

Approaching the Bridge

From a bluff overlooking a deserted strip of Caribbean beach one night last November, a Venezuelan peasant spotted a gang of men burying heavy crates in the sand. Suspecting smugglers, he informed the local army commander. Because of the peasant's find, the Foreign Ministers of twenty American republics gathered in Washington this week to consider action against Fidel Castro.

The crates were crammed with 3 tons of Cuban arms—proof positive of the Venezuelan Government's longtime charge that Castro was arming its terrorists. On Nov. 29, Venezuela asked members of the Organization of American States to brand Castro as an aggressor and vote sanctions against him under the Rio defense treaty.

But even after a special OAS investigating committee substantiated Venezuela's charges, the OAS procrastinated. At least four Latin American nations, some of them for internal political reasons, remain reluctant to attack Fidel Castro publicly; Uruguay, Chile, Bolivia, and Mexico continue full diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Finally, however, the meeting was scheduled for July 21. In Washington, the Foreign Ministers will debate resolutions condemning Castro and asking OAS members to cut trade and com-

munications links with Cuba. Although some drafts merely "recommend" that OAS nations sever diplomatic relations with Castro, Venezuela will fight to make this action mandatory. "Cuba instigated direct intervention—shooting people, intimidation, and a nearly successful effort to take over our capital . . . If we don't punish intervention, then the Rio treaty is nothing but a lot of blah blah," Venezuela's Ambassador Enrique Tejera Paris told NEWSWEEK's Bruce van Voorst last week. Tejera also declared confidently that "we have the necessary thirteen votes"—the two-thirds majority required to force all members to break relations.

From south of the border, however, came advance notice that Mexico would oppose sanctions as contrary to its traditional nonintervention policy. Mexican Foreign Minister José Gorostiza declined even to attend the conference. But when he was asked if Mexico would break with the OAS rather than accept a vote imposing sanctions against Cuba, Gorostiza hedged. "That," he said, "is one bridge we haven't reached yet."

MEXICO:

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