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ADC-SAFIRE COLUMN#

7 (COMMENTARY)

7 ESSAY: BREZHNEV'S BIG EAR#

7 BY WILLIAM SAFIRE#

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WASHINGTON - THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE 3,000-MAN SOVIET ARMORED BRIGADE IN CUBA IS TO PROTECT A MASSIVE NEW "COMMUNICATIONS INTERCEPT FACILITY," WHICH WILL GIVE THE RUSSIANS THE ABILITY TO LISTEN IN ON MOST UNITED STATES TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS AS WELL AS TO MONITOR TRANSMISSION OF DATA BETWEEN COMPUTERS AND FROM OUR SATELLITES AND MISSILES.

THE SOVIET COMBAT TROOPS HAVE SECONDARY PURPOSES - TO PROVIDE A "PRAETORIAN GUARD" FOR PRESIDENT CASTRO TO BLOCK ANY COUP ATTEMPT WHILE HIS MAIN FORCE IS ACTING FOR RUSSIA IN AFRICA; AND TO ESTABLISH A "TRIPWIRE" TO KEEP U.S. FORCES FROM RESPONDING TO CUBAN PROVOCATION. BUT THE ESSENTIAL ROLE IS TO GUARD THE MOST SOPHISTICATED NEW SOVIET ELECTRONIC INTELLIGENCE EQUIPMENT FROM EVERYONE, INCLUDING CUBANS.

THE SOVIET "BIG EAR" PRESSED AGAINST THE COAST OF THE UNITED STATES HAS BEEN UNDER CONSTRUCTION SECRETLY FOR SEVERAL YEARS AND IS SOON TO BECOME OPERATIONAL. THAT EXPLAINS THE TROOP BUILDUP; WITH THE MOST SENSITIVE EQUIPMENT GOES A SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE. THAT HAPPENED IN CUBA IN 1962; IN EGYPT UNTIL 1976; AND IN CUBA AGAIN TODAY; THE RUSSIANS NEVER COMPLETELY TRUST THEIR OVERSEAS ALLIES.

THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION ENCOURAGED THIS LARGE-SCALE INTRUSION INTO THE U.S. ATMOSPHERE BY NOT REACTING STRONGLY TO THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ELECTRONIC SURVEILLANCE FROM ATOP SOVIET DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS IN THE U.S. WHEN SEN. PATRICK J. MOYNIHAN PROTESTED SUCH TIMIDITY LAST YEAR; THE ADMINISTRATION EXPLAINED IT HAD BURIED TOP-SECRET COMMUNICATION WIRES FOR GOVERNMENT BUSINESS; OFFICIALS DID NOT SEEM TO CARE ABOUT PROTECTING THE CONVERSATIONS OF PRIVATE CITIZENS; OR SCIENTIFIC INTERCHANGE BY COMPUTERS.

NEWS OF THE NEW SOVIET INTELLIGENCE BASE IN CUBA BEGAN FILTERING INTO THE SENATE THIS SPRING FROM DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE EXPERTS ANGERED AT CUTBACKS IN OUR SURVEILLANCE OF CUBA.

SOME OF THIS INTELLIGENCE EVIDENTLY REACHED CARTER IN JUNE. ACCORDING TO A LETTER WRITTEN ON JULY 27 FROM SECRETARY OF STATE VANCE TO FLORIDA DEMOCRATIC SENATOR RICHARD STONE: "THE PRESIDENT RAISED THE QUESTION OF THE SOVIET PRESENCE IN CUBA WITH PRESIDENT BREZHNEV IN VIENNA (ON JUNE 15-16) AND MADE CLEAR TO HIM THAT A SOVIET BUILDUP WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT OUR RELATIONSHIP."

AT THAT POINT, THE SOVIET LEADER EITHER LIED TO CARTER OR IGNORED HIM; THE TWO LEADERS THEN EMBRACED FOR THE CAMERAS AND SIGNED SALT II.

BY MIDSUMMER, STONE - A RESPECTED, HARD-LINE VOICE ON THE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE - EVIDENTLY HAD REASON TO SUSPECT CARTER HAD BEEN BAMBOOZLED; OR THAT ADMINISTRATION HIGHER-UPS WERE IGNORING INTELLIGENCE WARNINGS. HE PRESSED SECRETARY VANCE FOR A WRITTEN RESPONSE; AND RECEIVED THE REMARKABLE JULY 27 LETTER WHICH CONTAINED THIS GUARANTEE:

"THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF ANY SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE OF THE SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN CUBA OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS OR OF THE PRESENCE OF A SOVIET MILITARY BASE."

AS WE NOW KNOW, THAT WAS UNTRUE. RARELY HAS A SECRETARY OF STATE SO FLATLY MISINFORMED THE SENATE. FINALLY, UNDER PRESSURE FROM FOREIGN RELATIONS CHAIRMAN CHURCH, STATE LAST WEEK WAS FORCED TO ASSERT IT HAD JUST LEARNED OF THE 3,000-MAN FORCE (THOUGH NOTHING HAS BEEN SAID PUBLICLY ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF THE FORCE TO PROTECT THE ELECTRONIC SPYING BASE).

IN A PANIC, ADMINISTRATION APOLOGISTS NOW CLAIM THAT "ELEMENTS" OF THE SOVIET FORCE HAVE BEEN IN CUBA SINCE THE 1960'S; UNNOTICED BY OUR CIA. CARTER INTELLIGENCE CHIEF STANFIELD TURNER, WHO DOWNPLAYED WARNINGS ON CUBA FROM HIS UNDERLINGS AND FOOLISHLY WENT ALONG WITH THE SHARP CURTAILMENT OF OUR CUBAN SURVEILLANCE UNTIL STONE'S MIDSUMMER REQUEST, HAS BEEN ELECTED WHITE HOUSE FALL GUY. HE MAY NOT SIT STILL FOR THAT; I AM TOLD THAT CIA WAS NOT THE SOURCE OF VANCE'S FALSE "NO EVIDENCE" GUARANTEE.

ALL THIS PUTS THE SOVIETS IN A PERFECT POSITION. IF WE REACT WITH ONLY A PEEBLE PROTEST, THEY WILL HAVE GAINED A CUBAN BASE FROM CARTER THAT THEY HAD BEEN DENIED BY KENNEDY AND NIXON.

BUT IF - AS IS MORE LIKELY - THE SENATE THREATENS TO HOLD UP SALT, AND CARTER GOES ON TELEVISION WITH A STAND-UP-TO-THE-RUSSIANS STEMMINDER, THEN BREZHNEV CAN PLAY THE BARGAINING CHIP HE HAS BEEN ALLOWED TO CREATE.

HAVING BROUGHT ABOUT THE CRISIS, THE SOVIETS WILL RESOLVE IT - AT A PRICE. WHEN CARTER STERNLY DEMANDS THE RUSSIANS WITHDRAW, BREZHNEV WILL PULL OUT MOST OF HIS COMBAT TROOPS - BUT NOT ALL; AND NOT HIS INTELLIGENCE BASE. IN ADDITION, HE WILL AGREE ONCE MORE NOT TO USE THE CIENFUEGOS NAVAL BASE TO SUPPLY SOVIET VESSELS.

IN RETURN FOR THEIR RESPONDING TO OUR "DEMANDS" WITH SUCH SWEET REASON, THE SENATE WILL BE EXPECTED TO PASS THE SALT TREATY WITHOUT REQUIRING A BUILDUP OF OUR DEFENSE FORCES.

AT THE SAME TIME, THE SOVIETS WILL HAVE BREATHED NEW LIFE INTO THE CARTER CANDIDACY. A FAKE-TOUGH PRESIDENT WHO CAN BE MANIPULATED THIS EASILY IS IN THE SOVIET INTEREST; A MODIFIED SOVIET PULLBACK WILL HELP SHORE HIM UP.

IN THIS LATEST TEST OF OUR WILL, THE SOVIETS CANNOT LOSE; THEY WILL EITHER GET A NEW INTELLIGENCE BASE AND CHANGE THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE CARIBBEAN; OR THEY WILL TAKE HALF A LOAF - THE SPY BASE WITH 2,000 "ADVISERS" BUT WITHOUT THE 3,000 COMBAT TROOPS - AND IN THE PROCESS HELP ALONG THE BEST U.S. PRESIDENT THE SOVIET UNION EVER HAD.

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