

post 9/11/74 *A New Look at Cuba*

A NEW AMERICAN relationship with Cuba is now being formed. This is happening chiefly as a result of Richard Nixon's resignation. He had a personal thing about Fidel Castro; or rather, Bebe Rebozo, who had a personal thing about Fidel Castro, apparently influenced Mr. Nixon on this issue. It was a frivolous way for a great power to make foreign policy, but there it was. Fidel Castro, one should add, did not exactly consider Richard Nixon his favorite international statesman either. Whenever the former President's name was printed in the Havana press, the "x" was replaced with a swastika.

Whether it was Mr. Castro's intent from the beginning to make Cuba a socialist state and an ally of Moscow, or whether Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy gave him no alternative, remains a matter of lively historical debate. Regardless of that, American policy, which was meant to bring disaster upon Castro's Cuba, has been a disaster for the United States. The anomaly of Washington's dealing with Moscow and Peking but not Havana has been widely remarked. But the disaster aspect has not.

Fidel Castro was not weakened but strengthened by American pressure: his 15-year tenure is pretty good evidence. Moscow was not excluded from the Caribbean but brought in evidently to stay. Socialism in Latin America was not discredited; Cuba has become a "socialist showcase," in the words of a recent Senate Foreign Relations staff report. The United States launched the Alliance for Progress to counteract the impact of socialism in Cuba but throughout Latin America the Alliance is at best lagging and only in Cuba have the basic social goals of the Alliance been attained. Nor does the totalitarian aspect of communism in Cuba look so destructive in the light cast from Chile and Brazil.

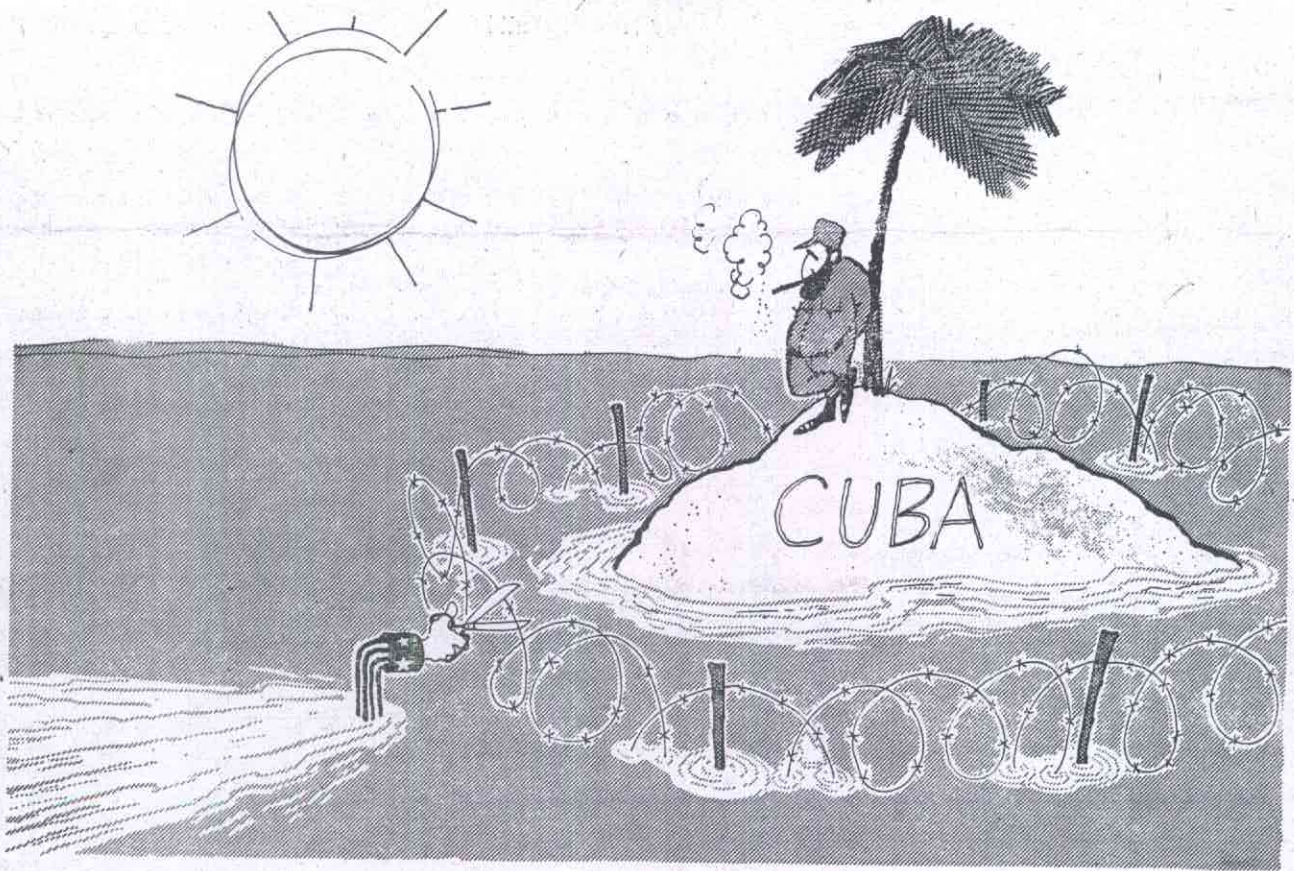
Only the rightwing military regimes in Latin America—regimes which allow no play to leftists at home—are not yet ready to find a way to make up with Cuba, and even some of those regimes can be expected to come around, if not to placate their domestic lefts, then to do

business. Sugar, Cuba's main export, has gone up in price from two cents a pound to 38 cents in the last six years and, while commitments to Moscow and inflation keep Havana from capturing the full measure of this increase, its benefits remain substantial.

Cuba is not so prosperous, however, that it is indifferent to its neighbors' policies. For economic as well as political reasons, it would like the OAS to lift its 1964 sanctions on trade, and it wants the United States to lift the trade blockade it imposed unilaterally in 1961. The United States, of course, has large nationalization claims pending against Cuba—claims which Mr. Castro had no reason to satisfy while overall relations were bad. This is but one of several difficult bilateral issues. Indeed, the bitter history and complicated nature of Cuban-American relations make it unlikely that formal reconciliation, once undertaken, will be attained soon.

When the United States put an exile brigade ashore at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, the Organization of American States—ostensibly the hemisphere's impartial watchdog—did nothing. But later when a cache of Cuban arms (but no Cubans) was found on a beach in Venezuela, the OAS kicked Cuba out. You have only to note this double standard applied in the OAS—a result of the United States' leverage in that body—to understand how unreal it is to discuss the Cuba question in terms of Cuba's possible return to the OAS.

It was the OAS which formally voted sanctions against Havana, and so, in a procedural sense, it is the OAS which must now remove those sanctions. But Fidel Castro can hardly be faulted for his lack of interest or for the contempt in which he holds the organization. He has long maintained it was merely the instrument by which the United States exercised its influence in Latin America and, though he is not so right in the 1970s as he was in the 1960s, he is not so wrong either. Even without Cuba, other Latin states were questioning the old ways of the OAS. So it is not merely a new American tie with Cuba that is being formed. The whole pattern of association in the Americas is under review.



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