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U.S., Cuban Skyjacking

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WASHINGTON — Cuba has submitted a detailed text of a skyjacking agreement, Administration officials today disclosed, which is so promising that a final settlement may be within reach before the end of 1972.

The officials revealed the Swiss ambassador in Havana, who is negotiating for the United States, would meet this week for a second time with Cuban foreign ministry officials. The basic purpose of the meeting is to deliver a detailed response to the Cuban initiative, Administration sources disclosed.

The main emphasis of the Cuban text, the sources said, was for "severe punishment" to be applied to skyjackers on a reciprocal basis — to Cubans who illegally escape the Communist island as well as to Americans who skyjack planes to Cuba.

The Cuban text reportedly

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proposed both nations pledge such punishment for any and all skyjackers, regardless of whether "political" or "criminal" purposes motivated the air pirates. But the Cubans reportedly have dropped their 3 year old demand for return of Cubans who skyjacked planes and boats to the United States in earlier years.

The major stumbling block was still believed to be the definition of what constitutes "political" as opposed to "criminal" asylum. The United States is understood ready to sign an agreement for the return of Cuban "criminals" as long as that does not include Cubans who slip out of Cuba genuinely seeking refuge in this country.

Cuban Reaction

If skyjacking, for whatever reason, is conceded by both nations to be a crime, then an agreement to punish all such criminals could be quickly concluded, officials here explained.

Asked whether an agreement could be expected in weeks rather than months, a high administration official said it "would depend on how they (the Cubans) react" to the U.S. response.