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ACIS - 23/82

5 April 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR: [redacted]
Acting NIO/USSR

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FROM: [redacted]
Chief, Arms Control Intelligence Staff

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SUBJECT: Soviet Statements Regarding Potential Responses to U.S.
Deployment of INF Missiles

As you requested, we have prepared a paper on Soviet statements on potential responses to U.S. deployment of INF missiles in Europe, including allusions to the placement of nuclear weapons in Cuba. A chronology of Soviet statements is provided in Annex. If you have further questions or comments, please contact [redacted]

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2 April 1982

Soviet Statements Regarding Potential Responses
to U.S. Deployment of INF MissilesSummary

In his 16 March speech to the Congress of Soviet Trade Unions, President Brezhnev coupled an offer to halt deployment of medium range nuclear arms in the European USSR with a warning that if the U.S. carries out its plan to deploy missiles in Europe, the Soviet Union would be compelled to take "retaliatory steps that would put the other side, including the U.S. its own territory, in an analogous position." Soviet commentary on the speech has not clarified the meaning of this warning. Some Western commentators have interpreted it as a threat to place nuclear weapons in Cuba. Three senior Soviet officials, however, have denied that Brezhnev was threatening to place nuclear weapons in Cuba.

Since the inception in 1979 of its public campaign to derail the NATO missile program, Moscow has interwoven offers of reductions in its own missile forces with vague threats of retaliation if NATO goes ahead with the deployments. The Soviets also have made previous allusions to placing weapons in Cuba in response to U.S. deployment of INF missiles. These statements, by lower level government officials, were made mainly in the context of substantiating Soviet objections to the NATO nuclear force modernization program.

Moscow appears to have adopted a strategy of calculated ambiguity in handling the threat of retaliation. While downplaying the allusion to Cuba, Soviet spokesmen have sought to keep the threat of retaliation alive by continuing to assert the USSR's right and intention to take countermeasures if the U.S. deploys new missiles in Europe. The warning in Brezhnev's latest speech has sharpened the formulation of earlier Soviet statements by clearly threatening an offensive response should the U.S. proceed with its deployment plans.

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