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## U S S R - C U B A - U . S .

## MOSCOW, HAVANA DEBUNK IDEA OF SOVIET COMBAT UNITS IN CUBA

A measured but firmly worded PRAVDA editorial article, released by TASS on the heels of Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin's 10 September meeting with Secretary Vance, has provided Moscow's first authoritative comment on recent statements by U.S. Administration officials and Congressional leaders on the issue of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba. The editorial article--paralleling in striking fashion an official TASS statement in October 1970 which rejected U.S. charges that the USSR was building a submarine base in Cuba--denied that there are Soviet combat units in Cuba and defended USSR-Cuban defense cooperation as an "inalienable right" of two sovereign states. Complaining that U.S. officials have not helped calm the situation but on the contrary have made matters worse, PRAVDA in effect has urged the Administration to handle the domestic political complications but has offered no insight into Soviet approaches to a diplomatic resolution. At the same time, the close parallels between the similarly unyielding 1970 TASS statement and PRAVDA's current response suggest the possibility of a similar approach to a solution. Moscow's avowal of resolute support for a close ally is to be expected in any case.

Like earlier Soviet and Cuban commentary, PRAVDA suggested that the primary motive of the campaign was a desire to embarrass Cuba as host of the nonaligned summit conference in Havana. Only secondarily did the paper bring up the matter of Senate SALT ratification proceedings--which Moscow previously had played in low key--by professing to see efforts by SALT opponents to use the issue to prevent, or at least complicate, the ratification process.

Building up to the PRAVDA response, Moscow pointedly called attention to the "global scale" of U.S. military deployment, decrying the presence of the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo as well as Western bases ringing the communist countries, and ventilating hackneyed charges of Pentagon plans to create "quick-reaction" forces for intervention abroad.

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PRAVDA EDITORIAL ARTICLE,  
1970 TASS STATEMENT

The 11 September PRAVDA editorial article, which came a week after Moscow first acknowledged the renewed U.S. debate on the issue, was remarkably similar in format to the 1970 TASS statement,\* with one important distinction in the treatment of the U.S. Administration. The circumspection shown now by PRAVDA--in contrast to TASS' more direct criticism of U.S. official spokesmen in 1970--suggests a desire to avoid further exacerbation of Soviet-U.S. relations over the current issue, a desire that may also have been reflected in the choice of an editorial article rather than an authorized TASS statement for what otherwise closely followed the 1970 format. By switching to a PRAVDA editorial article Moscow chose the most authoritative form of media commentary but one that is not formally an official expression of views.\*\*

+ Both PRAVDA now and TASS in 1970 complained of a propaganda campaign in American media echoed by members of Congress. TASS at that time addressed the substance of statements by official Pentagon and White House spokesmen which, it said, "opened" the campaign. PRAVDA by contrast maintained the discretion Moscow has displayed thus far in its treatment of statements by President Carter and Secretary Vance. It would seem, PRAVDA said, that the U.S. Government, "which of course knows the facts well," should have given the necessary explanations; "regrettably," however, "official representatives of the U.S. Government have followed a different course." Without explaining what the unidentified officials said, PRAVDA added that their statements "actually, so to speak, only add fuel to the fire."

+ PRAVDA then proceeded, as TASS had done, to rebut the U.S. charges. For 17 years, PRAVDA said, Soviet military personnel have been training Cuban servicemen at a center in Cuba, and the number and function of the Soviet personnel have not changed. Rejecting as groundless "all contentions about the arrival of 'organized Soviet combat units'" in Cuba, PRAVDA insisted that Soviet personnel in Cuba "do not and cannot present any threat" to the United States, whether by size or by functions.

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\* The October 1970 TASS statement is the most recent official Soviet statement relating to Cuba. After the 1962 missile crisis, TASS statements in 1966 and 1967 had denounced "new provocations by U.S. aggressive circles" with respect to an incident in the area of Guantanamo and alleged U.S. efforts to use the Organization of American States against Cuba.

\*\* The editorial article--which was broadcast in foreign languages including Spanish--was printed on the first page of PRAVDA, an unusual if not unique position for this vehicle, which normally appears on the inside pages.

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+ PRAVDA conveyed a firm insistence that the presence of Soviet troops in the context of Soviet-Cuban cooperation is an inalienable right of two sovereign states and that any attempt to restrict this right contradicts accepted international norms. Similarly, TASS in 1970 had maintained that Soviet port calls in Cuba were an inalienable right of sovereign states, universally recognized and confirmed by international practice.

+ Raising the question--as TASS had done--of the reason for the campaign, PRAVDA claimed that the "outcry" was timed primarily to coincide with the nonaligned summit conference and "not by chance" is being used to complicate the SALT ratification process.

+ PRAVDA cautioned in conclusion that "those who connive at" and inspire the "hostile" campaign should be aware of the responsibility they are assuming. TASS had warned in 1970 that "those who deliberately or irresponsibly" spread such "falsifications play into the hands of the foes of peace."

While noting that the United States had called into question Soviet observance of the 1962 U.S.-Soviet understanding, the 1970 TASS statement affirmed Soviet adherence to that agreement and "assumed" that the United States would also abide by it. While the understanding has not been at issue in the current dispute, Moscow raised it indirectly for the first time, and responded to SALT critics as well, in a broadcast to North America late on the 11th. Complaining that the United States has failed to heed the Soviet refutation, the broadcast asserted that U.S. officials have no grounds to distrust the Soviet Union's sincerity. "No one can reproach this country for violating its accords with the United States," it said, adding that "among other things," this pertains to the SALT I agreement. In other followup commentary Moscow has portrayed growing distress in the U.S. press and in political circles that the campaign may threaten the interests of the United States itself by hindering the SALT II ratification process.

#### EVOLUTION OF SOVIET RESPONSE

Moscow's customary sensitivity to its military activities in Cuba, as well as its circumspection on issues that might affect the SALT treaty ratification, had been underscored in its cautious, low-key treatment of the troop question. The first mention of the issue for the Soviet domestic audience came in an IZVESTIYA Washington correspondent's dispatch on the 7th reporting that Senator Church, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, had decided to "discontinue" committee discussions of the SALT II treaty and convene instead a special committee session on "the matter of the presence of Soviet troops in Cuba." The report noted that many senators viewed the decision as playing into the hands of treaty opponents. Earlier, Moscow radio's world service and a broadcast to North America on the

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5th had reported that Senator Church had "temporarily" postponed the committee's SALT discussion after meeting with President Carter and Secretary Vance.

Moscow's only reference to Secretary Vance's 5 September press conference statement came in a TASS pickup on the 7th of an editorial that day in the London DAILY TELEGRAPH. TASS cited the paper as pointing out that the Secretary had created a "mystery" with his statement about the presence of a "Soviet combat brigade in Cuba," when he "admitted" that "combat troops numbering 2,000 to 3,000 had been in Cuba for several years, possibly as many as 10 years." And it quoted the paper as saying that none of the theories as to the motive for his statement "seems entirely satisfactory." In briefly reporting President Carter's 7 September remarks to editors, Moscow's world service sidestepped the troop question, noting only that the President urged ratification of SALT II, which he said should be based on its own merits, and that he added that to link the treaty with "some action or inaction of the Soviets" would not be in the best interest of the American people.

A Soviet counterattack began developing on the 7th as Moscow replayed to foreign audiences, including Latin listeners, the line taken by Havana that there is no secret about Soviet assistance in training the Cuban army. At the same time, Soviet commentary began to focus on the U.S. military presence abroad. TASS New York correspondent Reshetilov, for example, denounced the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo, calling it of great "operational-tactical significance" for the Pentagon, and charged that "official data" showed the United States to maintain an "active military presence" in almost 30 countries. He noted that "sober-minded politicians" in the United States are expressing opposition to the "Pentagon's militaristic intrigues." And IZVESTIYA's Matveyev charged on the 8th that the Pentagon in the postwar years has permanently stationed from one-third to one-fourth of all regular military forces in foreign territories, particularly in West Europe and Asia--"on the approaches to the USSR and other states of the socialist community." Pentagon plans to form special forces for direct intervention abroad are not new, Matveyev said, but this makes them "no less dangerous for the process of detente."

Moscow's initial reaction to the current discussion, a commentary by TASS political observer Babenko on the 5th, ridiculed Senator Church, who, it said, "had 'discovered' 'approximately one brigade of Soviet troops' on Cuba" without the benefit of any optical devices. Moscow had taken a similarly derisory tack in July, when the troop issue was first raised by Senator Stone. A Vasilyev article in IZVESTIYA on 27 July indirectly associated the troop issue with the SALT debate and alluded to the combat nature of the troops. Claiming that Senator Stone suffered from nightmares about Cossacks preparing to land in Florida, Vasilyev said the senator had informed

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the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, then holding a hearing on SALT, that the Soviet Union "has sent combat-ready troops" to Cuba. Vasilyev indicated that the matter had been laid to rest when Defense Secretary Brown assured the committee there was no evidence of "any significant increase in the Soviet military presence in Cuba in the last few years."

Last fall's flurry over the supply of MIG-23's to Cuba had drawn a response by the pseudonymous A. Petrov in an 18 November PRAVDA article that evaded the issue of the plane's nuclear-delivery capability and attributed the "rumpus" to efforts of "supporters of the arms race" to arouse suspicion against the Soviet Union at a time when the SALT talks "have entered a decisive phase."

CUBAN REACTION      The first Cuban reaction came in a 6 September PRENSA LATINA commentary that scoffed at the U.S. "campaign" about the "alleged presence of Soviet combat troops" and, like Moscow, saw the American "accusation" as a maneuver directed against both Cuba and the nonaligned movement. PRENSA LATINA recalled the earlier "sensational scandal" in connection with the MIG-23 "combat planes" (which President Fidel Castro at the time--in a November 1978 press conference--had described as tactical planes, "absolutely defensive in nature.")

PRENSA LATINA maintained that Moscow's "generous" military aid to Havana and "Soviet advice to the Cuban army" were well known in Washington, and it forthrightly acknowledged that Cuban soldiers are "trained under the comradely aid of their Soviet brothers in modern tactics and military strategy and in the use and operation of defense arms of indisputable efficiency." Everything else, it said, is the product of "the delirious mind of some Yankee congressmen," and it assured U.S. senators that Soviet soldiers could never constitute a threat to anyone.

The Havana reference to Soviet training assistance is not unique: As far back as February 1970 a Cuban officer, speaking at a Havana observance of Soviet armed forces day, mentioned Soviet "advisers" and "specialists" who were helping "to increase the capabilities of our cadres and combatants in the use of the most modern and complex combat equipment."

Havana's only other available reference to the issue thus far came in an international service broadcast on the 8th noting that President Carter in a television statement repeated remarks made earlier by Secretary Vance on the "alleged presence" of Soviet combat troops. The broadcast gave no further details, adding merely that "Washington political circles" believe there is a "close relationship" between the troop issue and the Senate debate on the SALT treaty.

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