

Castro seeks consensus among nonaligned states

From Lionel Martin
in Havana

Tomorrow's commemoration of what the Cubans call the anniversary of the beginning of the Cuban Revolution finds Fidel Castro personally engaged in a war that even Washington cannot condemn — the war to eliminate the Aedes Aegypti mosquito, the carrier of the dengue fever epidemic that has been sweeping the island.

But while battling the Aedes Aegypti, Dr Castro has not forgotten his traditional enemy, "imperialism." This week a Cuban Foreign Ministry note condemned "the expansionist, aggressive and criminal policy of the Zionist authorities and their imperialist supporters." It announced that Cuba is trying

to promote "with the movement of Nonaligned nations" concrete measures against Israel.

Havana's emphasis on the Nonaligned Movement flows naturally from the fact that Dr Castro is its leader. When Dr Castro became head of the movement at the Havana summit in October, 1979, his enemies expressed fears that he would haughtily impose his "pro-Soviet" will on the movement.

Time has shown, however, that while Cuban foreign policy maintains its own definition of events, Dr Castro has judiciously avoided battles within the Nonaligned Movement on questions that would inevitably split it, such as Kampuchea and Afghanistan.

Nor has Dr Castro pressed

his idea, which brought sharp clashes with Yugoslav and other contingents at the sixth Nonaligned summit, that the Soviet Union is the natural ally of the Third World.

He has instead concentrated his efforts as the Nonaligned leader on problems on which he believes he can find consensus in the movement.

One of these issues is the Israeli-Arab dispute. When the foreign minister of Cuba condemns Israel, the Camp David accords and supports the PLO, he is doing no more than following the line set down by heads of state and government at the sixth Nonaligned summit.

Another consensus issue is the Iraq-Iran war. Cuba's initiative in seeking an end to

the conflict, although unsuccessful, had broad support among Nonaligned countries who see the conflict between two fellow members as detrimental to the movement.

Dr Castro has also enhanced his prestige in the Nonaligned Movement by his call at the United Nations to pump \$300 billion into the Third World in the form of donations and long-term low-interest loans.

His measured remarks at the Third World economists' meeting in Havana in April also impressed many of the delegates. He condemned the arms race for putting the world on the brink of war and for absorbing money that could go to narrow the widening gap between "North" and "South."

Cuba itself feels threatened by what it sees as the breakdown of detente and the growing Cold War atmosphere. The April 6 US News and World Report article which said that "the taming of Fidel Castro is emerging as a high priority objective for the Reagan Administration," could not have been lost on the Cubans.

Although the Reagan Administration has taken little direct action against Cuba, Havana feels that it can happen and has been stepping up its defence preparedness.

What does irk Cubans is the fact that they have been excluded from the forthcoming "North-South" conference scheduled for Mexico. They blame their exclusion on the United States and see it as an

affront to the leader of the Nonaligned Movement and to Cuba itself.

For Washington at least, the bottom line is that Cuban troops must get out of Ethiopia and Angola, that the Cubans must stop supporting revolutionary movements and that it should stop being an ally of the Soviet Union.

Senior US officials have indicated that if Cuba changes its ways it can expect favoured treatment from Washington. Many seasoned diplomats here in Havana believe however that Cuba has a foreign policy that is not likely to be turned around by either pressures from Washington or by its own desire to build greater consensus in the Nonaligned Movement.