

U.S. Had Secret Talks With Cuba in 1974, '75

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High-level officials of the United States and Cuba engaged in secret discussions on a broad range of issues from November, 1974, until November, 1975, informed sources said yesterday.

The talks, which were known to only a handful of officials at the time, were acknowledged by the State Department as representatives of the two countries were meeting in New York City in new, publicly announced discussions. Though ostensibly dealing with fishing rights in the waters around the two countries, the current discussions are expected by many to lead to broader efforts to patch up U.S.-Cuban relations.

The earlier discussions, according to participants, led to a series of unilateral and seemingly unrelated steps by each side. On the Cuban side the steps included release of some political prisoners, invitations to U.S. lawmakers and other visitors, the return of the hijacker of an American airplane and \$2 million in ransom money taken by an earlier hijacker, and "marked improvement" of public statements about the United States.

On the U.S. side steps flowing from the secret talks included U.S. approval for an end to the political and economic embargo imposed on Cuba by the Organization of American States, dropping of U.S. sanctions against trade with Cuba by overseas subsidiaries of U.S. firms, and easing of travel restrictions for Cuban diplomats at the United Nations. The Cubans were informed in advance of the steps before action was taken.

The U.S. participants in the 1974-1975 talks were Lawrence S. Eagleburger, then executive assistant to Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, and William D. Rogers, then assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs. Rogers, who is now in private law practice here, said yesterday that Kissinger, Eagleburger and himself were the only State Department officials informed of the "very delicate" discussions at the time.

State Department officials working in Latin American affairs said they never heard of the discussions until a few days ago. The State Department acknowledged the talks at this time because the present open and direct talks with Cuba makes continued secrecy unnecessary, officials said.