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Rejected Go-Between

Mexico Has Offered in Past to Mediate American Relations With Castro

By Jack Anderson

MEXICO CITY — The tenderest subject between the United States and Mexico during the past three years has been Fidel Castro of Cuba. Yet, it's entirely possible, given the right atmosphere, for Mexico to act as the mediator between the United States and Cuba.

Only the White House and a few diplomats in the State Department know it, but on three different occasions retiring President Lopez Mateos of Mexico has offered to act as a go-between.

Three times the approach was made either to the late President Kennedy or to Secretary of State Rusk, suggesting in friendly and diplomatic language that Mexico, a good neighbor of both countries, would like to see better relations between two countries which long had such close ties.

To all three approaches, however, President Kennedy or Secretary Rusk gave an emphatic no.

State Department officials have since confided to this writer that the issue of Castroism was too delicate politically for any talks with Castro, even through a mediator.

Nevertheless, Latin-American diplomats point out that sooner or later the United States will have to come around to resuming relations with Cuba, and that even if Castro should exit, the old conditions of the Machado-Batista-Grau dictatorships will never return.

There are two important backstage factors for believing that the time for new mediation attempts may be approaching and that new President Diaz Ordaz may be the man to step into the breach. They are:

FACTOR NO. 1—Castro has made various gestures indicating he would like to

resume relations with the United States. When in Moscow on May Day, he told the Russians that relations between the United States and Cuba had been too close for too long a time; that Cuba would have to resume relations.

About the same time, President Dorticas told Communist ambassadors in Havana the same thing, adding that Cuba would be willing to pay the United States for property seized.

FACTOR NO. 2—Mexico is in an excellent position to act as mediator because, like Cuba, it has experienced revolution.

The memory of the Mexican Revolution and the bitter struggle with the United States over it is all too fresh in the minds of most Mexicans, and the fact that President-elect Diaz Ordaz and President Lopez Mateos before him visited the LBJ ranch is considered revolutionary. A few years ago, no Mexican President would have spent any time in Texas, once a part of Mexico. It would have been too unpopular with the Mexican people.

What many Americans don't remember is that the Mexican Revolution began in 1910, seven years before the Bolshevik Revolution and 40 years before the Castro revolution in Cuba.

And during the Mexican Revolution, American oil and ranch properties were seized, Pancho Villa crossed the border and raided Columbus, N.M., Gen. Pershing commanded an expeditionary force invading northern Mexico and the United States fleet fired on Vera Cruz and Tampico in a wanton show of force against a relatively helpless nation.

It took about 20 years for tempers to cool off and relations to get back to some degree of normality. And the men who deserve chief credit for cooling them off were

President Calvin Coolidge and Ambassador to Mexico Dwight W. Morrow.

Coolidge had the foresight to pick Morrow as envoy, a J. P. Morgan partner whom he knew would not be criticized by Wall Street and the big oil companies if he compromised with Mexico. At the same time, Coolidge knew Morrow was a liberal businessman who understood Mexico's problems.

Ever since this era when Morrow talked without waving the big stick, United States-Mexican relations have been on the upgrade.

Today, Mexico is one of the few Latin-American countries where American businessmen can make investments and take their capital out overnight. As a result, Sears, Roebuck, Woolworth's and various other United States companies have made heavy investments in Mexico City.

It's also why practical Mexican statesmen figure the United States is missing a bet in not patching things up with Cuba. With British, French and Spanish business pouring into Havana, the United States still maintains a rigid embargo. Just as the Mexican Revolution veered from seizure of United States property to cooperation with the United States, and just as Soviet communism has adopted free farming and the profit system for industrial production, so also Castro's socialism is changing. So Mexicans wonder why we don't ride the tide of political change rather than try to stem the tide.

If President Johnson ever decides to accept Mexican overtures to make up with Cuba, one American who could do the job is outgoing GOP Sen. Ken Keating of New York. As a one-time Cuban missile critic, he is in the same position as Dwight Morrow to be above Republican criticism.