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Castro Conciliation Bid Called Propaganda by U.S. Officials

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United States officials consider statements attributed to Cuban Premier Fidel Castro last weekend as the "most conciliatory" he has yet made, but apparently empty propaganda.

Castro told a New York Times reporter in Havana that he would "withhold material support" from Latin American rebels if the United States and other hemispheric nations halted their material support of subversive activity against Cuba.

He suggested that the U.S. and Cuba begin a "discussion of issues" that would lead to a normalization of relations between them.

U.S. officials view these remarks as primarily an effort to ward off the invocation of sanctions against Cuba by the Organization of American States.

Foreign Ministers of OAS countries are scheduled to meet on July 21 to impose such sanctions as the result of Cuban attempts to subvert and overthrow the Venezuelan government.

Nevertheless, there is little doubt here that Castro wants an improvement of relations with the U.S. The only trouble, U.S. officials say, is that there is no evidence to indicate he is seeking such improvement on any but his own terms, despite the seeming reasonableness of his words.

It is pointed out, for example, that Castro said a formal initiative for talks should come from the United States since this country, in his view, is largely to blame for the present state of relations. Castro must know, officials say, that this condition alone would preclude the possibility of any talks.

Only if Castro were willing to make genuine concessions to the U.S. and OAS view, these officials made clear, would this country consider reexamining its policy toward Cuba. In sum, such concessions would have to amount at the very least, to a movement by the Cuban government toward Titoist political independence.

In concrete terms, it is stated, Castro must rid Cuba of all remaining Russian military technicians; publicly an-

nounce and practice a foreign policy independent from that of the Sino-Soviet bloc; halt subversive activities in Latin America and accept the existence of all hemispheric governments; stop propagandizing against the U.S.; and relax his police hold on Cuba.

In any event, a White House source made clear, there would be no possibility of a change in U.S.-Cuban relations before presidential elections in November — a fact that Castro himself recognized in his interview. Any move toward a detente with Cuba would undoubtedly be used by the Republicans as a campaign issue.

Even after the election, the chances of any change are regarded as extremely slim in view of the unlikelihood that Castro would meet U.S. conditions.

Nor do U.S. officials see how this country, or the OAS, could prevent Cuban exiles from trying to subvert the Castro government as long as they didn't disobey any national laws. The U.S. does not admit to carrying out Central Intelligence Agency operations in Cuba.

Officials detected two new elements in the Castro remarks. First, by offering, in effect, to stop subverting neighboring government, he admitted for the first time that Cuba was engaged in subversion. And second, Castro conceded also for the first time, that his regime may have been partly responsible for its bitter relations with the U.S. in view of its revolutionary extremism.

If the coming OAS Foreign

Ministers conference influenced the timing of Castro's conciliatory statements, these statements are believed to have been motivated as well by longer-range factors.

Cuba is in serious economic straits and needs normal relations with the United States and other western nations to make progress with its recolonization. The Soviet Union, which now must support Cuba, is understood to be pressing the Castro regime to mend Western fences if only to reduce the burden on herself.

U.S. officials said they saw no need for holding direct talks with the Castro regime to explore its intentions. They maintained that Castro could fully express himself through the Swiss Embassy in Havana which is representing American interests there.

And if the time were to come for talks, it was emphasized, they could only be held with the approval of this country's OAS allies, including the Caribbean nations which most fear and hate the Cuban regime at this time.