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Nixon Signals Castro on U.S. Policy Change

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WASHINGTON — The United States — in a clear signal to Cuba that successful hijacking negotiations can lead to wider talks — has quietly dropped its two major preconditions for beginning a China-type reconciliation with the Castro government.

The first clue that the United States may have fundamentally shifted its policy came in the only interview with President Nixon published since his landslide reelection.

In a remark that went largely unnoticed or interpreted as a hard line statement, he said there would be no change in U.S. policy toward Cuba "unless and until . . . Castro changes his attitude toward Latin America and the United States."

Despite the apparent toughness of the comment, the President for the first time omitted the two conditions that for several years have been prerequisites for any policy shift.

They are the demands that Cuba end its "export of violent revolution" in Latin America and break its military ties with the Soviet Union.

Second Clue

A second clue that U.S. policy may be shifting occurred yesterday when State Department spokesman Charles Bray pointedly refused, under repeated questioning, to restate the two preconditions.

This marked the first time an official U.S. spokesman had refused such a public invitation to spell out the reasons why relations remained frozen.

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the two spelled-out conditions to a subjective judgment on the part of the President, saving either side from the appearance of backing down and permitting more leeway for negotiations.

Theoretically, if Castro cooperates to the fullest extent possible in negotiating a hijacking treaty and agrees to return the Americans now there, Nixon could determine that Castro's attitude had changed enough to shift basic U.S. policy.

Such a shift could entail an end to the eight-year-old trade embargo by the Organization of American States, open cultural and professional exchanges like those now taking place with China and eventually bring a resumption of American tourism to the former "Jewel of the Caribbean."

Two additional factors in the handling of the hijacking issue convinced observers

here that the United States is interested in improving relations.

Secretary of State William Rogers, the highest U.S. official in many years to deal directly or indirectly with the Castro regime, called in Swiss Ambassador Felix Schnyder to convey administration eagerness for a quick hijacking accord.

The Swiss embassy in Havana represents U.S. interests in the absence of U.S.-Cuban relations. Also, the State Department yesterday issued a blanket statement that the United States would meet with the Cubans in any forum or manner they desired, including direct face-to-face talks.

It probably will be some time before the United States publicly acknowledges any policy shift. That is to be expected because Washington feels it must save face and not get out ahead of what still could be troublesome negotiations on the hijackers.

But the message to Fidel Castro is clear — cooperate on the hijacking issue and who knows where the future may lead.

But perhaps the most significant aspect of this apparent shift was the fact that Nixon had changed the ground rules, paving the way for the same pattern of reconciliation that occurred over a period of many months with Peking.

Up to Nixon

In stating that relations would not improve with Cuba until Castro changed his attitude, Nixon was saying in effect that he alone reserved the right to determine when Castro's "attitude" had changed sufficiently to warrant closer U.S.-Cuban ties.

The shift was made from

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