

10 September 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Staff Meeting Minutes of 10 September 1979

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The Director chaired the meeting. [ ]

McMahon reported briefly on the following:

-- The Soviets have 3600 troops in Kabul, Afghanistan to protect Soviet civilians and other military personnel. He said also insurgents had captured four Soviets including a colonel and a major during the fall of Asmar several weeks ago.

-- President Marcos had instructed the Philippine delegation to the Nonaligned Conference to enter into an understanding with Nonaligned members that his government does not plan to renew agreement in 1991 re U.S. bases in the Philippines. This is intended by Marcos to gain observer status within the Nonaligned movement. 25X1

[ ]

Taylor reported his office is "hip-deep" in preparing the 1981 budget submission to OMB this week. [ ] 25X1

Hetu commented briefly on yesterday's Washington Post article: "The 'Brigada:' An Unwelcome Sighting in Cuba" by Don Oberdorfer (attached). Mr. Carlucci noted the article included a lot of detail which he felt certain Oberdorfer did not get from us. [ ] 25X1

Clarke reported [ ] NIO/EA has returned to academia and that [ ] will take on Nat's account for the time being. [ ] 25X1

Clarke said he would be meeting with the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel today and tomorrow. The Director noted his regret that he will not be able to meet with the Panel due to his schedule. Clarke said he would explain to the Panel. [ ] 25X1

Mr. Carlucci called to Clarke's attention David Aaron's 7 September memorandum requesting by 14 September an analysis and assessment of the Nonaligned Movement proceedings in Hayana. Clarke said an analysis was already underway. [ ] 25X1

Clarke reported on a Presidential request for the NID distribution list. The Director said he had seen and agreed with the response prepared by Clarke and noted the cover memorandum was especially useful. The Director asked Mr. Carlucci to pay particular attention to this topic and explained that it would be difficult to cope with any White House-directed reduction in distribution. Relatedly, the Director discussed briefly with Silver the fulfilling of our responsibility under EO 12036 to keep appropriate officials informed, including the Hill, and in this regard, the meaningful role of the NID. [ ]

25X1

The Director briefly discussed Martin Schram's article--"Chapter Two: Response: Avoiding a Crisis Time"--in yesterday's Washington Post (attached). Relatedly, Clarke noted how well [ ] handled the behind the scene activity during the public unfolding of the Soviet troop situation in Cuba. [ ]

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Silver reported a setback on the Agee situation (see Staff Minutes of 7 September). He said after having pressured Justice to act if Agee appeared in Washington, he was called by Justice on Friday to let them know the moment Agee might be sighted--in order to serve a civil suit. Silver said the information source that Agee might appear had suddenly dried up and the responsible NOC had gone away for the weekend and could not be reached. Mr. Carlucci said he does not favor a civil suit, that legislation would be more meaningful regarding Agee, et al. The Director said, however, that he wants us to keep pressing Justice to action--to let people know how serious we are on this matter. Silver said if we could get State and Justice to agree, revocation of Agee's passport would be a very effective curb on Agee's activities. [ ]

25X1

May reported Don Wortman's father died in Iowa on Saturday and that funeral arrangements are set for Wednesday, 12 September; May said he has additional details if needed. He reported also [ ] is in Georgetown Hospital after suffering a coronary but appears to be doing well. [ ]

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May explained recent power outages at Headquarters which will put us at reduced emergency capability during a repair period of several months; he said some computers and commo activities may be impacted. Lastly, May said as of 30 September, [ ] personnel have or will have announced retirement; this compares with [ ] for all of 1978 and that up to [ ] more retirements can be expected by year end. [ ]

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TOP SECRET

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The Director noted the upcoming World Administrative Radio Conference and his concern for any impacts that may result; he said, for example, COMSAT's new way of doing business has already impacted us. (It was later learned OSI has completed assessment of the current situation and will be forwarding same shortly to the Director.) [redacted]

25X1

The Director suggested a think piece be prepared by NFAC on why the Soviets are reportedly changing their position re the Ayatollah Khomeini. Mr. Carlucci noted the damage that could result if such a piece were leaked; a brief discussion followed and Clarke will have NIO [redacted] prepare a background piece for the DCI, after which dissemination will be reviewed.

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Attachments (2)

SECRET

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE A-1WASHINGTON POST  
9 SEPTEMBER 1979

# The 'Brigada': An Unwelcome Sighting in Cuba

By Don Oberdorfer

Washington Post Staff Writer

On Friday, Aug. 17, a U.S. spy satellite in orbit over the Caribbean trained its high-powered lenses on a tract of rugged country near the southern coast of Cuba. The pictures transmitted electronically to the ground were examined by photo interpreters in offices scattered around Washington. They revealed the tanks, artillery, trucks and tents of a military unit on field maneuvers.

The photographs were of grave significance, for a reason known only to a handful of U.S. intelligence officials: A few days before, they had been tipped off that a Soviet combat unit stationed near Havana planned maneuvers across the island at the time and place where the satellite cameras trained their lenses for high-resolution zoom shots.

On Aug. 20, another satellite mission over Cuba found the maneuver area deserted and the heavy artillery equipment parked once more in two inconspicuous areas a few miles west of Havana that are the suspected base camps of a Soviet brigade.

The pictures of the Russian guns of August, together with confirming data that still are secret, ended an internecine argument of long standing among U.S. intelligence agencies and officials. Most of the skeptics and the doubters now agree that a Soviet combat force of several thousand men has been stationed in Cuba for many months—perhaps for many years.

This unavoidable conclusion has touched off a new Soviet-American confrontation, endangered the embattled strategic arms limitation treaty between the superpowers, and has posed a new challenge to the sagging political fortunes of President Carter.

Last Friday afternoon, three weeks after satellite photographs ended an argument and began a new crisis, a somber Carter appealed to the nation from the White House for "calm and a sense of proportion" in equal measure with "firmness and strength."

In the public metaphor of high officialdom, the prob-

lem of finding a unit of 2,000 to 3,000 Russian soldiers on a Caribbean island of 10 million persons and 190,000 Soviet-equipped Cuban troops was a "jigsaw puzzle" of excruciating difficulty. While there is no doubt that the challenge was formidable, it is also true that only a few people and a tiny fraction of American intelligence resources were devoted, until recently, to fitting together this unexpected and unwelcome picture.

The origins of the Soviet effort are obscure, but top officials of several U.S. intelligence agencies suspect that the starting point was the Russian buildup of 1962—17 years ago—when Moscow put offensive missiles, bombers and about 20,000 first-line troops in Cuba.

The resolution of that missile crisis, perhaps the most dangerous superpower confrontation of the nuclear age, required the removal from Cuba of the Soviet offensive weapons and of all Soviet forces associated with the missiles and bombers. According to those who have

studied the diplomatic exchanges and understandings—some of which have never been made public in full detail—there was no agreement covering Soviet ground forces in general.

Nor was there much attention to the subject then or in most of the years since. An official who recently reviewed the record of highly confidential U.S. deliberations and action in the missile crisis, a stack of documents several inches thick, could find only 1½ pages which made reference to Soviet ground troops. A top Central Intelligence Agency official said last week, "Soviet ground forces in Cuba have not been a priority item . . . they weren't considered a threat to the United States."

It was well known in Washington and no secret in Havana that hundreds of Soviet military advisers—1,500 by one estimate—were left behind in 1962. Beginning in the early 1970s, there were also well-documented reports that some of these troops were on hand to guard and operate a large and highly sophisticated Soviet electronic eavesdropping station established on the Caribbean island.

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On the basis of retrospective hints, NSA officials now believe it is plausible and possible that a Soviet ground combat unit has remained in Cuba, under the nose of the United States, since the buildup and the withdrawal of 1962. The evidence is slender and inconclusive, however.

Beginning at least a decade ago, U.S. intelligence received periodic and fragmentary reports of Soviet ground force units of a few thousand men in Cuba. These reports were not taken at face value and raised no alarm signals at the top of the government. CIA officials said it is doubtful, in fact, that they ever got to the top.

One reason was that in the late '60s and early '70s, the intelligence community (like the rest of the government) was obsessed with Vietnam. Intelligence "assets," both human and technological, were directed at that part of the world; there was little left over for intelligence operations aimed at Cuba.

By the mid-'70s the Vietnam adventure had ended but there was still interest in Cuba. The National Security Agency picked up references to a Soviet "brigada" in Cuba in 1976. But nothing was done about it; the information, in effect, was ignored.

Several explanations are now being offered.

First, the analysts didn't know what to make of references to a brigade. It is an aberrational form of military unit in the Soviet army. Most Soviet ground forces are organized into regiments and divisions. Only four "brigades" were known to exist in the entire 1,200,000-man army—a ceremonial unit in East Berlin, a unit in East Germany, and two units in Mongolia, whose functions are still unknown.

So the intercepted "brigada" chatter out of Cuba set off no alarm in the intelligence community in 1976. Analysts assumed that somebody was mistaken or confused.

Second, the Soviets went to unusual lengths to conceal the presence of their ground unit among the Cubans. The Russian colonel in charge and his men, who are believed to serve tours of two to three years in Cuba, were never mentioned in public by either Moscow or Havana.

The brigade was split between two separate locations resembling Cuban camps a few kilometers from one another near Los Palacios, 60 miles west of Havana, rather than camped together in recognizable Soviet style. The unit maintained a high degree of radio silence and only rarely conducted maneuvers, according to American officials.

Third, there was very little U.S. interest in the subject. Without indications of "sufficient weight to warrant a presumption" of a Soviet combat unit in Cuba, "we weren't looking for it," according to presidential national security affairs adviser Zbigniew

Brzezinski. Until this summer, the National Security Agency, which is a very large organization, had only one analyst assigned fulltime to material from Cuba.

The first break in the process of discovery came in early 1978, when "a happy accident" brought to U.S. intelligence within a few days two specific pieces of information about a Soviet brigade in Cuba. An intensified study was ordered. It produced photographs of modern Soviet military equipment deployed in camps near Los Palacios and photographs of a Soviet training mission at a Cuban gunnery range in the western part of the island.

From this evidence, officials at the Defense Intelligence Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency drew the wrong conclusion. They ruled that the military equipment was assigned to Cuban, instead of Soviet, forces and that the "brigade" bivouac areas were Cuban camps. Some lower-level U.S. intelligence officials strongly disagreed with that assessment.

Late in 1978, U.S. concern over the arrival in Cuba of modern Mig23 combat aircraft prompted the first U.S. spy plane flights over the island since Carter called them off in 1977 as a gesture of goodwill to Havana. The Mig23 incident heightened U.S. interest and surveillance, but the overflights were not continued on a regular basis.

In March this year, a White House memo signed by Brzezinski ordered CIA Director Stansfield Turner to assess the size, location, capabilities and purposes of Soviet ground forces in Cuba. One of the practical results was to send NSA's lone Cuban analyst back through the agency's voluminous computerized files for bits of pertinent information. After a second White House memo a month later, other intelligence organizations joined the search.

By mid-June the NSA analyst completed a study which, in retrospect, was a landmark in the search for the Russian brigade. For the first time an accumulation of evidence argued convincingly that, at a minimum, a Soviet brigade headquarters had been established in Cuba.

The study set off a fierce dispute within the intelligence field, in part because of its implications for U.S. policy. NSA and Army intelligence argued that a combination of photography, signal intelligence and a rare bit of human intelligence pointed unmistakably to the presence of a clandestine Soviet brigade. According to informed sources, CIA, DIA, State Department, Air Force and Navy intelligence chiefs disagreed.

The basic information was available to all the agencies, and thus the issue was one of interpretation and evaluation. With Carter signing the long-awaited SALT II treaty with Soviet

President Leonid Brezhnev in Vienna in mid-June and the administration preparing for a battle royal over Senate ratification, the political implications of belatedly discovering Soviet combat troops in Cuba were grave. According to a senior intelligence officer, his superiors said repeatedly, "We've got to save SALT, whatever you do keep that in mind."

An early July review of the intelligence did nothing to resolve the deadlock. NSA and the Army were even firmer in their insistence that there were strong and precise indications of a Soviet combat force. Other agencies were unmoved. The compromise result, engineered by CIA's Turner, was a mid-July agreement that a Soviet force was present as a separate unit, not part of an advisory group. But there was no agreement on the size, organization or mission of the Soviet force.

During the July deliberations the Army argued that the official report should take note of the purposes of the Soviet unit, including the possibility that its mission is to guard existing or potential nuclear weapons. According to an official present at the coordinating meeting, Turner telephoned a high Army officer to argue against any such statement, even as a dissenting view.

"We heard only one end of the conversation, but that consisted of firm statements that Army was being unreasonable and that it should fall off

He [Turner] in effect ordered them to cave in" and the Army did so, the participant reported. A CIA spokesman, asked about the incident, said Turner had intervened to keep "gratuitous speculation" out of the coordinated intelligence report.

One result of the mid-July coordinated report was a memo from Carter to Turner directing stepped-up intelligence surveillance to determine the nature and purpose of the Soviet ground unit, if one in fact existed, and authorizing a diversion of resources

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from other areas of the world if necessary. A very heavy effort involving satellite photography and other highly sophisticated technology was mounted. The same concentration of effort, if carried out on a worldwide basis for a year, according to an informed official, would cost about \$100 billion, nearly as much as the entire Department of Defense budget.

Another result of the intelligence controversy and compromises of July was a series of leaks to members of Congress and news organizations. On July 11, Sen. Richard Stone (D-Fla.) questioned the Joint Chiefs of Staff about Soviet forces in Cuba, and on July 15 he began a series of public charges about Soviet military activities there. On July 20, ABC News reported that Soviet combat forces were in Cuba. These reports attracted little

public attention, and were denied in essence by official spokesmen.

Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on July 17, reported that there was no evidence of a "substantial increase" in the size of the Soviet military presence in Cuba over the past several years. He added that apart from the Soviet military advisory group, "our intelligence does not warrant the conclusion that there are any other significant Soviet military forces in Cuba." The same language was used by Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance on July 27 in replying for the administration to a letter from Stone.

These cautiously hedged statements did not define such terms as "significant" nor did they reveal that a crash effort had been mounted at presiden-

tial directive because of strong indications of a Soviet brigade in Cuba. Stone called the Vance letter "a whitewash." Another official said the Vance-Brown statements contained part truths which are commonplace in public statements on controversial intelligence studies.

In the early part of August, the intelligence drive paid off with a report that the Soviet brigade planned maneuvers across the island near the middle of the month. Also in early August, perhaps in response to such findings, Carter directed, through Brzezinski and Turner, that intelligence on Soviet forces in Cuba be stepped up to "highest priority."

It was this effort that paid off on Aug. 17, in a fraction of a second and the snap of a shutter high above the Cuban countryside.

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9 SEPTEMBER 1979

# Chapter 2:

## Response: Avoiding a Crisis Tone

By Martin Schram

Washington Post Staff Writer

While satellite pictures of the Soviet brigade in Cuba were being analyzed in Washington, the president of the United States was floating down the Mississippi aboard the old paddle-wheeler, the Delta Queen.

Jimmy Carter didn't need any more bad news. His U.N. ambassador, Andrew Young, had just resigned in a flap over Young's contacts with the Palestinians. That incident set off re-cremations between American blacks and American Jews.

Robert Strauss, Carter's Middle East envoy, was in a jurisdictional dispute with Cyrus R. Vance, the secretary of state, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, the national security affairs adviser.

There was the continuing bad news from the public opinion polls; his energy program and his SALT pact were embattled in Congress; there was lingering fallout from the Cabinet shakeup.

It was not until Aug. 23 that the president was informed about the brigade in Cuba. That day he was in Hannibal, Mo., where he reminisced about the Mark Twain era.

The night before, press secretary Jody Powell had explained that the president was on top of his job and that "it doesn't mean a damn bit of difference where the president is — in the White House or on the banks of the Mississippi."

In any case, the report on the brigade reached Carter as part of the daily intelligence briefing he received from the CIA.

The information was sent to Carter via a mobile communications center set up on the Delta Queen. It was a secure communications channel.

Carter sent word back to Brzezinski in Washington that all of the information on Soviet ground forces in Cuba should be assembled and that an interagency meeting should be held at the White House to discuss the matter.

Almost a week later, that meeting was held. As a senior administrator official recalls it, it was of no importance that it took so long to pull together the military, intelligence and diplomatic records and data.

"This was something of significant concern to us," he said, "but it was not a matter of imminent crisis or danger. The troops had been there for some time. It was just that now we had to address it diplomatically."

The group that met in the Situation Room in the basement of the White House consisted of top-level officials from the intelligence community, the State and Defense departments and the National Security Council.

For the officials gathered around the table, it had already been an August far more eventful than they had envisioned or wanted. Vance had been forced to interrupt his vacation at Martha's Vineyard once before for a quick 24-hour visit to Washington to see Strauss, Vice President Mondale, and Brzezinski in a meeting that was part show-and-tell and part showdown.

Now, on Aug. 28, was back again, his vacation officially over, and awaiting him was the diplomatic snarl over the Soviet ballerina who was sitting on an Aeroflot airliner grounded at New York's Kennedy airport, and the undiplomatic snarl of details in Time magazine about the in-fighting of Strauss versus Vance versus Brzezinski, which read like Strauss and Brzezinski versus Vance, which infuriated the secretary of state.

For Vance, the Soviet brigade in Cuba was the issue of first priority. The officials decided to press the matter through diplomatic channels.

On the afternoon of Aug. 29, Undersecretary of State David D. Newsom called Soviet Deputy Ambassador Vladilen Vasev (Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin was on home leave in the Soviet Union.) Newsom told Vasev that the United States had conclusive evidence of the presence of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba, and that this was a matter of great concern to the United States. He said that Vance would want to address the matter with Dobrynin upon his return.

In conjunction with the Newsom-Vasev meeting, officials at the U.S. diplomatic interest section in Havana were directed to take the matter up simultaneously with the Cuban foreign ministry. But it turned out that the U.S.

section chief in Havana, Wayne Smith, was unable to obtain an appointment with the Cuban officials until Sept. 1. By that time the presence of the brigade had become public knowledge.

Carter administration officials initially had planned to postpone the disclosure of the brigade, hoping to deal with the matter first through quiet diplomacy. "There was never going to be a way to hold it," said one official, "only a question of whether you could hold it temporarily until you had a reply from the Russians. If so, you would have been able to go to the public with some disturbing news but some Russian reply."

But this was not to be.

On Aug. 27, the National Intelligence Daily, a classified U.S. government document with a daily circulation to several hundred officials with top security clearance—including the Senate and House Intelligence committees—carried an account of the confirmation that the Soviet brigade was operating in Cuba.

On Aug. 30, in the State Department an interagency meeting of undersecretaries and assistant secretaries was held to decide how and when the matter should be made public. They decided that a few key members of Congress would be informed later that day and the next day, State Department spokesman Hodding Carter would announce, in a manner that would convey concern but no sense of crisis or alarm, that the presence of the Soviet brigade had been confirmed and that U.S. concern had been expressed to the Soviets, and that the diplomatic negotiations were proceeding.

The State Department spokesman would handle it rather than the White House press secretary because, the Carter officials agreed, this would help keep the matter relatively low key so that it would not be viewed as an issue of crisis proportions. "The idea was to keep the president away from it," said one administration official.

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But events moved faster than did the administration. For on the same day that the officials were discussing how to make the information public, a representative of Aviation Week magazine queried both the departments of State and Defense about the confirmation that a Soviet brigade was in Cuba, an action indicating that the publication had a detailed account of the intelligence report.

That afternoon, Undersecretary of State Newsom began contacting members of Congress.

He called Sen. Richard Stone (D-Fla.), who had been raising questions about the presence of a Soviet brigade in Cuba more than a month ago. Stone, who was home in Tallahassee at the time, recalls that Newsom told him: "We've concluded our gathering of the intelligence information and we're ready to tell you what we've learned."

But Stone says he told Newsom not to bother. "I said, 'Don't tell me let's do it in person when I get back to Washington.'"

Newsom also telephoned Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Frank Church (D-Idaho) and ranking committee Republican Jacob Javits (N.Y.), House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Clement Zablocki (D-Wis.) and ranking Republican William Broomfield (Mich.), Senate Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D-W. Va.) and Senate Minority Leader Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.). Pentagon officials contacted Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John Stennis (D-Miss.) and House Armed Services Committee Chairman Melvin Price (D-Ill.).

Of all the calls, the one to Church is the one that will be remembered—because it was through Church that the world would first hear of the presence of the Soviet brigade.

Church earned a reputation for being a foreign policy liberal and a dove on Vietnam; and he has been finding out now that these liberal credentials are doing him no good in conservative Idaho, where he is expected to have a difficult time winning reelection next year.

As Church recalls Newsom's call, "he said that he wanted me to know that the existence of this brigade had been confirmed. He said he wanted me to know before I read it in the newspapers within 24 to 48 hours." Church says he took this to mean Newsom thought it would be leaked to the press. And that, he says, is one reason why he decided to tell the press.

The other reason, Church says, is that it was his committee that issued the statement in July, based on testimony from Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, that there was no Soviet buildup in Cuba, a statement that certainly was misleading, in retrospect, if not untrue.

So an hour later, Church called the secretary of state. He asked for some more data and then he says he told Vance he intended to make the information public. Church says Vance's only response was: "I know you'll use your best judgment in what you say."

Church rounded up a few local reporters and invited them to join him in the living room of his home in Idaho. There he unloaded to the assembled Idaho reporters one of the year's major foreign policy stories.

His words were clearly hard line.

He called for "the immediate removal of all Russian combat units from Cuba."

Church now bristles at suggestions that he publicized the information (before the State Department spokesman could) for his own political reasons. He has seen those comments from Senate colleagues and he calls them "cheap shots."

He says: "I can't believe the president intended to keep the matter secret. I made it public because I thought it best that the information come from someone in a public responsibility, not just leaked by an anonymous source."

Meanwhile, back at the White House, presidential advisers bristle at the thought of what Church did. They see him as having set a crisis tone to a matter that deserved moderate and restrained handling.

"There is not the feeling here that the way Church behaved was excusa-

ble for our own political situation," said one senior White House official. "If he was going to put a statement out, he could have been more responsible. The way he said it put pressure on other liberal and moderate senators to match it."

President Carter was back from his riverboat working vacation and on his way home to Plains, Ga., for the Labor Day weekend, unaware at the time that Church was taking care of his foreign policy public relations for him. White House officials say they had not heard from either Vance or Church what the Idaho senator was about to do.

The next morning, on Aug. 31, the president discussed the matter by telephone with Vance. The president decided to try to salvage the low-keyed approach and said that Vance should handle the matter by issuing a statement. Carter went for a walk through downtown Plains, which consists of a single row of shops, mostly devoted to selling Jimmy Carter souvenirs, and he repeatedly refused to comment on questions about the Soviet brigade, saying only that Vance would do the talking back in Washington.

Despite the low-key efforts of the president and his advisers, the tone had been set. Several days later, Church was announcing that he was postponing the hearings on SALT II so his committee could "deal immediately" with the issue of the Soviet brigade.

Some Senate liberals and moderates who supported the strategic arms limitation pact joined with more conservative SALT critics in saying they doubted the pact would be approved if the question of the Soviet brigade was not resolved satisfactorily.

Newspaper editorials around the country were sounding a hard line. The Wall Street Journal, in an editorial headlined "Exploding Cigar," suggested that perhaps the Soviets would give the United States assurances that the troops were not for offensive purposes by sewing medic patches on top of the soldiers' artillery insignia.

And the president, back on the job in Washington, concluded on Friday that his lowkey battle was lost and he had to speak out before, as one aide said, "senators got so far out on a limb against SALT that they couldn't get back."

On Friday afternoon, the president strode into the press room of the White House and, as television cameras covered the event, Carter declared:

"This is a time for firm diplomacy, not panic and not exaggeration."

The president had a political problem.