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Focus on Cuba

ELEVEN YEARS AGO at American urging, the Organization of American States ousted Cuba and ordered member states to have nothing to do with the hemisphere's only Communist state. Mexico ignored the ban from the start. Other states dropped it as, through the years, Cuba came to seem less menacing both as a source of subversion and as a base for hostile Soviet action, and as the Latin left gained strength and influence. While Richard Nixon was President, his and Fidel Castro's mutual personal animus dominated official Cuban-American perceptions. Mr. Nixon was grimly content to let stand the glaring contradiction between the detente he was seeking with Russia and China and the cold war he sustained with Cuba. In Costa Rica the other day, however, President Ford's OAS delegate joined 15 others in voting to eliminate collective sanctions against Havana and to permit each member to conduct relations of its own choice. In its new respectful style of hemispheric dialogue, Washington did not engineer the decision, it merely contributed to it.

That Cuba is ready for a new look at the United States is evident. Mr. Castro has received a succession of American visitors to change the atmosphere. He sent Cuba's premiere dancer, Alicia Alonso, to New York the other evening to fly the cultural flag. His evident purpose goes beyond restoring normal relations; he would like to restore them as much as possible on his own terms. That is why he has been reaching out over the heads of the U.S. government to American politicians and public figures sympathetic to him. Just this week, playing skillfully on the sense of guilt and contrition that has been nourished in many Americans by disclosures of CIA

plotting against him, Mr. Castro offered through Sen. George McGovern an 86-page report on alleged CIA efforts to assassinate him during the period 1961-70. While the value of the document as evidence is still to be ascertained, its value as political propaganda is plain.

We hail the contribution the OAS has made to acceptance of ideological diversity in the Americas. We think the United States should start working on its own relations with Cuba. The time for hostility and isolation is past. There is plenty to discuss. The American base at Guantanamo, for instance, is an anachronism that cries to be liquidated. Its remaining use is as a bargaining chip to be dealt off against the Soviet Union's use of Cuba as a facility for its own strategic weapons. The still-secret Soviet American "understanding" of 1970, following the flap over servicing Soviet subs at Cienfuegos, should be supplemented by a direct Cuban-American undertaking. At some point, normal trade should be resumed. The problem here will be to do it in a way that enhances prospects of a fair settlement for Americans whose Cuban properties were expropriated; these claims total \$1.8 billion. Finally, the situation of Cuba's political prisoners must be addressed. American conservatives have long manifested concern for this aspect of Cuban reality. American liberals, who have paid close attention to prisoners in rightist authoritarian states like Chile, should have no less an interest in respect to the leftist authoritarian state of Cuba. All these issues, plus those which Mr. Castro may wish to raise, are difficult and will take time to negotiate. That is all the more reason for an early start.