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Soviet Views of Troop Issue Colored

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Murray Marder, the senior diplomatic correspondent of *The Washington Post*, has been on leave since September to explore conflicting perceptions between the United States and the Soviet Union. The project is sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations with support of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, both of which have granted permission for Marder to write the following special report from Moscow.

By Murray Marder
Washington Post Staff Writer

MOSCOW, Sept. 30—"You Americans will never be able to do this to us again."

The speaker was Vasily Kuznetsov, first deputy Soviet foreign minister. He was talking quietly and solemnly, but in a tone of irrefragable bitterness, to U.S. arms control coordinator John J. McCloy in New York. The time was 1962 and the Cuban missile crisis was over.

The United States and the Soviet Union had just passed through what many saw then as the specter of nuclear eclipse. It was a "victory" for the United States; it was also the greatest international humiliation for the Soviet Union in the post-World War II years.

President Kennedy issued stern orders to every administration leader "not to gloat," to avoid jeopardizing, for years to come, any prospect of improving American-Soviet relations. But the humiliation was un concealable.

Confronted by overwhelming U.S. strategic nuclear power—and tactical supremacy in the region that made it unnecessary for the United States even to threaten to use nuclear force to impose its will—the Soviet Union was compelled to bow to virtually anything the United States demanded.

Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, totally miscalculating the American reaction, unwittingly had chosen the worst testing ground in the world for challenging the United States

at any level—military, political or psychological: America's backyard. The Soviet Union had selected an ill-chosen bargaining card for achieving global "equality" with the United States.

Premier Fidel Castro's indignant protests to Khrushchev that the forced withdrawal of

Secretary of State Vance and Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin conferred on the Soviet combat brigade in Cuba as President Carter prepared for his address to be broadcast at 9 tonight on channels 4, 7, and 9. Page A22

Soviet missiles and bombers from Cuba was an abject surrender were overridden by the Soviet Union's own interests—and weakness.

In the U.S. view, and indeed in the perception of some Soviet officials at the time, President Kennedy acted with a victor's mag-

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by 1962 Debacle

nanimity. Kennedy resisted the advice of the hawks among his advisers to inflict vengeance, and "take out" the Soviet missiles with an American air strike.

Kennedy dismissed that option when he found that was certain to kill many Soviet troops and risk all-out war, however "surgical" the Air Force's claims for bombing precision. Even then, Kennedy, as adviser Theodore C. Sorensen said afterward, "felt we came very, very close to war that week."

In the words of the president's brother, Robert Kennedy, U.S. strategy was based on the concept of trying to put itself "in the shoes" of its adversary. But not publicly, and in fact, not completely, for the president also said in private, "It isn't wise politically to understand Khrushchev's problems" too well. Khrushchev, for his part, said in his memoirs long after "the smell of burning in the air" had dissipated, that "the resolution of the Caribbean crisis came as a historic landmark.

For the first time in history, the Americans pledged publicly not to invade one of their neighbors and not to interfere in its internal affairs. This was a bitter pill for the U.S. to swallow. It was worse than that: the American imperial beast was forced to swallow a hedgehog, quills and all."

That was hardly the image, or the reality. The Soviets Union was forced to uncover and display the outgoing missiles for visual proof of their withdrawal and counting. American reconnaissance planes swooped down to insultingly close range, just over the masts of Soviet freighters headed homeward on a humbling journey, before the mocking eyes of the world.

As Kuznetsov grimly told McCloy at the close of negotiations in New York, the experience would rankle deep in the Soviet psyche. We live today with the consequences of that humiliation. And we live with entirely

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different memories in the United States and in the Soviet Union, about what Cuba represents.

The Soviet Union, in military power and global reach—but only in those realms—is now the equal of the United States.

By the end of the 1960s, it had become what Khrushchev prematurely had proclaimed it was, namely, America's military equal. Starting in 1957, the Soviet Union, in a surge of movement that stunned Americans, tested the world's first intercontinental missile and launched the world's first space satellite. Moscow created the belief in an illusory "missile gap" out of American public shock over those seeming leaps in technology.

The Soviet Union had achieved the image of a superpower, but not the reality; it could not begin to match the resources and technology of the United States.

In Cuba in 1962, the United States flagrantly demonstrated who was really "superior." That situation obviously no longer is the case. Again, outcries are rising in the United States that the Soviet Union is headed for, or already has achieved, "military superiority." And paradoxically, with its present unquestioned power, the Soviet Union—unlike two decades ago—now adamantly denies that it has or seeks superiority, for it is genuinely concerned about provoking the United States into a new leap forward in the arms race.

The Soviet Union clearly would concede that the United States still has regional military superiority in its Caribbean backyard. Therefore, what Moscow totally rejects is that the presence of "a few thousand" Soviet military personnel, whom it calls military instructors, technicians and advisers, are a threat of any kind to the United States.

Even if there is a Soviet "combat Brigade" in Cuba—which the Carter administration insists there is and the Kremlin determinedly denies—that would still be irrelevant as any threat to American interests, in the perception and argumentation of Soviet military and political strategists.

As a result, they maintain that they find the American position implausible by "any logic," capitalist or communist. Furthermore, they note, there has been a Soviet military presence in Cuba for 17 years, since the Cuban missile crisis, and the United States has "known that all along." In the Soviet perspective, this makes doubly illogical the U.S. case for raising "the pretext" of a new Soviet threat accompanied by an American "near-ultimatum."

Soviet sources dismiss as ludicrous the notion that this nation's aging leadership, governed by men steeped in caution and wary of duplicating Khrushchev's disastrous miscalculation of 1962 in any remote form, is suddenly "testing" or challenging the

United States in Cuba again.

In this situation, however, there is a real danger that whatever Carter does that affects Soviet interests—even for what Soviet sources describe as "miscalculated face-saving measures"—could be construed in the Kremlin as an attempt by a far weaker president to repeat the 1962 humiliation.

This time around, however, all the pressure would be on the Kremlin leadership to demonstrate forcefully that Washington no longer has unilateral power to make the Kremlin do anything.

And yet concurrently, what the Soviet Union fears is that the United States, acting on an unwarranted perception of looming American strategic inferiority, will reopen the floodgates of its vaster resources to try to recapture its longtime strategic superiority over the Soviet Union. Faced with that challenge, the Soviet Union unquestionably would try to surpass the American effort. It could do so only with woeful damage to its far weaker economy.

The moves open to each side therefore appear from here to be circular, unless one side clearly backs down. The Soviet Union insists it will never do that again, as Kuznetsov cautioned McCloy in 1962, and most certainly not when it sees itself as innocent of any provocative step.

This underlying determination never to blink again in any new "eyeball-to-eyeball" confrontation, especially anywhere the Soviet Union believes it is unjustifiably challenged, has caused the Kremlin no hesitation, after the first probing exchanges, in labeling the latest Cuban controversy unreal, concocted and illogical.

At strategic levels of Soviet thinking, one suspicion constantly emerges: that the Carter administration "manufactured" a crisis to enable a weakened president to shift course in his basic policy toward the Soviet Union in the face of an approaching election.

The premise is that he did so because of his inability to obtain ratification of the symbolic, and actual, touchstone of detente that is the new American-Soviet strategic arms limitation treaty—SALT II. The embattled pact now is staggering in the Senate after six years of grueling negotiations, and an ostentatious signing ceremony at the June summit meeting of President Carter and Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev in Vienna.

The competing rationale among those most knowledgeable here about American processes, politics, psychology and intentions is this. The Carter administration stumbled into a sequence of missteps that left it floundering, that the president is trying to get out of the corner he painted himself into, but his chances for success are extremely questionable. Therefore, Soviet attention should begin to concentrate on his potential successor. That outlook raises for the Soviet Union and for the United States, however, the prospect of an unpredictable relationship for the next 16 months,

until Jan. 20, 1981—a frightening time lag.

As a result, from either direction of Soviet analysis, the prospects suddenly look dark for American-Soviet relations.

This report draws most heavily on two weeks of interviews that began Sept. 12, part of research for a book intended for publication in 1980 on American-Soviet perceptions over the last 20 years. The current dispute came up only as an example of conflicting perceptions.

In the third week of private talks with senior government and Communist Party officials and academic specialists on American-Soviet relations, however, what had been looked upon earlier as a passing, although classic episode, took on widening implications.

Negotiations between Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko in New York ended in stalemate last Thursday and Gromyko, even more gloomy than usual, headed back for Moscow. A U.S.-Soviet political crisis — although not a military crisis — was clearly under way, after being first characterized here as a "foolish pretext for mischief-making."

After a private discussion Friday with two leading Soviet experts on political-military relations, who are well known to American specialists on Soviet affairs, they agreed to put portions of their remarks on the record. This is not a usual practice: neither man normally is a public spokesman.

Daniel Proektor, former colonel and instructor in the Soviet military, a soft-spoken, 62-year old scholar-strategist said that after examining everything he could read and hear about the interacting American moves involving Cuba and SALT ratification, he was totally frustrated. He was unable as a Marxist, he said, to fit what he could discern on the American scene, which he thought he understood quite well, into a comprehensible pattern.

It is, he said, "an absolutely chaotic movement, something similar to molecular movement."

Proektor's distinguished colleague, Alexei Nikonov, also 62, said that to average Soviet citizens, it would appear that "Americans are unreliable people, with whom you cannot do business and should not do business with."

Proektor and Nikonov both hold the title of "professor doctor" in the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. This means that they are primarily advisers to the higher echelons of the Soviet government and Communist Party, as are other senior members of various Soviet institutes.

Inevitably, anything originating from the Soviet capital under these circumstances—even from an American writer—is suspect in American eyes as Soviet propaganda. For what really "informed sources" are there in

the Soviet capital but Soviet sources? And "propaganda" is not a dirty word in the Soviet Union, but rather an institutionalized instrument of government, without evil domestic connotations.

Furthermore, it is customary diplomatic practice in the Soviet Union—and in many other countries as well—to "hang tough" at the outset of a negotiation; to admit nothing, to concede nothing. What a nation says in such a situation often by no means represents its ultimate position.

Even now, with escalating evidence of internal, but not external tension, some form of ultimate compromise between the two superpowers over the Soviet troop presence in Cuba cannot be foreclosed.

But there is one critical difference between the present American-Soviet stalemate and many others in the past. It is that the Soviet Union has no need to manufacture a propagandistic position to reinforce its stand. The American demands simply are no plausible in Moscow's perception. That encompasses not only the perceptions of government officials, Communist Party cadre, the Soviet press, leaders of the various scientific, professional and other institutions that collectively represent the Soviet establishment. The U.S. position is truly

beyond the reach of the Soviet mind in general, some of the most experienced non-American Western experts here agree in private. And it is taxing even Western European diplomats here.

One Soviet source with unusual access to official information said the Soviet Union was indignant about the kinds of questions put to it by the United States. The American administration, he said, called on the Soviet Union to supply it with a detailed breakdown of all its military personnel in Cuba: their armament, equipment, dispositions, functions, and so on.

"How would you (Americans) like it," he asked, "if we were to make similar demands upon you about your troops near our borders? You would be outraged, of course."

There is no other source of information available here about what the United States asked the Soviet Union to supply in terms of military data, nor the context on tone of the requests as the Carter administration construed them.

It presumably was the Soviet interpretation of these requests and others that contributed to the unusual personal attack on President Carter by the official Soviet news agency Tass last week. Carter was accused of employing an "ultimatum-like tone" in his Queens College remarks last week.

In the pungent Russian expression, the challenging question becomes *Skto delat?* — "What to do?" and the only answer given here by any Soviet source is "Nothing; It is a question for

the United States to answer. It provoked the problem."

This does not mean, however, that Soviet specialists have not explored the problem fully — in the dimensions that fit their perceptions. Their rationalizations, as they express them, presumably match what Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin first, then Gromyko, told Secretary Vance, but do not necessarily, or even probably, encompass all the points made in the official discussions.

The Soviet contention is that even if the Soviet Union hypothetically prepared to assist the Carter administration in making "face-saving" gestures "to bail it out" nothing that it would even contemplate doing could provide the American president with enough tokenism to sustain what he has now made himself hostage to deliver: a show of firmness and strength, implying that he has wrung some kind of concessions out of the Soviet leadership. That is the last thing the Soviets want.

At the same time, in American domestic terms—as Soviet specialists here perceive Carter's dilemma—with multiple election challenges confronting him, the president's political opponents are free to charge that anything he obtains from the Soviet Union will be inadequate. That would apply, Soviet analysts say, "even if the United States could 'count the military personnel going out.' His political opponents would be free to make constant unlimited demands." And perhaps, one Soviet Americanologist added wryly, "they will end up demanding that Castro leave Cuba and that Cuba should abandon Marxism. So there is nothing we can do, plan to do, or want to do. It is Carter's problem."

And yet they know only too well, despite all disclaimers of any Soviet culpability or responsibility for the impasse, that the Soviet Union is inextricably trapped in the Carter administration's problem.

Americans here are being questioned with sudden intensity about the prospects of Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) entering the White House in 1981, the identity and quality of the advisers around him and the possible direction of his policies if elected. Of 27 sources interviewed so far, one specialist said that he was in a distinct minority—possibly even alone—who clearly preferred to see Carter remain in office.

"I have that he is a sincere, intel-

ligent man who honestly wants to reduce arms levels," said this Soviet specialist on U.S.-Soviet strategy and weapons. He said, "I personally would strongly prefer him to Kennedy—an unknown quantity in many ways. Of course that is your decision, not ours."

To return to the remarks of Proektor and Nikonov, Proektor said:

"The problem, as I see it, is do President Carter and his administration really believe that this [the Soviet

military presence in Cuba] is a threat? Or is it just an occasion to raise new barriers to ratification of the SALT treaty?"

"On one side," he continued, "Carter says it is necessary to ratify. And on the other side he is putting forward an obstacle to make it difficult to ratify. . . ."

"There are all kinds of organized American units on our borderlines in the east and in the west," Proektor said, explaining that he was groping for some rationale that he could find meaningful in either Soviet—or American—logic.

Nikonov said: "This is a continuation of the 'linkage' policy: Africa first, then Cuba—and there is some logical inconsistency. Carter says there is no threat to the U.S. from that 'brigade' and in the next paragraph he recognizes that the number of Soviet troops have not changed—and then he says all this should not be a barrier to SALT ratification?"

At this point Proektor, slowly shaking his head, made the observation about a "chaotic movement . . . similar to molecular movement."

Nikonov then briefly recapitulated the sequence in the SALT negotiations, starting with former President Ford and President Brezhnev at Vladivostok in 1974. When the Carter administration made its opening move on SALT, in March 1977 to reopen the basic premises of the Vladivostok strategic arms control formula, on grounds there should be a new approach and deeper cuts in both sides' forces, it encountered an immediate, outright, Soviet rejection and angry public Soviet condemnation.

"How is it possible," Nikonov asked, "that one president agrees to something in Vladivostok, then [the Soviets encounter] another who says 'No'?"

And on the Cuban dispute, Nikonov added, "Is it time to revive the Monroe doctrine? The Monroe doctrine is dead, not only for the Soviet Union, but also for deGaulle and lots of other people. (French President Charles de Gaulle, who died in 1970, in the early 1960s personally launched a campaign to compete with the United States for influence in Latin America, including a trip through the area.) "This is another example," Nikonov said, of the "double standard that the United States applies where the Soviet Union is concerned."

Proektor shifted to a military analogy:

"When I worked at the Military Academy, I came to understand there is grand strategy and there are tactics. And tactics should be derivative from strategy . . . It is basic for large nations to distinguish between tactics and strategy."

Referring to the Soviet troop controversy, he said "I treat this as a tactical episode. But I think it would be a tragic mistake if the SALT talks should be subject to the tactical situation.

"But there should be the basic question: What the strategic long-term effects will be. And I'm afraid that this [hypothetical] tactical success can make more difficult—and perhaps put an end to—the SALT process."

Seeking an analogy, Proektor said: "Take the Chinese attack on Vietnam [in February]. We had very strong emotions. But we were restrained—and we didn't allow our emotions to fly—because we felt it could result in big strategic losses."

"If the treaty is not ratified," Proektor said. "Your country and my country will not only have a single Cuba, but perhaps a dozen Cubas—or worse."

Nikolov added, "the responsibility of both our countries is very great, and this kind of chaotic development of events could undermine the authority of both the Soviet Union and the United States in the eyes of other states—which is dangerous . . ."

"And one of the problems," he continued, "will be that we will be unable to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The fact that the United States and the Soviet Union share the same view on proliferation of nuclear weapons deters other countries. In case we are unable to agree, we will be unable to prevent other countries from acquiring nuclear weapons. And then everybody is against ev-

erybody, and everybody is arming up."

"We are at the turning point of contemporary history . . .," Proektor added. ". . . The essence of the turning point will be that either the United States and the Soviet Union will be able to demonstrate that they are capable of agreeing on measures to decrease the danger of war, or that they are unable to do so . . . One could 'win' Cuba, so to say—and lose the history."

This type of assessment, it should be stressed, while typical of the most sophisticated moderate appraisal available here, is offset to an undiscernible degree by a far more suspicious analysis, which was not available for attribution on the record.

The essence of more suspicious assessment is that while there is a seeming "jigsaw puzzle" of actions on the American side, they can all be pieced together into a "grand design."

One veteran Soviet news commentator, a longtime observer of the American scene, expressed his interpretation of the puzzle.

"It all fits: [Vice President] Mondale dropped a brick on the Soviet Union in China," during his recent trip, then Cuba, now SALT. And perhaps the fourth part of the 'grand design' is the increase of American nuclear forces in Europe . . . The United States evidently is reverting to a 'position of strength' policy . . . to try to reinforce a weak president."

It should be emphasized that what is recounted here is a sampling of Soviet perceptions as reflected by

Soviet officials and other senior sources at the upper levels—but not the highest levels—of the Soviet establishment, and their perceptions of U.S. actions and intentions. There is no attempt in this account to reflect the administration's position in any detail, nor its own perceptions.

It can be said that Cuba produces a Rashomon effect in the minds of Americans and Soviets, and has done so for two decades. (Rashomon is the Japanese film classic in which a brutal crime is told for times, from the point of view of each of its participants, leaving the audience to decide which version it wants to accept.)

Each side sees a very different version of almost everything affecting U.S.-Soviet actions concerning Cuba. In each case it is a kaleidoscopic film, flashing through the mind's eye often disjointedly, much like a strobe light shifting swiftly from one scene to another and back.

But the subject of the film is not simply Cuba. For 20 years, since Castro came to power, the total relationship of the United States and the Soviet Union has been repeatedly linked with, or affected by a nation dwarfed in world significance by the two superpowers. Cuba is imbedded in their past, and in their future, totally out of proportion to its size and influence.

The Rashomon factor in U.S.-Soviet relations is by no means limited to Cuba, however. Planners and decision-makers in Washington and in Moscow see very different images of almost everything they focus on.

On Feb. 1, 1961, in a cable from Moscow to the new Kennedy administration, the late American ambassador Llewellyn Thompson reported that the "most discouraging aspect of East-West negotiations is that [we] both look at [the] same set [of] facts and see different things. . . ."

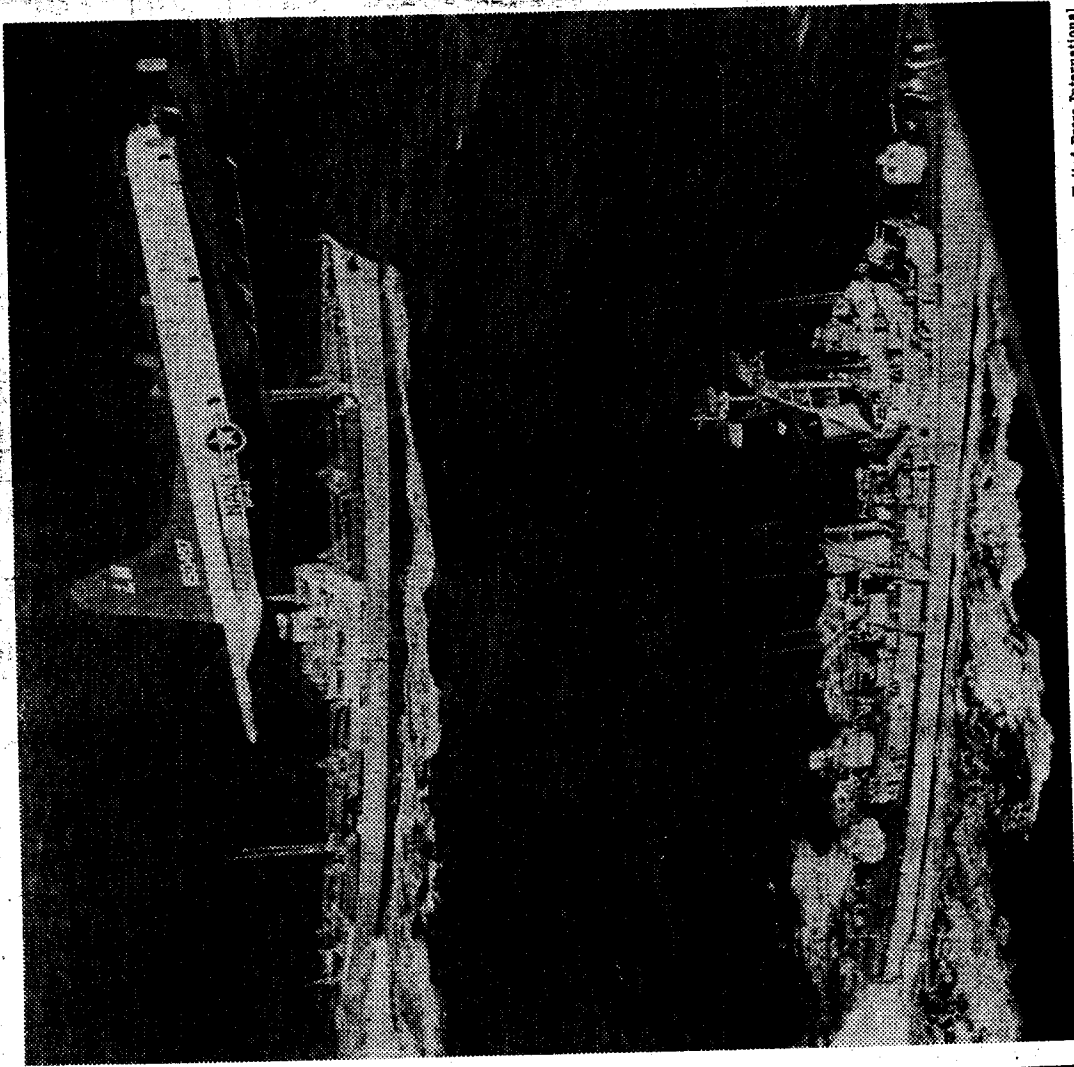
That is the one assessment on which American and Soviet specialists do agree.

Kevin Klose, Washington Post correspondent in Moscow, contributed to this article.

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The Soviet Union, unlike two decades ago, denies it has or seeks superiority, for it is genuinely concerned about provoking the United States into a new leap forward in the arms race.



United Press International

U.S. plane and ship, foreground, inspect Soviet freighter taking missile equipment from Cuba in 1962.