

Editor's report

Recognizing Castro

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SAN FRANCISCO — A lot of water has gone over the dam since the autumn of 1962 when Khrushchev and Castro — plotting together — thought they could get away with the placing of Russian-made missiles on Castro's Communist Cuba, only 90 miles from the United States.



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President Kennedy, in what was definitely his finest hour, called a decisive halt to the potentially deadly scheme. Going to the brink of a cataclysmic war, he told the Soviet leader to get his missiles out of there, pronto. Khrushchev did, and many think his abortive action cost him his job soon thereafter.

Jack Kennedy hated Fidel Castro with a vengeance. He considered the bearded guerrilla leader who took over as premier of Cuba in 1959 to be a vicious, dangerous menace to the U.S. and to the Western Hemisphere in general. Accordingly, he had ordered a total

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embargo on U.S. trade with Cuba on Feb. 4, 1962.

He was not alone in his attitude. As a result of Castro's open attempts to subvert a number of Latin American Countries, members of the Organization of American States votes 15-4 on July 26, 1964, to impose punitive mandatory sanctions on Cuba.

These anti-Castro actions had my enthusiastic support. Like Jack Kennedy, I considered Castro to be a filthy creep whose importation of communism to the Americas was a major threat to our national security.

He still is a slob, in my opinion. But the years have muted his revolutionary ambitions. The threats he represented more than a decade ago have disappeared in his frustrations, due to the effectiveness of the embargo.

Today, as normalization of relations between Cuba and the U.S. moves forward on a variety of fronts, my thoughts are concerned more with the Cuban people than with their oppressive overlord.

Until Castro came along we had friendly relations with the Cubans, freed by us from Spain in 1898 largely as the result of a liberation campaign spurred by my father in his newspapers.

The Cubans personally retain their warm attitude toward us, as reported in a series of eye-witness articles written a year or so ago by John Wallach, the brilliant young State Department expert of our Washington bureau.

Wallach told me this week that, in his opinion, our isolation of Cuba might have been a boon to Castro at that time as it helped him tremendously to coalesce his government. Now, by inviting a resumption of U.S. presence among his people, he is taking a calculated but dangerous gamble with his own power. For the Cubans still like us, by and large.

What Wallach said makes a lot of sense. And that is why, to a considerable extent, I have revised my attitude toward resuming relations with Cuba — a resumption toward which our government is clearly moving anyway, step by cautious step.

This switch in attitude may surprise some readers. But really, there is little difference between recognizing Castro and recognizing Tito. Or, for that matter, Moscow and Peking.

As close neighbors, it is natural that Americans and Cubans should have the warmest possible relationship permitted by the handicap of Castro. This might be the best possible way to further dilute his Communist influence in the New World.

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Recognizing Castro without fully recognizing him for the evil lout he is could be a big mistake. Americans should know what they are getting into, and I can think of no better summary than to quote here at some length from a letter forwarded to me by my friend, George Woods, the eminent international banker.

The letter was written by Julio E. Nunez, who comes from a distinguished Cuban family and who is engaged in international business activity. Here is how he views the prospect of U.S. recognition for Castro:

"The so-called Castro experiment has been the most expensive course in political economy ever undertaken by any nation. The people of Cuba have had to carry the weight of the arrogant, repressive, opportunistic and totally incompetent Castro revolutionaries on their backs for over 15 years.

"Politically, freedom was snuffed out almost from the very beginning in spite of the many Castro promises to the contrary. There has been no election of any kind for any public office in Cuba since Castro assumed power.

"The rights of the Cuban worker to representation, pensions, vacations, sick leave and sick pay, job tenure and to strike have been totally eliminated.

"The entire Cuban legal system under Castro has become little more than a crude machine of punitive compulsion. Its tribunals deal out draconian sentences of 20 to 30 years in prison for the larceny of as little as \$100.

"If Mr. Castro is to be granted recognition as part of the inter-American system, is he to be given all the benefits of such recognition and not be asked to accept the responsibilities?

"Cubans have known in the past how to struggle for freedom against great odds. What they have a right to expect from the free world is that we do not supply their tyrant with the unconditional legitimacy they themselves have never given him and which he has never dared try to get in a free election."

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News developments this week regarding Cuba may seem to indicate an end to the Castro-isolation era of the island is around the corner. That isn't true, and especially so far as the U.S. is concerned.

A majority of countries attending the closed, 11-day general assembly of the OAS, which began in Washington on Thursday, favors lifting their collective economic and diplomatic sanctions against Cuba. This undoubtedly will be done at some future date since the U.S. is no longer inclined to stand in their way.

This action — still months off — will not mean automatic acceptance of the Cuban regime by all OAS members. It will simply permit each country to deal with Castro as it sees fit, which means that our own economic blockade will be continuing.

It is the U.S. trade blockade which has been hurting Castro most. Its lifting is what he wants more than anything else. To get it, as he indicated this week, he is willing to make a variety of concessions.

Here is a unique opportunity for the U.S. to exert our leverage in behalf of civil liberties. We have no right to demand any change in Cuba's government. But we can and must insist that Cuba honor certain civilized principles.

According to the Inter-American Press Assn., there are still about 30 Cuban newsmen and tens of thousands of political prisoners languishing in jail for resisting Castro's repressive decrees. We would be sadly remiss not to make an effort to restore their freedom.

Another matter to be insisted on is reciprocal relaxation of travel restrictions. If American businessmen and free-spending tourists are to be welcomed again in Cuba, Cubans must be free to visit the U.S. for reunions with exiled members of their families.

Still another is the satisfactory settlement by the Castro gang for the \$22 million worth of American property they seized.

It will take years of inch-by-inch negotiating before all these differences are straightened out and full diplomatic relations with Castro's Cuba are resumed.

Meanwhile we should be in no hurry.

Castro has a lot more to gain from this slowly developing deal than we have.