

Mexico Hints It May Defy OAS If Sanctions on Cuba Are Voted

By Dan Kurzman
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PALM SPRINGS, Calif., Feb. 22—Mexico today hinted that it might defy the Organization of American States if that body votes to impose sanctions on Cuba for involvement in plots to overthrow governments in the Western Hemisphere.

Some observers here feel that this hint, if converted into concrete policy, could seriously damage the effectiveness of the OAS as an instrument for united action on any problem.

Mexican President Adolfo Mateos apparently caught United States officials in President Johnson's party here by complete surprise when he told a press conference that the United Nations, and not the OAS, was the proper organization to deal with charges against Cuba by OAS nations. He based his argument on the fact that Cuba is no longer an OAS member.

Shortly after the Mexican leader made this statement, Foreign Minister Manuel Tello said in an interview that the remark reflected the Mexican government's feeling that the OAS was not the appropriate forum to consider sanctions against Cuba for alleged arms smuggling and other subversive activities in Venezuela.

Within a few days, a special OAS investigating committee is expected to report that Venezuelan charges have been confirmed. It will then be up to the OAS Council to decide whether to invoke the inter-American treaty of reciprocal assistance (Rio Treaty) for the purpose of applying sanctions against Cuba, possibly the severance of diplomatic relations with that country by all member nations.

A two-thirds affirmative vote would bind all OAS countries to apply the specified penalty. Mexico, as well as Brazil, Chile, Bolivia and Uruguay, still maintain diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Tello said, nevertheless, that Mexico would not necessarily feel itself bound to support sanctions should they be voted if it considered such sanctions unwarranted.

"If the OAS suddenly voted

for sanctions against Uruguay," Tello commented, "do you think we would automatically agree to them without careful consideration?"

If Lopez Mateos's suggestion prevailed, many observers here believe Cuba would be free to pursue subversive activities short of outright armed attack with impunity. It is not considered likely that action in the U.N. against Cuba would be successful.

The Soviet Union would inevitably veto any sanctions in the Security Council, and the Communist and Afro-Asian neutralist blocs in the General Assembly could also be expected to regard unfavorably the application of penalties.

Mexico, it is speculated, may be supported in its stand by Brazil and possibly a few other OAS countries. But the importance of the suggestion,

some observers say, appears to lie less in the possibility of OAS approval than in the danger it poses for the organization's survival as an effective force for hemispheric unity and security.

Administration officials here said that Lopez Mateos had not offered this view on how to handle the Cuban problem in his talks with President Johnson. They said Cuba had played only a minor role in the conversations, with neither party pressing the other to change its policy.

These officials were, therefore, puzzled and worried by the Mexican statement, though they tried to de-emphasize its significance. They appeared particularly concerned that it might detract from the harmony they seemed to feel characterized the conversations.