

President Carter

Soviet Troops In Cuba

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Following is the text of President Jimmy Carter's broadcast from the White House to the nation, Monday night, October 1, 1979, on the subject of Soviet troops in Cuba.

Tonight I want to talk with you about the subject that is my highest concern, as it has been for every President. That subject is peace and the security of the United States.

The Soviet brigade is a manifestation of Moscow's dominance of Cuba.

We are at peace tonight, as we have been at peace throughout the time of my service in this office. The peace we enjoy is the peace of the strong. Our national defenses are unsurpassed in the world. Those defenses are stronger tonight than they were two years ago; they will be stronger two years from now than they are tonight, because of carefully planned improvements that are going forward with your support and with the support of Congress.

Our program for modernizing and strengthening the military forces of the NATO alliance is on track, with the full cooperation and participation of our European allies. Our strategic nuclear forces are powerful enough to destroy any potential adversary many times over, and the invulnerability of those forces will soon be further assured by a new system of powerful mobile missiles. These systems are designed for stability and defense.

Beyond these military defenses, we are on the threshold of a great advance in the control of nuclear weapons—the adoption of the second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, SALT II.

This evening I also want to report to you about the highly publicized Soviet brigade in Cuba and about its bearing on the important relationship between our nation and the Soviet Union. This is not a simple or easy subject.

The United States and the Soviet Union are the two most powerful nations on earth, and the relationship between us is complex because it involves strong elements of both competition and cooperation.

Our fundamental philosophies conflict; quite often our national interests conflict as well. But as two great nations, we do have common interests and share an overwhelming mutual concern in preventing a nuclear war. We must recognize therefore that nuclear arms control agreements are vital to both our countries; and we must also exercise self-restraint in our relations and be sensitive to each other's concerns.

Recently we have obtained evidence that a Soviet combat brigade has been in Cuba for several years. The presence of Soviet combat troops in Cuba is of serious concern to us.

I want to reassure you at the outset that we do not face any immediate, concrete threat that could escalate into war or a major confrontation.

But we do face a challenge. It is a challenge to our wisdom—a challenge to our ability to act in a firm, decisive way without destroying the basis for cooperation which helps to maintain world peace and control nuclear weapons. It is a challenge to our determination to give a measured and effective response to Soviet competition and to Cuban military activities around the world.

Now let me explain the specific problem of the Soviet brigade and describe the more general problem of Soviet-Cuban military activism in the Third World.

Here is the background on Soviet forces in Cuba: As most of you know, 17 years ago in the era of the Cold War, the Soviet Union suddenly attempted to introduce offensive nuclear missiles and bombers into Cuba. This direct threat to the United States ended with the Soviet agreement to withdraw those nuclear weapons, and a commitment not to introduce offensive weapons into Cuba thereafter.

At the time of that 1962 missile crisis, there were more than 20,000 Soviet military personnel in Cuba. Most of them were withdrawn, and we monitored their departure. It was believed that those who stayed behind were not combat forces but were there to advise and train Cubans and to perform intelligence functions.

Just recently American intelligence obtained persuasive evidence that some of these Soviet forces had been organized into a combat unit. When attention was then focused on a careful review of past intelligence data, it was possible for our experts to conclude that this unit had existed for several years, probably since the mid-1970's and possibly even longer.

This unit appears to be a brigade of two or three thousand men. It is armed with about forty tanks and other modern military equipment. It has been organized as a combat unit, and its training exercises have been those of a combat unit.

This is not a large force, nor an assault force. It presents no direct threat to us. It has no airborne or seaborne capability. In contrast to the 1962 crisis, no nuclear threat to the United States is involved.

Nevertheless this Soviet brigade in Cuba is a serious matter. It contributes to tension in the Caribbean and the Central American region. The delivery of modern arms to Cuba and the presence of Soviet naval forces in Cuban waters have strengthened the Soviet-Cuban military relationship. They have added to the fears of some countries that they may come under Soviet or Cuban pressure.

During the last few years the Soviets have been increasing the delivery of military supplies to Cuba. The result is that

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Cuba now has one of the largest, best equipped armed forces in this region. These military forces are used to intrude into other countries in Africa and the Middle East.

There is a special relationship between Cuba and the Soviet Union. The Cubans get their weapons free. Other Soviet satellite countries have to pay for their military supplies.

The Communist regime in Cuba is an economic failure that cannot sustain itself. The Soviet Union must send to

Cuba about \$8 million in economic aid every day.

Fidel Castro does not pay money for Soviet arms; the Cuban people pay a much higher price. In every international dispute; on every international issue, the Cuban regime automatically follows the Soviet line.

The Soviet brigade is a manifestation of Moscow's dominance of Cuba. It raises the level of that dominance—and it raises the level of responsibility that the Soviet Union must take for escalating Cuban military actions abroad.

Now I want to report further on what we are doing to resolve these problems and to counter these activities.

Over the past three weeks we have discussed this issue at great length with top Soviet officials. We have made it clear that the presence of a Soviet combat unit in Cuba is a matter of serious concern to us. The Soviet Union does not admit that the unit in question is a combat unit. However, the Soviets have made certain statements to us with respect to our concern:

- That the unit in question is a training center, that it does nothing more than training, and can do nothing more;
- That they will not change its function or status as a training center. We understand this to mean that they do not intend to enlarge the unit or to give it additional capabilities;
- They have said that the Soviet personnel in Cuba are not and will not be a threat to the United States or to any other nation;
- That they reaffirm the 1962 understanding and the mutually agreed confirmation in 1970, and will abide by it in the future. We, for our part, reaffirm this understanding.

These assurances have been given to me from the highest levels of the Soviet Government.

Although we have persuasive evidence that the unit has been a combat brigade, the Soviet statements about the future non-combat status of the unit are signifi-