

Helms Says Pact Ending '62 Missile Crisis Impedes U.S. on Cuba

By Michael Getler
Washington Post Staff Writer

Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) said yesterday that the largely unpublished U.S.-Soviet agreement ending the 1962 Cuban missile crisis is mostly "a myth" but that its "ghost" paralyzes American policy and today prevents more forceful action against Cuba.

Helms, an advocate of tougher measures to counter communist influence throughout Central America, made his charges in one of the shorter and more unusual meetings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The conservative lawmaker, who said this country should "take every appropriate step to destabilize" Fidel Castro's Cuban government, had called for public hearings on the 1962 agreement between President Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev.

The idea, advisers said, was to refocus public attention on the still murky events surrounding settlement of the missile crisis and to argue that Moscow has violated whatever agreements may have been reached. The United States, therefore, should not be bound by such things as the "no-invasion" pledge offered by Kennedy at the time, advisers said.

In an attempt to force the issue into the public domain, Helms had asked Secretary of State George P. Shultz to testify in open session. Shultz declined and after about 10 minutes of open session in which Helms made his remarks before reporters and television cameras, the committee went behind closed doors to hear the secretary.

Although Helms criticized the State Department for "shrinking" from a public discussion, Sen. Paul S. Sarbanes (D-Md.) supported Shultz's judgment that it was more prudent to discuss such issues in private.

In 1962, the Soviets, under strong U.S. military pressure, agreed to dismantle and

remove offensive missiles and bombers they had tried to deploy secretly in Cuba. This took place against a pledge by Kennedy that, if all offensive weapons were removed from Cuba and kept out of the hemisphere in the future, the United States would "neither initiate nor permit aggression in this hemisphere."

That was taken by Moscow as a "no-invasion" pledge which allowed the Soviets to save face in the confrontation. But much of the correspondence between the two superpowers in the crisis remains classified.

Former secretary of state Henry A. Kissinger said in his memoirs that a detailed understanding was "never formally buttoned down." A Kennedy demand for U.N. verification of Soviet compliance in Cuba was never met.

Helms and conservative allies such as Sens. Steven D. Symms (R-Idaho) and James A. McClure (R-Idaho) argue that the Soviets, in the past 20 years, have done many things in Cuba that Kennedy sought to prevent.

Helms yesterday cited introduction of Soviet TU95 "bombers" and MiG23 jets in Cuba, construction of "submarine facilities" and introduction of a Soviet "combat brigade" as things that "most persons would classify as offensive forces."

The State Department yesterday issued no response to Helms' claims. In the past, however, this and other administrations have not put such stern interpretations on these activities, all of which have been known for some time.

President Reagan's former Pentagon spokesman, Henry Catto Jr., for example, described the MiG23s last summer as primarily air defense fighters and not, to the best of his knowledge, a violation of the 1962 accords. The Soviet TU95s have generally been described as reconnaissance planes rather than bombers.