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The US-USSR Understanding on Cuba

The US-USSR Understanding resulting from the 1962 Cuban missile crisis has never been embodied in formal documents signed by both sides. The Understanding developed from a number of exchanges between President Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev and between their representatives. Some exchanges were written, others were oral. They extended from October 1962 to October 1963. Subsequently, in 1970, the Understanding was clarified in certain respects through another series of oral and written exchanges between the two governments.

The Understanding consists of a Soviet undertaking not to introduce "offensive weapons" into Cuba and a US pledge not to invade Cuba. It applies to nuclear weapons and to missiles, bombers, and other delivery systems capable of launching a strategic nuclear attack. In the 1970 clarification, the Soviets further agreed not to establish a naval base in Cuba. This appears to apply to the servicing in or from Cuba of submarines and surface combatants capable of carrying nuclear weapons that can be used for strategic attack and to facilities in Cuba for servicing such vessels.

Over the years, the Soviets have persistently tested the limits of the Understanding. They have carried out naval task force visits to Cuba of varying duration and using varying combinations of vessels. They are assisting Cuba in constructing a naval facility at Cienfuegos, the purpose of which is unknown, and have delivered to Cuba increasingly sophisticated but apparently non-nuclear weaponry, such as MiG-23 aircraft.

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