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Page A-3

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Tried to Halt Zaire Invasion?

Disbelief Reported Reason Castro Cable Not Revealed

Associated Press

The Carter administration reportedly did not disclose a statement by Fidel Castro that he tried to head off a bloody attack by rebels on Zaire's Shaba province because it did not believe Castro was telling the truth.

Senate sources said the Cuban leader informed the United States four days after the Katangan rebels invaded Zaire that he had prior knowledge of the attack and tried to head it off.

That appears to support President Carter's claim that Cuba was aware of the invasion plans. But it casts doubt on his statement that the Cubans did nothing to prevent the attack.

YESTERDAY, Deputy White House press secretary Rex Granum declined to comment on the matter. And Mary Ann Bader, a State Department spokeswoman, said, "It is not our practice to comment on diplomatic exchanges."

Castro made his comments May 17 to Lyle F. Lane, the top U.S. diplomat in Havana, who relayed them to the State Department in a secret cable, sources said Saturday night.

The sources, who asked not to be named, said CIA Director Stansfield Turner confirmed the contents of the cable after Sen. George McGovern, D-S.D., read a copy of it to a closed meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Friday.

The sources quoted Turner as saying the cable had not been disclosed publicly because Carter administra-

tion officials did not believe Castro was telling the truth.

Carter charged ~~May 25~~ that Cuba shared with Angola a responsibility for the attack.

"WE BELIEVE that Cuba had known of the Katangan plan to invade and obviously did nothing to restrain them from crossing the border," Carter said in a statement that he read to a news conference in Chicago.

Castro claimed that after learning early in April of the impending invasion, he tried to persuade the Angolan government of President Agostinho Neto to put a stop to it, the sources said. But Castro was unsuccessful, they said, partly because the Angolan president was ill and staying in the Soviet Union.

On May 13, the rebel Katangans captured the copper-mining city of Kolwezi and killed hundreds of black and white civilians. The rebels eventually were dislodged from Kolwezi and driven back into Angola by a combined force of troops from France and Belgium as well as those from Zaire. The United States provided logistical support.

Sen. Dick Clark, D-Iowa, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on Africa, referred to the cable in a telephone interview Saturday night.

"The thing that I find disturbing is that the president didn't bring it out and let the Congress and public decide (on Castro's truthfulness)," Clark said.