

Turner says 'breakthrough' confirmed Soviet presence

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Washington—Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of central intelligence, giving fresh details on the Soviet brigade in Cuba, said yesterday an "intelligence breakthrough" in August gave the United States persuasive evidence that Russian troops were back on the island and in a combat formation.

Addressing the Association of Former Intelligence Officers, he described the Soviet outfit as consisting of three infantry battalions, a tank battalion and the normal artillery, antiaircraft and anti-tank guns and support of such a unit. It has been said to number 2,000 to 3,000 men.

Admiral Turner did not elaborate on the "intelligence breakthrough" that finally produced what the administration accepted as "persuasive evidence." The modifier "persuasive" was applied first by President Carter in his Monday night speech. Earlier, officials had simply said the combat brigade was there—its presence "confirmed."

The intelligence chief said the detection process was greatly aided by reprocessing old data stored in computers and once thought irrelevant. By 1978, he said, there was "strong suspicion" the Russians were reintroducing combat troops into Cuba, and after the August conclusions were reached, it was accepted that the information had been there at least since 1978.

In early September, officials said the unit had been in Cuba since the mid-1970's or longer.

Admiral Turner offered fuller explanation on the question of when, and whether, Russian combat troops indeed left Cuba after the 1962 missile crisis.

He said the evidence is that all those in combat units departed in the 1963-1964 period.

In his speech, President Carter said there were 20,000 Soviet military men in Cuba at the time of the 1962 crisis and "most of them were also withdrawn [like the missiles] and we monitored their departure." Those remaining, he said, were thought to be advising and training Cubans and doing intelligence work.

This assessment left some questions because of a briefing by the then-defense secretary, Robert S. McNamara, in February, 1963.

At that time, Mr. McNamara said there were "four combat forces, roughly each the size of a reinforced battalion" in Cuba. There were other technicians and advisers associated with air units and training Cubans to use patrol craft and coastal defense equipment, he said.

Mr. McNamara put the combat personnel at that time at about 5,000, which he said comprised a "very, very small force," and said there were about 12,000 other Russian military men then in Cuba.