

By William Safire

WASHINGTON—Nothing succeeds like succession.

The suddenness of President Ford's emergence, the delight with which he is widely embraced for the virtue of not being his predecessor, and the correctness of his demeanor have combined to create the atmosphere of success in which success is more likely to be achieved.

Consider the question of Cuba, which was raised and neatly sidestepped at President Ford's first press conference. Richard Nixon's personal dislike of Fidel Castro, along with Bebe Rebozo's passionate espousal of the cause of the anti-Castro Cuban refugees, froze U.S. policy toward Cuba—and, therefore, toward the rest of Latin America—throughout the period of spectacular "normalizations."

United States policy was—and, as the President indicated, still nominally is—to isolate the police state in the Caribbean. Everybody knows that the policy, like a bawling baby, is waiting to be changed.

One reason why: The quarantine is becoming ludicrous, since six members of the Organization of American States have opened embassies in Havana and more are to follow soon. The old fear that Castro would export his Communist revolution has diminished, because dictatorship of the left is not as efficient as dictatorship of the right.

Another reason, which will provide the figleaf for the American turnaround, is that Premier Castro has been looking for the moment to drop his overt hostility and the best moment is the succession of a new U.S. President. The half-billion-dollar-a-year Soviet subsidy does not satisfy him; because he thinks he can do better in normal relations with Western Hemisphere neighbors, he has been sending signals of amity.

In one of the most bizarre examples of diplomacy in a television age, Premier Castro has set forth a series of conditions about ending the freeze via a filmed television interview with news entrepreneurs Kirby Jones and Frank Mankiewicz. But that olive branch on film awaits sale to a U.S. television network; like a diplomatic note sent across the seas before the invention of the wireless, it makes its stately way to overtake events.

With your policy coming apart in full view of the world; with the express reason for your policy—the hostility of the Castro regime—now being removed; and with a need to show that you, too, are capable of "bold, new initiatives," what would you do if you were a new American President?

You would change the policy and be

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a hero, right? Only partly right; the way you handled it would make all the difference.

If you were to handle it Kissinger-style, you would order up a top-secret National Security Council memorandum; you would dispatch your national security adviser to a secret meeting on a fishing boat within sight of the lights of Havana; and you would announce on national television, with a mystery guest standing in the wings puffing a large cigar, that you have ended the threat ninety miles from our shores that plagued three previous Presidents.

That would be The Easy Way, and it is to be shunned if we are to create a foreign policy to advance our interests rather than to interest our advance men. There is no need to follow the Nixon *shokkus* in Japan with any Ford *choques* in Latin America. Former Assistant Secretary of State Sol Linowitz, heading an independent committee to pave the way for U.S.-Cuba relations, says: "The greatest irony would be to take such a step in a way that would alienate the very Latin-American leaders who want us to take that step."

Neither our Latin-American friends nor the American public needs another twist of *fait accompli*: We can let the nations of O.A.S. dicker with Cuba individually as we debate the pros and cons of establishing relations with Mr. Castro's Government out in the open.

The Senate Kissinger Relations Committee, formerly the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, would ordinarily be the proper forum for this examination of developing policy, but the committee members and staff are too hopelessly committed to promoting the restoration of relations with Cuba to permit a real debate, and too much taken by Henry's flattery to offer him more than a sounding board.

Is there a House Foreign Affairs Committee? Is there any forum, within or without Government, that will call attention to the drawbacks inherent in any necessary change of international relations, pose questions about what the change will cost taxpayers, make at least a few moral peeps about encouraging totalitarianism, and suggest certain standards to be met before a deal is struck?

Our Secretary of State, accustomed to dealing in secret with dictators, is now the agent of a President with a different style. He would do well to surprise us with no surprises, go public to make his case, and thereby use the fact of Mr. Ford's succession to turn the Cuban anachronism into our Latin-American opportunity.