

Johnson Makes Overture to Castro

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President Johnson, instead of sitting out his last six months in office, has embarked on one of the most comprehensive programs to patch up world problems ever undertaken by a President of the United States.

The program includes not only improving relations with Russia and pouring oil on some of the trouble spots in Latin America, both already known, but overtures in two hitherto unpublicized and very difficult areas. They are:

1. Resumption of diplomatic relations with Cuba.
2. Establishing peace between Israel and the Arab states.

Diplomatic feelers have already gone to Fidel Castro through third parties that the United States would be willing to resume normal relations provided Castro would cut military ties with Russia and stop trying to overthrow neighboring Latin governments.

The first condition is easy, since the Russians have already withdrawn all troops and have made it clear to the United States that they would like to get rid of their obligations to Cuba, now costing about \$1 million a day.

The second condition is considered more important inasmuch as Castro has been fol-

lowing the Chinese brand of communism which calls for militant subversion of capitalist governments.

Fidel and USA

However, Fidel Castro has already made it clear that he would like to resume relations with the United States. Speaking in Moscow in May, 1965, his last visit, he stated publicly that Cuba and the United States had enjoyed cultural and economic relations for so long a time and were so close geographically that they would have to go back to their old relationship.

President Dorticos of Cuba went further. He stated in Havana, about the same time, that Cuba would be willing to repay Americans for the property seized by the Castro regime if and when relations were resumed.

Castro has replied to President Johnson's first overture that he is interested. The discussions haven't gone beyond this point.

Kosygin and Israel

The question of settling the Near East crisis has been discussed by President Johnson and Premier Kosygin in their recent exchange of correspondence, so far unpublished.

President Johnson has felt that if there was to be peace between Israel and the Arab states it would have to come as a result of pressure from

the two countries which have been shipping them arms—the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.

Premier Kosygin appears to take a similar view. In his letters to Mr. Johnson he has expressed interest in getting Israel to sign the non-proliferation pact. She abstained. Kosygin wants nuclear weapons banned from the entire Middle East. So does the United States, and State Department officials are suspicious of the Israeli nuclear plant built in the Negev desert south of Beersheba, which no Westerner has ever been permitted to enter.

Kosygin has offered to control the flow of arms to Egypt, Syria, and other Arab states, and also has tried to persuade Nasser to recognize Israel. It's reported that he has exacted a promise from Nasser to permit Israeli shipping to pass through the Suez Canal.

Reports from Moscow last week indicated that coolness had developed between Nasser and the Kremlin during Nasser's visit.

Kosygin now has asked President Johnson to pressure Israel into relinquishing the territory it seized from Egypt and Syria.

He has also asked ex-Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, now head of the World Bank, to call on Nasser while in Cairo; while McGeorge Bundy, former White House adviser, now head of

the Ford Foundation, has also called on Nasser to sound him out about U.S.-Egyptian relations. These have not been resumed since the June 1967 war. Both men reported Nasser in a more friendly mood.

Mr. Johnson is studying this problem. His advisers suggest that Israel would probably be glad to get out of the Suez Canal area, the Gaza strip and the west bank of Jordan, since they contain so many Arabs that in time they could make Israel a Moslem rather than a Jewish state.

Key City of Jerusalem

However, the White House contemplates great difficulty regarding the ancient city of Jerusalem, and the strategic uplands of Syria. The latter are considered essential by the Israeli military to prevent Syrian raids on the sea of Galilee.

And the ancient city of Jerusalem has great religious meaning for the Jewish world. Israeli leaders state frankly they will never give it back. But it also has great significance to Moslems and Christians.

Jerusalem, therefore, will be one of the greatest stumbling blocks in the path of peace.

However, the essential fact is that the two great powers with the greatest influence for peace—the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R.—have started talking to each other regarding peace.