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U.S. Says Soviet Barges Stay at Cuban Port

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 15—

United States officials said today that the continuing presence of two Soviet barges in the Cuban harbor of Cienfuegos was causing concern to the Nixon Administration.

The officials, who are below the White House level but declined to be identified, emphasized that the barges were of a type directly linked to the deployment of Soviet nuclear submarine. They declined to divulge details but intimated that the Government had more information than it had released and that it was continuing to watch the situation at Cienfuegos closely.

Secretary of State William P. Rogers, they said, is expected to raise the presence of the barges, along with the larger question of Soviet naval activities at Cienfuegos, when he confers tomorrow with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei A. Gromyko. Both officials are attending the session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The Soviet press agency, Tass, in a statement Tuesday, declared that the Soviet Union "has not built and is not building its own military base on Cuba."

The term "its own" has evoked interest among officials. It was also the subject of an article yesterday by Victor Zorza, a leading specialist on Soviet affairs, in the British newspaper The Guardian.

Mr. Zorza suggested that the

Tass statement, issued two weeks after United States officials had drawn attention to Soviet activities at Cienfuegos, left as many questions unanswered as it answered.

Informants here pointed out that the two barges still at Cienfuegos were transported from northern Soviet ports across the Atlantic on a tank-lading ship (LST), unloaded at Havana Harbor, where there are cranes and other facilities, and then towed around western Cuba to the southern harbor of Cienfuegos.

They arrived as part of a Soviet naval squadron, comprising a guided-missile cruiser, a destroyer and a submarine rescue ship, that visited Havana and Cienfuegos from Sept. 9 to 12.

American concern about the Soviet naval visit was reported Sept. 25 in a column by C. L. Sulzberger in The New York Times. That day, in response to questions, Jerry W. Friedheim, a Pentagon spokesman, confirmed the Government's disquiet and later an unidentified White House official warned that "we would view the establishment of a strategic base in the Caribbean with the utmost seriousness."

On Tuesday the United States appeared to be lowering the temperature of charge and countercharge. Daniel Z. Henkin, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, noted that the last Soviet ships — the submarine rescue ship, which he termed a "buoy ship" and

the LST—departed Saturday, making it "less likely" that the Soviet Union was planning a submarine base.

Other informants hinted today that the two barges contained equipment for servicing nuclear submarines and their nuclear missiles. The United States has extensive facilities of the same type at its Polaris submarine bases at Holy Loch, Scotland, and Rota, Spain.

The informants also noted that the Tass denial could imply that Soviet nuclear submarines now off the East Coast might be able to use shore facilities under Cuban sovereignty.

In that connection, officials pointed to a steady increase in Soviet-Cuban cooperation in the last two years.