

Feeler From Castro?

Remarks by Cuba's Ambassador to Mexico about the possibility of resuming contacts with the United States are of more than passing interest, especially since for once the State Department did not dismiss the comments out of hand but promised to "weigh everything."

Ambassador López emphasized that Cuba's "single and irrevocable" condition for a fresh start with Washington was "unconditional and unilateral" lifting of the economic blockade imposed in 1964. He added that the United States Navy's base at Guantánamo, long a Castro propaganda target, "is not important to us" and would be no obstacle to talks.

Though Cuban officials have said similar things in the past, the emphasis and timing of Mr. López's statement have aroused speculation about a feeler to Washington from Premier Castro. Since conclusion of the effective anti-hijacking pact last February, hostile exchanges between the two Governments have been rare though the year produced no additional agreements.

Secretary of State Kissinger said in September that the Administration was willing to consult other members of the Organization of American States about relaxing the Cuban embargo. Despite subsequent strains imposed by the overthrow of the Marxist-dominated Government in Chile and by the Middle East war, the chances for some relaxation of tensions remain worth exploring.

Fidel Castro knows Washington will not unilaterally lift the economic sanctions invoked by the O.A.S., though other member governments have done so. For its part, Washington knows that Cuba long ago ceased any serious effort to export its revolution to other American states—the reason for the embargo.

What is required of the United States, by way of putting Mr. Castro to the test, is not a public declaration but a quiet passing of the word to other O.A.S. members that Washington will not stand in the way if they wish to lift the embargo and invite Cuba back into the inter-American family. The attempt to keep Cuba isolated has been an anachronism ever since President Nixon began to work toward détente with the Soviet Union and China.