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Hint on Return of Navy Base

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MIAMI BEACH — The United States may give up its naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as the first step in reopening relations with that Communist country.

This intriguing possibility has been raised by the remarks of the U.S. commander of the base, Rear Adm. Leo B. McCuddin. Though couched in diplomatic terms, they go farther than any former U.S. statement in accepting what has been a long-term Communist demand.

The admiral's unusual call for a rapprochement with Cuba was contained in two remarks made to a Miami reporter. The admiral said, first, that U.S. relinquishment of the base is "not beyond the realm of possibility, but for the foreseeable future we will be staying here."

This is the first time, so

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far as is known, that an American official has even voiced the possibility that the United States might give up its naval base at Guantanamo.

Cuban dictator Fidel Castro has long been demanding that the United States give up the base. The timing of McCuddin's statement was especially interesting, since Cuba and Russia recently reiterated the demand.

Following Castro's visit to the Soviet Union at midyear, a joint communique was issued which included the following paragraph:

"The Soviet delegation confirmed its support of the demand made by the people of Cuba and the Revolu-

tionary Government of the Republic of Cuba that the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo, set up in Cuban territory against the sovereign will of the people of Cuba, be unconditionally withdrawn."

Relations Asked

McCuddin also reportedly called for resumption of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba. McCuddin was quoted as saying:

"We have to recognize that there are other ideologies and we all have to get along in the world. It would be better for us economically, and better for Cuba, if we did recognize the country and establish relations with them again."

Again the admiral's comments were viewed as especially significant because to date American officials have been reluctant to discuss the possibility of rapprochement with Cuba. Whether McCuddin's statement had prior approval from Washington was not known, but in view of the sensitive position he holds it was not deemed likely he would say these things without at least a tacit OK.

Long Lease

The United States holds a 99-year lease to 45 square miles of land at Guantanamo. The lease was obtained at the turn of the century, when the base had more strategic importance than it does today. Then it served as a needed coaling station for U.S. ships sailing the Caribbean. Today it serves primarily as a psychological balance to Soviet military presence in Communist Cuba.

Hence the possibility is seen that the United States might be willing to withdraw from Guantanamo if Russia were to withdraw its military presence from Cuba.



THE NAVAL BASE AT GUANTANAMO
Originally established as coaling station