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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



The USSR's Intentions
with Respect to its
Military Presence in Cuba

13 December 1962



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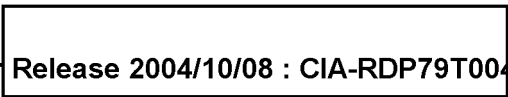
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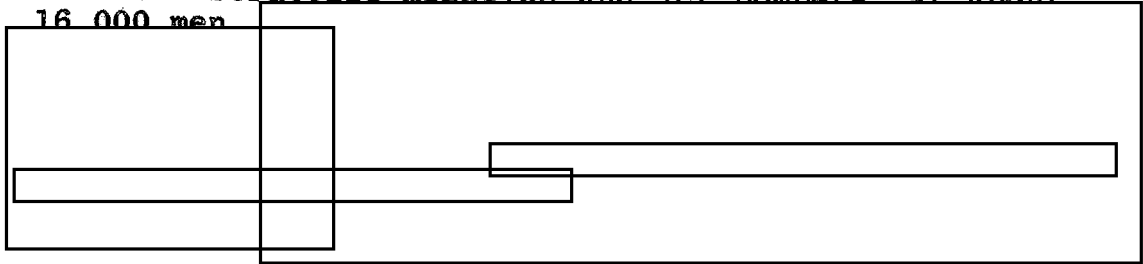
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

MEMORANDUM: The USSR's Intentions with Respect to its Military Presence in Cuba

1. This paper discusses the evidence whether the Soviets have decided to remove their remaining military forces and weapons systems from Cuba. It concludes that it is too early to decide among three possibilities: that the Soviets might decide to withdraw these assets gradually over a rather extended period of time; that they might have decided to keep them indefinitely; and that they have not yet made up their minds. All these possibilities hold the chance of further action against the interests of the US, particularly with respect to action against US surveillance of the island.

2. We estimate Soviet forces in Cuba, following withdrawals of about 4,000 personnel associated with the strategic missiles and jet bombers, at about 16,000 men



Gradual Withdrawal

3. The USSR might decide to withdraw a large part of its forces, and in particular the armored combat groups and surface-to-air missile systems, on the grounds that one of their original justifications --defense of strategic missiles--had disappeared. They could reason that their continued large military presence subjected them to US pressures, prevented a windup of the Cuban crisis, and perpetuated the risk of future military involvement with the US, all without any compensating strategic advantages.

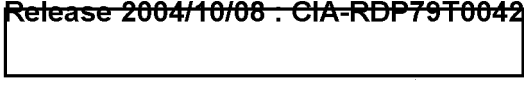
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4. There is very little evidence pointing to such a Soviet decision. The cruise missile site at La Sierra was dismantled in late November, but its equipment is still in Cuba and photography [redacted] shows that the other three sites of this type remain operational. Khrushchev has given a vague assurance concerning unspecified future withdrawals, but we have detected no indications of preparation for any further withdrawals since the departure of the last 15 of the 42 IL-28s on 7 December. This lack of evidence does not, however, negate the possibility that the Soviets have taken a decision on substantial withdrawals in the future. It may be that, having rushed the strategic missiles and jet bombers out in order to satisfy the most urgent US demands, they now intend to stretch out further withdrawals in order to avoid an impression of weakness and to minimize the resulting damage to their relations with Castro.

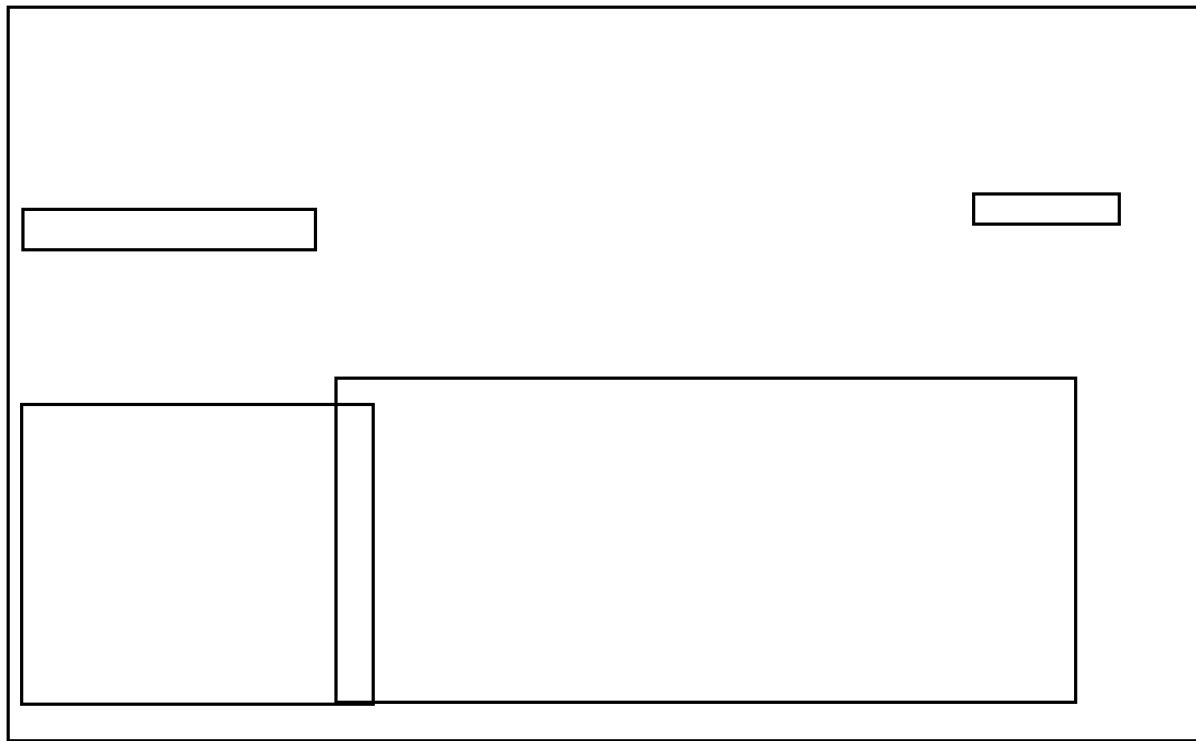
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No Further Withdrawals

5. The Soviets might decide to keep in Cuba all of their forces now there, or a great part of them. They might think this decision essential to a rebuilding of their relations with the Castro regime. They might also consider that it would contribute to deterring any future US military action against the island.

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No Decision Yet

8. It is also possible that the Soviets are still postponing decisions about the future of their military presence in Cuba. The question where the USSR's best interests lie in this matter is a complicated one, apart from the acute problems of relations with Castro, on the one hand, and the US on the other. Thus they may still be temporizing and attempting to gauge the longer-term pressures and prospects attached to either alternative.

Attack on US Overflights :

9. Whichever of these three possibilities is correct, the problem of US overflights is a particularly thorny question for the Soviets. They almost certainly estimate that, if they shot down a US plane with an SA-2 missile, the Cuban crisis would be renewed in a drastic fashion. On the other hand, they are almost certainly still under strong pressure from Castro to defend the sovereignty of Cuban airspace. The USSR for its own part desires to deny the US any special rights with respect to Cuba and to prevent the collection of photographic intelligence on its forces there. The Soviets will continue to encounter these problems under all of the policies suggested above save one which calls for early and large-scale withdrawals, including the SAM system.

10. The Soviets probably estimate a substantial risk at present that the US would make a military response to any shootdown, attacking a SAM site as a minimum. After a time, however, they may come to believe that the crisis has dissipated sufficiently to minimize these risks. They might reason that, having withdrawn the weapons condemned as "offensive"

by the President, they could pose before the world as the more cooperative side in the liquidation of the Cuban crisis. This line of reasoning might lead them to attack overflights in the name of Cuban sovereignty on the calculation that the US, fearing that it would incur the major blame for a new crisis, would limit its response to non-military measures.

11. We conclude that, so long as the Soviets estimate that a military response is likely, they will not attack an overflight. Even though they might calculate that this sequence of events would do great damage to US political standing in the world, they would see little profit in reviving at any early date a military confrontation in which they would again labor under a grave disadvantage of power. If they decide that a military response is unlikely, however, the chances of an attack against US reconnaissance aircraft would rise substantially.

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