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How Good Was U. S. Intelligence?

Cuban Missile Bases Pose Serious Questions

Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON—How good was United States intelligence about the Soviet missile buildup in Cuba?

Did United States spies catch on to Khrushchev's sneak of offensive missiles into the island as soon as they should have? Or were they slow and did they get into getting caught only in the nick of time?

How good was the spies' information after they got it? Did they give earlier warnings which not even attention was paid?

Also, is it suggesting that this is a case where the intelligence should be explored by a committee when Congress meets in January.

THE American public has been told the truth—and at this point there is no evidence that it has not been told. The intelligence did a fast, masterful job of sniffing out the building of the missile scheme when they reached Cuba. The scheme was nipped in the bud, preventing the missiles from being launched.

Superiority Threatened

In a few more weeks of the big sneak without discovery apparently would have wiped out America's nuclear retaliatory deterrent superiority. Khrushchev would have been in position to poise his finger over the nuclear war button and been, to say the least, a lot tougher to deal with. The sobering realization of this has caused wonder about whether the United States intelligence network is working as well as it should.

IN THE PINCH, aerial reconnaissance came through with fast after-the-fact discovery of the installation of mobile medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) by the Soviets in Cuba. It disclosed the longer-range intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) base construction apparently before any of these missiles were ready for launch. And it found the Soviet IL-28 jet nuclear bombers while they were still being uncrated.

But observers are wondering how well the intelligence network is doing at the obviously more difficult job of finding out what the Soviets are doing in the

Undoubtedly, the United States position would be better now if American spies had learned of the Soviet plan to base offensive weapons in Cuba before the weapons got there and got set up and aimed at this country, as the Defense Department says happened in the case of the MRBMs.

IF THE SPIES HAD found out ahead of time and given warning, the United States might not now be having to negotiate the missiles out of Cuba. A blockade perhaps could have been clamped on before they got there. Or a mere warning to Khrushchev to stop their shipment might have been sufficient.

Some members of the Republican Party, where the most natural critics of the Democratic administration might be expected to be found, already have criticized the Kennedy administration's version of the discovery of the missile bases, or the action taken on this intelligence.

GOP Charges Politics

The Republican Congressional Campaign Committee, which was working hard at making an issue of Cuba long before the President ordered the Cuban blockade and revealed the proof of Soviet offensive missiles in Cuba, said President Kennedy was playing politics in the timing of his revelation of the missiles' presence and the announcement of the blockade—just two weeks before the congressional elections.

"THE STATEMENT THAT (his action) was only because the White House had just discovered the existence on Cuba of missiles capable of striking American cities sounded brazenly false inasmuch as this had been known for months," the Republican committee charged in a newsletter on Oct. 23. Democratic leadership called this a revealing, "unpeackable" claim.

In an Oct 23 letter, the committee said:

He (Kennedy) said that only on Oct 16 did he discover that missiles in Cuba were offensive. Sen. Kenneth Keating, R-NY, had said two weeks earlier that he had definite information the Russians were installing intermediate-range missiles in Cuba. Kennedy admitted in his nationally televised speech that the launching pads and airfields took months to build. Where was the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) when the preliminary work was going on?" SEN. HUGH SHERMAN, D-PA, said last week that he and other Republicans

same information was available to the Kennedy administration.

Claiming that missile bases were built in a week, Scott said. Those missile bases were there a long, long time before the President spoke" on Oct. 16 and told the nation he had received his first hard preliminary information of the missile buildup Oct 16.

Statements Lack Truth

He said, "The fault might have been in putting this information together and seeing that the President got it."

Some of these statements are lacking of proof, some ill-founded; some appear to disregard the difference between SAMs, surface-to-air missiles, and MRBMs and IRBMs.

Sen. Keating of New York has come through the Cuban crisis smelling like a rose, because he has been urging action against Soviet arms in Cuba for weeks and saying all along that the weaponry was offensive. Although he declines to say where he has been getting his information, he has either been getting mighty good information or is a mighty good guesser.

OTHER REPUBLICANS have been sounding off on Keating's information.

But Keating did not claim "for months" or even in early September to know that MRBMs or IRBMs or jet nuclear bombers were in Cuba.

And Mr Kennedy did not "admit" in his televised speech, as the Republican Congressional Committee said, that "the

launching pads and airfields took months to build." In making his point about Soviet deception, he said that the size of the Soviet "undertaking" in Cuba "makes clear that it has been planned for months." The evidence the administration has made public, in fact, indicates that the MRBM bases were built much faster.

On Aug 31 Keating said the Soviets had greatly stepped up shipments of men and equipment to Cuba since July, and he said 3,000 to 5,000 technicians or troops had arrived during the year.

"MORE OMINOUS reports suggest that the Soviets are constructing missile bases and sending over technicians and experts to man them," Keating said then.

On Sept 2 he urged the government to call upon the Organization of American States to send a mission to Cuba to investigate reports of Cuban missile bases.

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