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By Don Oberdorfer
Washington Post staff writer

On Friday, Aug. 17, a U.S. spy satellite in orbit over the Caribbean trained its high-powered lenses on a tract of rugged country near the southern coast of Cuba. The pictures transmitted electronically to the ground, were examined by photo interpreters in offices scattered around Washington. They revealed the tanks, artillery trucks and tents of a military unit on field maneuvers.

The photographs were of grave significance for a reason known only to a handful of U.S. intelligence officials: A few days before, they had been tipped off that a Soviet combat unit stationed near Havana planned maneuvers across the island at the time and place where the satellite cameras trained their lenses for high-resolution zoom shots.

On Aug. 20, another satellite mission over Cuba found the maneuver area deserted and the heavy artillery equipment parked once more in two inconspicuous areas

a few miles west of Havana, which are the suspected base camps of a Soviet Brigade.

The pictures of the Russian guns of August, together with confirming data which is still secret, ended an interagency argument of long standing among U.S. intelligence agencies and officials. Most of the skeptics and the doubters now agree that a Soviet combat force of several thousand men has been stationed in Cuba for many months—perhaps for many years.

This unavoidable conclusion has touched off a new Soviet-American confrontation, endangered the superpower, and has posed a new challenge to the sagging political fortunes of President Carter.

Last Friday afternoon, three weeks after satellite photographs ended an argument and began a new crisis, a somber Carter appealed to the nation from the White House for "calm and a sense of proportion" in equal measure with "firmness and strength."

In the public metaphor of high officialdom, the prob-

lem of finding a unit of 2,000 to 3,000 Russian soldiers on a Caribbean island of 10 million persons and 180,000 Soviet-equipped Cuban troops was a "jigsaw puzzle" of exorbitating difficulty. While there is no doubt that the challenge was formidable, it is also true that only a few people and a tiny fraction of American intelligence resources were devoted, until recently, to fitting together this unexpected and unwelcome picture.

The origins of the Soviet effort are obscure, but top officials of several U.S. intelligence agencies suspect that the starting point was the Russian buildup of 1962—17 years ago—when Moscow put offensive missiles, bombers and about 20,000 first-line troops in Cuba.

The resolution of that missile crisis, perhaps the most dangerous superpower confrontation of the nuclear age, required the removal from Cuba of the Soviet offensive weapons and of all Soviet forces associated with the missiles and bombers. According to those who have seen CIA, Air, Col. 1

**The 'Brigada':
An Unwelcome
Sighting in Cuba**