

Cuba

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CAPITOL STUFF

By MICHAEL O'NEILL

Washington, July 29—The decision of the Organization of American States to crack down on Cuba is not only a victory for President Johnson. It also is evidence of a significant change of attitude in Latin American.

Not so long ago, many of the most important nations south of the border were strictly ho-hummish about the Castro threat. They regarded this country's concern as an unfortunate excess, probably related to domestic politics.

But when the foreign ministers of the hemisphere met in special session here last week, they were in a militant new mood. This caught even the State Department's experts by surprise. Most of the statesmen were eager to hit the Castro regime hard—and some were even gung-ho about it.

The result was that the U.S. got more than it expected. The OAS didn't just recommend new sanctions. It called for a mandatory break in diplomatic relations and a cutoff of trade and sea communications. It also branded subversion as an act of aggression which might warrant collective counteraction, even the use of armed force.

Many complex factors contributed to the new mood reflected in the OAS action. One of the most important of these, perhaps, was the recent overthrow of the leftist-dominated Brazilian government of Joao Goulart. The new rulers, headed by President Humberto Castelo Branco, are strongly pro-U.S. and anti Communist. And Brazil threw its considerable weight behind mandatory sanctions.

Other elements contributing to the growing support for Cuba's isolation were the flagrant Castro attempt to destroy Venezuela, a general decline in popular infatuation with Castroism throughout Latin America, and Secretary of State Rusk's personal negotiating skill.

Recovered From Their Misgivings

In the background, however, was still another factor which is the least discussed but in some ways the most significant. It is the way that the Latins have recovered from the deep misgivings they developed about U.S. policy at the time of President Kennedy's assassination.

Kennedy's death was a shock because it immediately raised the spectre of the U.S. once again losing interest in Latin America. More than any other President since Franklin D. Roosevelt, he had personally involved himself in the hemisphere's problems. Whether or not the Alliance for Progress had made any real progress, it symbolized Kennedy's interest.



Thomas Mann
LBJ's man for Latin America

Johnson recognized this threatened spiritual defection of the Latins and moved almost immediately to head it off. In his first business session with any foreign dignitaries—just four days after the assassination—he called hemisphere leaders to a "family gathering" in the White House to emphasize his own interest in their problems, his early links with Roosevelt and his dedication to the alliance.

The President's first major action in the foreign field was to order an overhaul of the whole management of hemisphere problems, installing his own man, Thomas Mann, as assistant Secretary of State for inter-American affairs and top coordinator for the alliance.

Called in the Ambassadors

Johnson met with the ambassadors to Latin America later in March and then called them to the White House again May 11 to give them a progress report and pep talk on the alliance. In between times, he was peppering Tom Mann with instructions.

There was some initial fumbling in the handling of the Panama crisis, mainly because some of the President's top aids were still operating on the old Kennedy wave length and hadn't tuned in on the LBJ signal. This apparently caused some psychological reverses around the hemisphere.

But Johnson kept his personal diplomacy rolling. During the first week in July—on the eve of the OAS meeting—he called the Latin American ambassadors to the White House in small groups on three different days. And he let them talk about their problems—how to increase hemisphere exports, how to coordinate trade policies, how to improve the alliance.

Johnson didn't press anyone regarding Cuba. He emphasized America's determination to help the hemisphere. But he warned that the Latins would have to do the alliance job themselves. He particularly exhorted them to put more of their own private money into the effort.

Question Still Is: Will It Work?

It is too soon to say how successful Johnson's personal diplomacy will be. The problems of the hemisphere are so staggering—so utterly complex, so entangled in the coils of dead history, so intractable—that no one is tempted to be optimistic.

The Alliance for Progress urgently needed reorganization and regeneration when Johnson came to power. He has done what is necessary, but only time will tell whether the alliance will now work well, or even work. In the final analysis, it will rise or fall on the performance of the Latins themselves. And their record is less than promising.

But diplomats say the special attention Johnson has given to the hemisphere and the effort he has made to get the alliance back on the track has helped quiet Latin fears about his intentions. And this, in turn, contributed to the salutary outcome of the OAS session on Cuba.

As one official put it, most OAS members were more willing to make concessions to the American viewpoint on Cuba because they had the feeling that the U.S. was determined to help them with their