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U.S. extends olive branch to

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Knight News Service

Secretary of State Kissinger signaled a dramatic change in U.S. policy on Cuba yesterday in what probably was the most conciliatory public statement by any U.S. official toward the Castro government since

diplomatic relations were severed in 1961.

Kissinger clearly indicated his willingness to extend his "new hemisphere dialog" to Cuba in a carefully worded speech delivered in Houston yesterday but orchestrated from the State Department in Washington.

"We see no virtue in perpetual antagonism between the United States and Cuba . . . We have taken some symbolic steps to indicate that we are prepared to move in a new direction if Cuba will," he declared.

Kissinger also virtually assured that the Organiza-

tion of American States will vote to lift economic and diplomatic sanctions against Cuba when it meets in Washington May 8.

He said if he found a consensus for lifting the sanctions during an extensive trip to Latin America next month, the United States

Cuba

would likely support it.

Such a consensus already is apparent. Twelve countries, two short of a required two-thirds majority, voted to lift the sanctions at an OAS meeting in Quito last fall.

Lifting the sanctions could

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pave the way for eventual bilateral relations between the United States and Cuba, Kissinger made clear.

The United States, which enigmatically abstained in Quito, would support a majority resolution and carry along with it the votes of two or three smaller nations that also abstained in Quito.

Such action would then free every OAS member — including the United States — to pursue whatever policy toward Cuba it considered in its own best interests.

But the return to normality between Washington and Havana still appears to be a long, tortuous path with many formidable hurdles to overcome.

The evolution of Cuban-U.S. relations can be expected to develop gradually through a series of specific actions and reactions by both countries.

In practice, they already have begun.

U.S. officials now make clear that the relaxation of travel restrictions last month against Cuban diplomats at the United Nations was one of those "symbolic steps" Kissinger cited.

The next move on the part of the United States, perhaps depending on the Castro response, could well be the end of the ban on travel by U.S. citizens to Cuba, except in specifically authorized cases. The ban automatically expires later this month unless Kissinger extends it.

Other issues to be resolved

deal with Americans imprisoned in Cuba and the broad question of Cuban political prisoners and the reunification of families and visitation privileges to Cuba for Cuban exiles without fear of seizure.

Unilaterally, one of the first considerations by Washington will be to eliminate those anti-Cuban regulations that complicate U.S. relations with other countries, including provisions that prohibit ships from engaging in trade with Cuba from carrying U.S. government cargo or bunkering at U.S. ports.

Another prohibits subsidiaries of U.S.-owned companies in Latin America to sell to Cuba, a restriction that has created problems in U.S. relations with Argentina and Canada and now threatens disruptions with Mexico and Colombia.

Other weighty problems include:

- The status of the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo.

- Outstanding claims against the Castro government by U.S. firms and individuals for expropriated property, claims of some \$3.3 billion have been filed by American citizens with the U.S. Foreign Claims Commission. The commission has upheld claims totaling \$1.85 billion involving some 5,000 individuals and 1,000 companies.

- The extent of the Soviet military presence in Cuba, a subject Kissinger specifically referred to in his speech as being of paramount concern to the United States.