

Soviet Tender Still Plying Caribbean

DEC 3 1970

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 2—High Administration officials are said to suspect that the Soviet Union is playing a maritime "cat-and-mouse" game with its submarine tender in the Caribbean.

"If I were the Russians, I'd run that ship around for the next six months," a senior official commented to a newsmen a few days ago. That is what Government analysts believe the Soviet Union is doing.

The 9,000-ton tender, of a class known as Ugra, has been the center of the controversy that has been simmering, both publicly and privately, between the Nixon Administration and the Kremlin since late September. It started when a Soviet naval squadron, for the third time in 15 months, called at the Cuban ports of Havana and Cienfuegos between Sept. 9 and 12.

Soon after, the principal Soviet ships, including a guided-missile cruiser and a guided-missile destroyer, sailed home. Several auxiliary vessels,

including the tender and two special barges, remained at Cienfuegos. United States U-2 reconnaissance aircraft photographed the ships as well as new shore construction, and intelligence experts alerted the White House.

Before going abroad today, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird discussed Soviet naval deployment in the Caribbean.

A submarine base, he said, requires the presence of a tender, and "it's the tender that's the important thing." At the same time he said that there were no indications that a Soviet submarine had been serviced in Cienfuegos or other Cuban waters by the tender.

He said the tender was moving around in the Caribbean

and was now somewhere south of Haiti.

Asked whether he was surprised that it was still in Caribbean waters, he replied in the negative, but he said he would be surprised if it "serviced a Soviet submarine" in Cuban waters in view of a Soviet declaration in October that the agreement that ended the 1962 Cuban missile crisis was being adhered to.

Mr. Laird agreed that the accord did not preclude such servicing outside Caribbean waters.

"I assume that the tender will be used to service submarines in the future and I don't know what reason they'd hang on to it if they didn't service submarines," he added.