

THE SOVIET SUBS IN CUBA

Soon after I took over as Chief of Naval Operations, I began to get concerned about the frequency of visits by Soviets to Cuba and there were reports of building at Cienfuegos which could well have been, at that time, the result of an understanding between Cuba and the Soviet Union that base facilities would be provided, in violation of the original Kennedy-Khrushchev understandings. I made my concern known to Admiral Moorer who indicated that he was going to make his concerns known to SEC DEF and the White House. Subsequently, I expressed the concern to SEC DEF. Subsequently, on hearing nothing back from either direction I contacted Admiral Rem Robertson to find whether anything was going on. A few days later Admiral Robertson came to see me to consult concerning a paper that he had been tasked to do by Henry Kissinger, a paper which would recidivate the Kennedy-Khrushchev understandings, making it clear to the Soviets that we would not accept a base facility at Cienfuegos or anywhere else in Cuba out of which ships carrying nuclear weapons could operate. I indicated satisfaction with the original draft. Subsequently, Admiral Robertson showed me the draft as it had been reworked by Henry

Kissinger and used (as a talking paper or aide memoir to Dobrynin). The wording in it in it's final form was unfortunate. It read: Nuclear submarines would not be considered acceptable in its key words. I pointed out to Admiral Robertson that this left a confusion: (1) Were diesel-propelled submarines carrying strategic missiles to be prohibited? (2) Were nuclear-propelled submarines not carrying missiles to be prohibited? Admiral Robertson shared my concern and said that he had not been able to get the paper corrected and that when he had talked to Henry Kissinger, Henry Kissinger had indicated that it was too late to do anything about it. As a result, we have seen subsequently over the ensuing years the Soviets proceed to test these uncertainties by putting diesel-propelled submarines into Cuba, nuclear-propelled, non-missile submarines, a tender of the type which sometimes carries nuclear warheads but which allegedly did not have warheads in it, all under the guise of visits not yet suggested as operational bases. This action was part of their ongoing operating and diplomatic initiatives which, had they been able to bring it off, would have been useful to them as a trade-off for forward bases in Europe in the SALT arena or in the MBFR arena where NATO is trying to keep it, and in any

event would have indicated a significant accrescent of power capability on their part.

R. Maybe it would be useful to say, the best you can, how you knew what was going on down there.

Z. I don't recall the source of my intelligence information, whether it came through in the daily high-level intelligence that comes out from CIA or whether it was relayed to me by those who were aware of intelligence that would not normally have come to my attention.

R. You haven't any ships sailing around down there looking at what's happening to them?

Z. Yes, we do have surveillance by Navy aircraft and by Navy ships.

R. Then it's something they weren't trying to keep a secret, too, probably.

Z. The construction was being done by Cuban personnel and the fiction they were trying to present to us was that it was a Cuban Naval facility.

R. That means the ship visits, too, would not be _____. If they were testing you, they would want you to know.

The recent newspaper article fits my recollection that the TASS announcement of, I think it is 13 October, there was a kind of final line in that

negotiation, that is, the Soviet government had never announced they were building bases; they didn't, therefore, want to announce that they weren't building bases, and so TASS - an unofficial organ, the validity of which they could always deny - was used to cut the deck on that deal.