

Rogers Says U.S. Is Ready For Direct Talk With Cuba

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By TAD SZULC NOV 17 1972

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 16—Secretary of State William P. Rogers asked the Swiss Ambassador today to inform Cuba that the United States was willing to take any steps, including direct negotiations, to obtain an agreement to halt the hijacking of airliners to Havana.

The State Department's spokesman, Charles W. Bray 3d, who announced the meeting between Mr. Rogers and the Swiss Ambassador, Felix Schnyder, said the United States wanted an agreement "in the most expeditious and effective manner possible" and was "prepared to engage in any process which will produce results."

If Cuba agrees to face-to-face talks — instead of conducting negotiations through the Swiss Embassy, which represents United States interests in Havana—it will be the first direct contract between the two Governments since they broke diplomatic relations in January, 1961.

In reply to questions, Mr. Bray told newsmen that Secretary Rogers had personally intervened in the current exchanges with Havana—an unusual step in what heretofore has been a frozen relationship—to suggest "the degree to which we wish to give positive response to indications that the Cuban Government is prepared to negotiate an agreement on hijacking."

"Of course, it was a symbolic

Continued on Page 4, Column 4

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Rogers Says the U.S. Would Meet Cubans

Continued From Page 1, Col. 4

gesture," Mr. Bray said of Mr. Roger's session with Ambassador Schnyder.

After this meeting, Mr. Schnyder told reporters that the Cuban Premier, Fidel Castro, was personally interested in solving the hijacking problem.

Mr. Bray said that Secretary Rogers had also conveyed to Cuba through the Swiss Ambassador a "statement of welcome" by the United States to the formal declaration by the Cuban Government, broadcast yesterday by the Havana radio, proposing negotiations to work out an agreement to curb aerial hijacking.

Late in the day Secretary Rogers flew to Camp David, Md. for foreign policy discussions with President Nixon. State Department officials said that Cuba was among the subjects to be taken up at the meeting.

'Broad Agreement' Urged

Both Mr. Bray and the White House press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, continued to caution against speculation that negotiations on antihijacking measures might lead to other forms of normalization in Cuban-American relations. But Nixon Administration officials said privately that the dialogue with Havana, which has included private exchanges, had already moved further than either Government would have predicted a month ago.

At his news briefing, for example, Mr. Bray refused to say whether the United States regarded as negotiable the Cuban proposal yesterday for a "broad agreement" covering not only hijackings of American aircraft but also what Havana describes as acts of violence against its ships, planes and territory by exiles.

The Cuban declaration repeated past charges—which the United States has denied—that this country aids "illegal" departures by Cubans from the

island, raids by Cuban exiles against Cuba and the hijackings of Cuban ships. The statement said that such activities should also be covered by any antihijacking accord.

Two years ago a United States proposal for an antihijacking agreement foundered over these Cuban demands. But today, Mr. Bray said that "it would be premature to discuss in a detailed way our or their positions."

"Our view is that this process must be addressed to the future," he said, "and one of the outcomes must be to make it clear to hijackers that both Governments will deal effectively with them," he said.

Other State Department officials said that Washington's immediate response to the Cuban declaration yesterday—in which the Havana Government said it "has no interest whatever in promoting hijackings" or providing refuge for "persons responsible for common criminal acts" in the United States—implied that the United States was not ruling out negotiations on the other points raised by Havana.

"If we start talking about other matters than hijacking, then, obviously, we shall be negotiating some very basic aspects of our relations with

Cuba," an official said.

Washington broke relations with Havana in 1961 in response to Cuban demand that the diplomatic personnel at the United States Embassy be reduced to eight officers, but this step followed two years of mounting hostility between the two Governments.