

U.S. Doubles Air Strike Force Off Cuba

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The recent Pentagon decision to double the size of the warplane strike force at Homestead AFB, south of Miami — and across the Florida Straits from Communist Cuba — has raised eyebrows from coast to coast.

Unconfirmed rumors are already circulating in Miami that the United States may be getting ready for another major confrontation with the Fidel Castro regime.

The Pentagon announcement said simply that the 4531st tactical operational fighter wing at Homestead is being doubled in size with F4D fighter-bombers.

Homestead AFB already has two squadrons of the F4D's. A squadron usually consists of 15 to 18 planes. The

new buildup would give Homestead another 30 to 36 planes plus some 1340 military personnel

Observers are wondering why the United States would want some 50 to 52 of the big fighter-bombers at Homestead, only 225 miles from Cuba, instead of shipping them to, say, Vietnam.

Rumors in Miami have the United States "worried" by recent reports that Castro has surreptitiously obtained new weapons — perhaps long-range missiles — from the Soviet Union or Red China. The Defense Department in Washington, however, has denied the new fighter-bomber buildup at Homestead has anything to do with the alleged new Cuban arms buildup.

Whatever the reason for bringing the wing to top strength and stationing it in South Florida, there is no disputing the fact the unit could devastate the Communist island if Cuba emerged once again as a direct military threat to U.S. continental security.

Permanent missile sites erected in the Florida Keys following the 1962 crisis presumably could shower Cuba with rockets if necessary.

While it is not clear what type of aerial surveillance the United States maintains over Cuba, the U.S. Navy keeps one ship, the USS Oxford, on continuous "station" off Havana. It apparently takes note of everything moving in and out of Havana harbor, as well as in Cuban skies.