

Henry A. Kissinger says the Nixon Administration is willing at least to consult other members of the Organization of American States about the possibility of relaxing the nine-year-old embargo against Cuba. Belated as it is, this slightly more flexible approach on the part of Washington is certain to get a favorable response from many O.A.S. governments long ago convinced that the attempt to isolate Fidel Castro's regime in the hemisphere was futile and counterproductive.

Mexico never adhered to the diplomatic and economic quarantine of Cuba invoked by the O.A.S. in 1964. In recent years, Chile, Peru, Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad-Tobago have all kicked over O.A.S. traces and opened relations with Havana. In May, as one of its first foreign-policy actions, the new Peronist Government of Argentina not only recognized Fidel Castro's regime but granted it a \$200-million credit.

However, in a 23-nation conference in Washington convened to recommend structural changes in the O.A.S., United States Ambassador Joseph John Jova has doggedly insisted that the sanctions against Cuba be continued. He opposed a drive to modify the quarantine; perhaps he has not yet been briefed on the shift indicated by the Secretary of State-designate.

It is significant that this drive to relax the embargo is led by Venezuela, which spearheaded the fight to invoke the sanctions nine years ago. Venezuela furnished the O.A.S. with evidence that Mr. Castro was training and supporting guerrilla forces bent on subverting the Caracas Government. With that threat long gone, Venezuela sensibly seeks to normalize relations with Cuba.

No O.A.S. member asks the United States to take a conciliatory initiative with Cuba, though all have seen a paradox in the perpetuation by the Nixon Administration of a rigid stance toward a small Communist-ruled country in this hemisphere while it is working overtime to advance détente with the Communist giants, Russia and China.

By insisting on keeping the door closed to Cuba, Washington risks an eventual humiliation comparable to the one it brought on itself at the United Nations by stubbornly opposing the entry of mainland China long after a majority of the members wanted Peking admitted. It is encouraging that Mr. Kissinger now seems ready to take the first step to head off such a defeat in the O.A.S.