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Cuba Becoming Soviet Beachhead

Scarcely a decade ago, Cuban Premier Fidel Castro was portrayed in intelligence reports as an undisciplined, flamboyant firebrand who sought to stir up revolutions throughout Latin America.

Now he is described as a subdued old fox who has completely sold out to the Soviets. He still has flashes of what one report calls a "tropical temper." But he submits to the Kremlin with "a careful mixture of adulation, confidence and ostensible humility."

This dramatic change in Castro may help explain what is happening in Cuba today. The Caribbean country has come under the Soviet thumb; the secret dispatches are explicit about that. Indeed, the Russians are transforming Cuba into a Soviet beachhead in the Western Hemisphere.

But the process has been so gradual that, though it hasn't gone unnoticed, it has not alarmed the surrounding governments. Cuba was even accepted last month as the host for a gathering of nonaligned nations.

Recounts a defense intelligence study: "Castro supported Latin American insurgents almost indiscriminately in the 1960s, despite the strains it created in his relations with Moscow. But he apparently now accepts the Soviet view that Latin America is not yet ripe for armed revolution.

"Castro reportedly also agreed in mid-1975 that any future support for

armed insurgency would be channeled through the local pro-Soviet communist parties."

Another analysis, classified "Top Secret Umbra," declares flatly: "Castro has demonstrated that the issues that had strained Cuban-Soviet relations so severely [12 years ago] are no longer even minor irritants. Cuban submission has been complete.

Surveillance reports claim that the Soviets, meanwhile, operate regular reconnaissance missions from secret Cuban airfields. An "independent fighter unit" has also been conducting "mock combat sorties" out of Cuba. Soviet submarines have been spotted refueling in Cuban ports, and sophisticated Soviet monitoring equipment has been installed in Cuba to intercept U.S. microwave telephone conversations.

Suggests a secret intelligence analysis: "The Cuban and Soviet focus at the present time is on expanding state-to-state relations and on encouraging the development of broad 'anti-imperialist' fronts. Both countries appear satisfied with their present policy.

"This does not mean, however, that Castro and Soviet leaders will give up the option to support 'national liberation movements' in Latin America when they feel conditions for revolution are propitious. Cuba's constitution recognizes 'wars of national liberation' as legitimate and describes Cuban aid to them as

its 'right and international obligation.'"

Long's Children: Sen. Russell Long (D-La.) routinely uses his power as Senate Finance chairman in the service of the wealthy and the special interests. Now he is holding the health needs of the nation's poor children hostage in a cynical maneuver designed to help his reelection chances next year.

Here's what has happened: Long is pushing a national health insurance plan in competition with Sen. Edward M. Kennedy's more celebrated plan. Long's bill is not popular with congressional liberals who feel that it would benefit primarily the middle class and do little for the poor.

So the astute Louisiana solon, casting about for some way to get liberal support for his bill, latched onto the Child Health Assessment Program. Long approached Sen. Abraham Ribicoff (D-Conn.), an enthusiastic sponsor of the child-care program, and told him he wanted to join the child-care bill to the health insurance plan.

Long explained candidly, "I need to do something for the poor." He promised that if his national health insurance bill gets bogged down, he will then support a separate child care bill.

Insiders tell us that Long's unprincipled manipulation of the child care bill will cause needless delay and may end up killing the bill.