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WARNING ON CUBA PUZZLES U.S. AIDES

White House Data in Report on Base Termed Old

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 29 —

American officials said today that the United States had only dubious and dated information to indicate that the Soviet Union might be planning to build a strategic submarine base in Cuba.

For this reason, these officials, who include members of the intelligence community, said they were at a loss to explain why the White House chose last week to warn Moscow against the establishment of such a base.

Officials and diplomats have suggested the possibility that the White House acted for broader policy motivations including the Middle East crises, or that an alleged Soviet threat in Cuba was being used to signal dangers that might develop if Dr. Salvador Allende, a Marxist, became Chile's President in November as expected.

The whole question of the reported Soviet plans for a naval base is delicate because in the Administration are inhibited from commenting on background briefings by the White House.

Source of Embarrassment

The practice of background briefings, by officials who cannot be publicly identified, has often turned into a source of embarrassment to the State Department.

While Latin-American diplomats wondered why the United States chose to create at this time what appeared to be an artificial crisis in the Caribbean, American officials acknowledged that the unconfirmed reports of construction

of a Soviet base in the Cuban port of Cienfuegos had been available since early this year. The officials said that little, if any, new information had been obtained in recent months that would account for the warning on Friday that "the Soviet Union can be under no doubt that we would view the establishment of a strategic base in the Caribbean with the utmost seriousness."

Hearings Are Recalled

It was recalled that virtually all the information on the reported Cuban base had been presented to the House Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs during hearings between July 8 and Aug. 3.

The possibility that the Soviet Union might seek to build a base was raised in the closed-door hearings by Adm. E. P. Holmes, commander in chief of the Atlantic Fleet, and by G. Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

Mr. Nutter's remark that the establishment of a Soviet base "cannot be discounted as long as Castro's hostility to the United States persists" was partly deleted from the transcript for security reasons. But no witness reported actual evidence of base construction.

Officials said there was still no evidence of suspicious construction activities, despite flights by U-2 surveillance planes.

However, reports from refugees from Cuba indicated that a section of Cienfuegos Harbor had been closed to visitors, except Soviet personnel.

In what may be a related effort, the Cuban press agency Prensa Latina reported Sept. 17 that an eight-lane highway from Havana to Cienfuegos, a section of the new southern coast superhighway, was being built under the supervision of a Soviet engineer.

Officials commented that normal automotive traffic in Cuba did not seem to justify an eight-lane highway, unless it was intended for military use.

These were the possible explanations offered for the White House response to these reports:

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