

Ford's Position on Cuba

Washington

President Ford pledged yesterday that the United States would act in concert with the rest of the hemispheric alliance in making any move to improve relations with Cuba.

In his Administration's first policy statement on Cuba, Mr. Ford responded cautiously at his news conference to a newsman's question, asserting that Washington's approach "was determined by the sanctions voted by the Organization of American States and we abide by those actions that were taken by the members of that organization."

In 1964, at the urging of the United States, the rest of the OAS members except Mexico voted to ban all trade and to break diplomatic relations with Fidel Castro's Communist government.

But moves are now under way in the OAS to lift the embargo. Mr. Ford seemed to leave open the possibility that if a majority of the or-

ganization altered its policy, the United States might not object. He said that it is up to Cuba to change its policy first, but he was not specific.

"Now, if Cuba changes its policy toward us and toward its Latin neighbors, we, of course, would exercise the option depending on what the changes were to change our policy," Mr. Ford said.

"But before we made any change, we would certainly act in concert with the other members of the organization of American states," the President added.

State Department officials said that in recent weeks Castro has moderated his comments about the United States, apparently aware of the possibility of changes within the OAS toward Cuba.

Mr. Ford's comments on Cuban relations were eagerly awaited by the diplomatic community here. Observers thought that he might be more flexible than former President Nixon on this question since he lacks Mr.

Nixon's strong ties to the Florida Cuban community, which is regarded as opposed to any change in the relationship.

On other foreign policy questions raised at his news conference, Mr. Ford stressed the importance his Administration attaches to finding a Middle East settlement and its desire to resume talks on limitation of strategic arms.

On strategic arms, Mr. Ford said he expects a decision soon on differences in the Administration of the position for forthcoming negotiations with the Soviet Union.

"I don't think there's any basic difficulties that cannot be resolved internally within our government," the President said, noting that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger would be discussing arms matters during a trip to Moscow in October.

"I think a properly negotiated, effective strategic arms limitation agreement is in the best interest of ourselves, the Soviet Union and

a stable international situation," he said.

Asked about the controversial Pentagon request to enlarge American facilities on the British island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, Mr. Ford said he supports the move because the Soviet Union already has "three major naval operating bases" in the Indian Ocean.

Mr. Ford's statement about Soviet bases was in conflict with the testimony given to the Senate Armed Services Committee by William E. Colby, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, last month. Colby said the Russians had only "limited facilities" in the Indian Ocean that acted as a constraint on their building up a major force in the area.

New York Times