

Clear Skies *Post 5/17/64*

As long as the United States is hostile to Cuba and Cuba is protected by the Soviet Union, there will be tension in the Caribbean. The reason is that the Soviet Union can match and offset the patently superior conventional strength of the United States in the region only by threatening to use its nuclear arms.

The situation is the same in Berlin except that the roles are reversed. There Russia has conventional superiority and it is the United States which has made a nuclear commitment outside the pale of its conventional advantage. That is why Cuba and Berlin are potentially the two most dangerous places in the world. That they are not continuously and actively dangerous is due to the fact that, since the Cuban missile crisis, Moscow and Washington have not challenged each other to the point where the defensive commitment could be maintained only by a threat of nuclear war.

This is the delicate balance that trembled when, a few weeks ago, it was indicated that Moscow would put its Cuban anti-aircraft batteries into Fidel Castro's hands. The fear was that the unpredictable Castro would shoot down one of the American airplanes which regularly scan the island for signs of a second Soviet attempt to sneak in offensive missiles. This would surely provoke a crisis.

The events of last weekend, however, seem to have removed danger from the tactical foreground

le
's
y
it
y
l-
s
b
1
t
y
D
-
1
D
D
1
D
1
to the strategic background. On May Day, Mr. Khrushchev gave the hard menacing pledge to Cuba's defense. It was repeated yesterday as he sailed off on his first trip to Africa, headed for the United Arab Republic, to sell the continent on the Soviet brand of reliability and rubles. But these words contained no new threat. Indeed, Soviet rhetoric has so devalued the language of diplomacy that Mr. Khrushchev must triply overstate his case in order to make it at par.

1
t
y
D
-
1
D
D
1
D
1
Understandably, Mr. Castro is irritated at being given slogans by Moscow instead of a down-the-line public promise to stand behind him in the event that he shoots down an American reconnaissance plane. He is irritated too at the prospect of having to swallow his pride while the planes continue to violate Cuban sovereignty. But, to his credit, he has given the clear impression that Cuba will content itself for the time being with trying to roast American toes in the forensic fires of the United Nations.

This is not the last of the scares over Cuba; it may not even be the last of this one. The immediate prospect is, however, for propaganda, not peril.