

Suspicion Of Plot Downgraded

U.S. Shifts Its Views In Trouble With Cuba

By Murrey Marder
Staff Reporter

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The United States and Cuba, each for its own reasons, made independent moves yesterday to cool down the temperature of the latest Cuban crisis.

American policy-makers have now downgraded their suspicions that Cuban Premier Fidel Castro tried to provoke a dispute over the United States Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to coincide with the United States-Panamanian dispute over the Panama Canal Zone.

While officials here said they cannot be certain, it now appears unlikely to them that Castro sent Cuban fishing boats into Florida waters last weekend and then cut off the water supply to Guantanamo,

as part of an elaborate plot, possibly with Soviet assistance.

Continuing Communist pressure to push the United States out of the base at the eastern end of Cuba is still

U.S. sends team to Guantanamo to study ways of making Naval Base more independent of Cuban facilities.
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expected by American officials.

That move more probably will be made in the United Nations. It is especially anticipated if the Panama dispute erupts there again, al-

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though American officials now hope that can be averted through conciliation facilities of the Organization of American States.

Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticos and Premier Castro both sought to tone down the Guantanamo dispute in statements Friday night.

"We are not planning a fight for the Guantanamo Base," Castro told newsmen in Havana. He denied a suggestion by Secretary of State Dean Rusk Friday that Cuba appears to be launching "a concerted campaign" to drive the United States out of Guantanamo. Castro also said, "This has nothing to do with Panama."

Dorticos said that at a moment it deems "convenient," Cuba will employ "the ways of international organizations" to pursue its claim to regain the base territory.

With the decisions reached by President Johnson on Friday night, the United States will proceed with plans to make the Guantanamo Base as free from Cuban harassments as possible.

As announced, this will be in the form of supplying the Guantanamo Base with its own water facilities, and reducing the numbers of Cuban employes who work on the American base and who contribute dollars to the Cuban economy.

Castro labeled these actions "new illegalities and methods of economic aggression."

The United States also has set in motion plans to try to bring new pressure on its NATO Allies to cut their trade with Cuba. This is certain to bring controversy with Britain, France and other Allies who recently have increased

Cuban trade. It will be an issue in the visit of British Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home, who arrives here Wednesday for two days of conferences.

But the United States now may find that line of policy hampered by its current, more calm, evaluation of the latest Cuban affair.

The predominant estimate that has now emerged in the Johnson Administration is that the penetration of United States waters by Cuban boats probably was just a fishing incident, rather than an international plot.

Castro's reprisal action on Thursday, by cutting off the supply of Cuban water to Guantanamo until the four boats and their crews are released, is now rated as a "flash" reaction, and not a premeditated plan.

The State Department confirmed yesterday—very belatedly—that Castro, in fact, was right when he said Cuba notified the United States in advance of its intentions to fish in the Gulf of Mexico. But Cuba, American officials said, did not specify just where in the Gulf the boats would fish.

On Dec. 9, Cuban Foreign Minister Raul Roa notified the Swiss Ambassador in Havana, who represents United States interests there, that Cuba planned to send its fishing boats into the Gulf of Mexico, off the United States Coast. Roa specified that the boats would remain outside of United States territorial waters.

The Swiss Ambassador reportedly told Roa he was sure the United States would require more specific information than that.

About Dec. 19, the United

States, through the Swiss Embassy, expressed its surprise to Cuba about its intended fishing plans, noting that the Cuban fishing fleet traditionally fished in Cuban waters. The United States requested more detailed information. State Department officials yesterday said no response was received.

Before Castro came to power in Cuba five years ago, Cuban fishing boats did fish in the Dry Tortugas islands east of Key West, where the boats were seized last weekend. But that was in the days of when fine lines were not drawn on penetrating the three-mile American-Cuban friendship limit of territorial waters.

Last May, Florida enacted a State law making it illegal for boats from Communist nations to fish in territorial waters off Florida.

The United States has charged that the Cuban crews knew they were in territorial waters, and their radio messages prove it. Florida is now proceeding with its prosecution of 29 of the Cuban fishermen out of the original 38. Two sought political asylum in the United States; seven others, between the ages of 14 and 16, were ordered dismissed as juveniles, to be deported to Cuba.

But now the United States faces another dilemma. Officials here said yesterday that there is no precedent for such a prosecution and the international problem for the United States is that this case could set one.

This can mean counter-trouble for the United States whenever its fishing boats and crews get in disputes abroad. That has happened with Mexico, Ecuador, Peru and other

countries. The normal procedure is to assess a fine, but the Florida law provides for a maximum penalty of a \$500 fine and a year in jail, and possible confiscation of the boats and equipment.

Federal officials would be very happy to see the Cuban fishing dispute end up in fines alone, with the case closed in a quick and orderly procedure.