

An OK for Some Trade With Cuba

Washington

The State Department yesterday announced approval of export licenses to three U.S. automakers allowing their Argentine subsidiaries to sell vehicles in Cuba.

The action was perhaps the most significant circumvention of the Organization of American States' embargo imposed against Cuba ten years ago.

State Department officials insisted that the decision did not signify a change in the traditional U.S. support for the embargo.

"Our policy toward Cuba is unchanged," an official said, adding that the decision took into account the economic interests of the three American subsidiaries in Argentina.

The applications involve the sale of Ford, Chrysler and General Motors Corp. vehicles to Cuba. Auto industry sources have indicated the deal may involve \$150 million.

Earlier in the day, Cuba made it known it is prepared to become an active participant in inter-American relations for the first time since 1962.

Mexican foreign Minister Emilio Rabasa told the Western Hemisphere foreign ministers that Cuba would accept an invitation to attend their next meeting, tentatively set for Buenos Aires

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next March.

Rabasa personally discussed Cuba's position with Prime Minister Fidel Castro last month in Havana. He said Cuba would be willing to assume a restricted role in hemispheric deliberations.

State Department officials said they believe it is "extremely unlikely that the government of Cuba will be represented in Argentina" at the meeting. They said several countries have opposed Cuba's presence.

The proposed sale of autos in Cuba can be traced to Argentina's decision last May to re-establish relations with Cuba, thus unilaterally violating the embargo.

Subsequently, Argentina and Cuba announced a \$1.2 billion trade agreement over six years, including the sale of autos manufactured by the three firms in Argentina.

The applications were received here last November but no decision was made immediately, reflecting the Nixon administration's reluctance to help violate the embargo on sales to Cuba.

Officials had also expressed concern that a growing number of applications might be received from other American subsidiaries overseas wanting to do business with Cuba.

According to U.S. officials, the issue came to a head Wednesday night as Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger met with hemispheric ministers.

Kissinger reportedly said that a final decision could be made only by President Nixon and he apparently got the green light from the White House yesterday.

Only 24 hours earlier, high State Department officials were saying there would be no major change in U.S. attitudes toward Cuba until at least the end of the year.

They indicated Mr. Nixon would not approve any shift for fear that liberalization of his Cuba policy would weaken support from congressional conservatives in fighting impeachment.

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