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Latins Dismantling U.S. Sponsored Wall Around Cuba

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BOGOTA, Colombia, Nov.

—The diplomatic and economic wall that was built around Cuba by the United States and its Latin American allies more than 10 years ago has begun to crumble under pressure from the Latin Americans.

For 14 years, three U.S. administrations have used economic aid, diplomatic pressure, military intervention and the CIA to enforce a political and economic embargo cutting Cuba off from Latin America.

Now, for the first time since Cold-War tensions began to ease, detente is being allowed into Latin America. But the Cold-War years left their mark and left Latin countries feeling more like the colonies of an empire than partners in an alliance.

"American economic dominance in this part of the world exists as a matter of fact," Carlos Lleras Restrepo, a former president of Colombia, said in a recent interview. "But the Latin countries have learned, after voting along to keep China out of the United Nations for 20 years, that the U. S. changes its diplomatic position strictly in accordance with its own interests and that there is no need to follow."

"The wall isolating Cuba from its natural neighbors and trading partners in the United States, the Caribbean and in South America was designed to keep Fidel Castro's formula for socialist revolution from spreading through the hemisphere. The United States began this isolation by cutting off Cuban sugar imports and all U. S. exports to the island in 1960, a year after Castro came to power, and by backing the abortive invasion at the Bay of Pigs the next year.

Latin American countries then helped to build the wall, slowly and reluctantly, under intense U.S. pressure, with unilateral actions and collective diplomatic decisions taken between 1961 and 1964. Recently, many of

the same countries which helped start the quarantine have taken the initiative to end it.

Mexico originally voted against the 10-year-old collective decision forbidding trade and diplomatic relations and has never respected it. Over the last four years, first Chile, under the late President Salvador Allende, then Peru, Argentina and Panama have disregarded the collective decision and have exchanged diplomatic missions and goods with Cuba.

Others want to follow, but decorously. So Colombia, Costa Rica and Venezuela, the firmest U.S. allies when the embargo was set up by the Organization of American States, have requested that the original decision be reconsidered.

Next weekend, a conference of OAS delegates from 23 countries will meet in Quito and the required two-thirds majority is expected to vote to leave each member country free to choose its own kind of relations with Cuba. For the first time in the history of the Cuban controversy, the United States, so far as Latin diplomats in three countries have been able to determine, has no clear position.

"The problem is over now, said Arturo Frondizi, president of Argentina when the United States under the Kennedy administration began pushing for the isolation of Cuba. Frondizi was one of the former presidents, foreign ministers and diplomats interviewed in Argentina, Brazil and Colombia over the last two weeks on their role in resisting or helping the isolation of Cuba.

"Now we're heading toward the full reincorporation of Cuba in the Latin American community," Frondizi said. "But what has changed is the relation between the U.S. and Russia, not the relations with Latin America."

Isolating Cuba from Latin America failed to bring down Castro's government or force it to change course, as three U.S. Presidents apparently hoped it would. In the view of those interviewed, it halted the spread of Cuban-style revolution only when the United States was willing to intervene in Latin internal affairs. For these men, the policy had three other effects that were predicted by public figures as it was taking shape in 1961 and 1962.

Frondizi made his predictions in letters to and conversations with his friend President John F. Kennedy. The late Francisco San Tiago Dantas of Brazil, then foreign minister, made his publicly in speeches.

First, Cuba, despite Castro's vaunted nationalism, became a Soviet satellite. Frondizi, trying to head off the isolation in December 1961, warned Kennedy that it would. But the Argentine president came away with the impression that Kennedy was under strong domestic pressure to "do something" about Cuba.

"Imagine that Kennedy asked me, in Palm Beach, not to send my memoranda on Cuba through diplomatic channels," Frondizi said.

Then, the inter-American system of defense alliances and the OAS, which had been built on the principle of self-determination for all member states, was strained to the breaking point. Some say it has broken down as the result of U.S. intervention and of internal differences.

All those interviewed asserted that the precedent for intervention set by the 1962 decision to expel Cuba from the inter-American system opened the way for the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965 and for massive CIA support for opposition to President Allende, who was closely allied to Cuba.

"The U.S. became the great judge of the fitness of governments in the hemisphere," said Sen. Julio C. Turbay, who argued with the United States in favor of diplomatic action against Cuba when he was Colombian foreign minister in 1961. "That was not what we had intended."

This was the second effect seen by the Latins. Finally, Latin domestic politics became increasingly radicalized under the pressure to line up on the U.S. side in the Cold War. Stumbling democratic governments that had favored Cuba's right to go its own way fell to military coups in Argentina in 1962, in Brazil in 1964 and in Chile last year.

"U.S. action in these years radicalized our internal processes and contributed to the failure of democratic experiments to change social and economic structures," Frondizi said.

"I believe opposition by our two countries to the expulsion of Cuba from the inter-American system was one of the factors contributing to the military coups in Argentina, and later, in Brazil," Frondizi stated. The former president added that there were, of course, strong internal political drives leading to the coups in both cases.

There were also internal reasons behind subsequent coups in Bolivia and Ecuador, which sided with Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Chile at the OAS conference in Punta del Este, Uruguay, in January 1962 and did not vote for the U.S. resolution expelling Cuba. Only Mexico, among the countries that opposed the measure, has kept the same form of government since 1962.

"Intervention is bad in any event," said Carlos Lleras, president of Colombia from 1966 to 1970 and a

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