of the United States."

Cuba, Castro has repeatedly said, is waiting for the United States to take steps that will include ending the economic blockade launched by the Kennedy administration at the height of bad feeling between the two countries.

Castro and his principal advisers have been telling American visitors that, from Cuba's standpoint, the chief impediment to normalization is the trade blockade directed from Washington and carried out—with only partial success—through U.S. trading partners.

The official rationale for the trade embargo, which was adopted by the United States in 1962 and by the OAS under heavy U.S. prodding in 1964 was to retaliate against Havana's campaign of revolutionary insurgency elsewhere in Latin America.

It is conceded openly by U.S. officials and guardedly by the Cubans that Havana has since 1968 abandoned its efforts to export its revolution and instead sought to play the role of a showcase socialist state, depending heavily on the Soviet Union for its economic survival as a result of the hemispheric trade embargo against it.

Holt emphasized in his report that "Cuban support of revolutionary or insurgency movements elsewhere in Latin America has been at a minimum, one might say a trivial level for years in

other than an ideological sense."

As long ago as 1971 Castro proclaimed in a visit to Chile that there is "more than one road" to economic development and that each country must find its own road. Since Cuba abandoned the course of external revolutionary insurgency, as symbolized by the late Ernesto (Che) Guevara, relations have progressively warmed between Havana and many of its Latin American neighbors.

Today there are prospects, considered by regional experts to be quite imminent, that Venezuela and Colombia will soon join the ranks of countries in the hemisphere that have restored full diplomatic relations with Cuba. The most recent was Panama, which resumed relations on Tuesday.

It is expected that by the end of the year there may be only a handful of hold-outs, such as Bolivia, Chile, Guatemala and Nicaragua.

Although the blockade has failed to prevent a growing Cuban trade with such capitalist partners as France, England, Italy, Spain, Canada and Japan—and most recently with U.S. auto subsidiaries in Argentina—it has cost the Cubans dearly in the form of astronomical freight bills.

Since freighters calling on Cuban ports are automatically put on the U.S. blacklist and barred from North American ports the Cubans have had to charter ships both for import and export of goods. This has led to staggering transportation costs, which would be alleviated with a relaxation of the embargo.

Without continuing Soviet aid to the tune of some \$600 million a year Havana's economy would probably have collapsed long ago. Nonetheless in the view of many experts, the Cubans are leery of their lopsided dependence on the Russians despite Castro's repeated public declarations of gratitude for Moscow's help. The Russians, in turn, would probably like to lighten the burden of support for their remote dependency in Havana.

And so the extension of the spirit of detente to the Caribbean could provide triangular benefits, as analysts of the region see it, to Cuba, the Soviet Union and the United States.

Politically, the full return of Cuba to the inter-American family has become an important symbol and rallying cry for the concept of regional sovereignty and independence of U.S. influence.

Mexican President Luis Echeverria has been campaigning for admission of Cuba to the conference of Latin foreign ministers, whatever Washington might think of such a move. Echeverria and other Latin leaders see the foreign ministers' conference as an alternative political body to the OAS, which is widely perceived as a Washington-dominated forum.

Kissinger this year took an adroitly ambiguous stand on Cuban participation in the next foreign ministers' meeting—an indication, in itself, of a new "flexibility" toward Cuba in Washington. The traditional response would have been head-on opposition.

The key to the future of relations with Cuba is, of course, in the hands of President Ford and his prospective Vice President, Nelson A. Rockefeller—a man who over the years has demonstrated a more than passing interest in Latin America with its vast Rockefeller holdings in oil and land.

The issue of Cuba is replete with unknown, if not dubious, benefits to a Republican President. During the Nixon presidency the bureaucratic folklore in Foggy Bottom was that any move toward mellowing U.S. relations with Cuba would have been blocked because of Mr. Nixon's friendship with C. G. (Bebe) Rebozo, who was probably the most influential of all Cuban expatriates.

Whatever the answer, the betting is that Kissinger will now have more leverage for whatever his objectives may be toward Cuba than ever before in his six years in Washington.