

Today in National Affairs Baring of Cuban Armament Called Vindication of U-2

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WASHINGTON.

The U-2 has been vindicated. Without the photographs made from U-2 planes flying over Cuba, it might have been difficult to convince the members of the United Nations and the world in general that the safety of the United States was actually threatened by missiles aimed at us from Soviet bases 90 miles away.

Instead of manifesting a sense of humiliation in May, 1960, as if something wrong had been done, the United States should have staunchly and repeatedly defended the use of the U-2 by insisting that surveillance over the Soviet Union was absolutely necessary to protect the free world against surprise attack.

Incidentally, in the latest exchange of letters between the White House and the Kremlin, Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev complained about a U-2 flight recently beyond Alaska into Soviet territory. President Kennedy politely acknowledged that the pilot had made a "navigational error." Had it not been a moment of crisis in other parts of the world, this might have been an opportune occasion to defend the use of the U-2—especially in the Siberian area, which is so close to Alaska. For there is no better way to learn whether an attack is being mounted than by day-to-day photographing. Any substantial change in the progress of a build-up or in the mobilization of military forces can, by this method, be promptly detected.

The U-2 has done a marvelous job of photography in Cuba in recent weeks. While the U-2 flights were discontinued over the Soviet Union in 1960, they were not abandoned wherever else they have been useful. Just what do the U-2 photographs show? They do not reveal such things as the kind of troops on the ground, but there are many objects which are too large to be concealed. The appearance of things on one day can be compared with what has been introduced on the scene the next day, and so on. Constant surveillance is necessary in the photographic operation.

It takes a big staff of technical experts to analyze the photographs brought back by the U-2's. Thousands of feet of motion picture film are obtained and enlarged many times. Perhaps only a few feet selected from many reels tell the vital story.

But the U-2 alone cannot do the whole job of detecting enemy preparations for military attack. Secret agents, operating inside a country, are absolutely necessary. Also, evaluation must be impartial and without any preconceived notions by Administration officials as to what policy the Administration would like to follow. A debate has arisen here as to when the Pentagon and the White House really found out about the Soviet missiles in Cuba, and why, if known earlier, something wasn't done about it sooner than Oct. 21 and 22.

Authoritative sources say that the Washington government knew about the buildup from the time it began in August and was kept constantly informed by secret agents. Large crates were seen being unloaded from ships and frequent reports were received from the field. Then why was the risk taken and no move made earlier to

checkmate the Soviets? Why were 400 reporters and newscasters from all parts of the country told by high officials of the State Department at a special briefing on Monday, Oct. 15, at mid-day that "the threat in Cuba is not now a military threat" and that the United States had ruled out either invasion or blockade. This continued to be the official word to the press for seven days, even though the U-2 photographs were analyzed and the "hard core" of evidence was available on Tuesday, Oct. 16.

There has been no satisfactory answer to the question of why a risk to the national safety was taken for so many days in a nuclear age. Prime Minister Macmillan has just told the British Parliament that President Kennedy made his decision on Oct. 20. What would have been the plight of the United States if Khrushchev or Castro had decided to fire the missiles or launch planes in a surprise attack on Oct. 15? It would have been of little avail for the Administration then to have argued that it was still studying the "hard core" of evidence.

Also, why was the press misled for a least six days after the U-2 photographs were examined at the White House and State Department? President Kennedy went campaigning on Thursday of that same week and didn't make any public announcement of a change in policy until Monday, Oct. 22.

The fact is that the United States government did know in mid-August what was happening and what it could mean militarily. That's what its intelligence system is for, and there is every reason to believe that the CIA and military intelligence units have been functioning efficiently and effectively in the Cuban situation for many months. Policy-making is quite another matter.

It still is a mystery why the Administration did not properly evaluate the data it had prior to Tuesday, Oct. 16, and waited so long before acting. Doubtless an opportunity will be afforded next January for Congressional committees to discuss in executive session all the facts, just as happened when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee investigated the Eisenhower administration's handling of the U-2 flight over the Soviet Union in 1960. For the representatives of the people ought to be accurately informed whether the lives of the American people were or were not safeguarded from August to October 1962, when our principal adversary did establish missile bases in Cuba.

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