

Eased Tensions in Cuba

In a period of growing anxiety about Russian-American relations, Moscow's denial that the Soviet Union is building a naval base in Cuba contains an unexpected extra dividend. The Tass statement affirms the continued validity of the Kennedy-Khrushchev understanding that ended the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Of parallel importance, it implicitly recognizes that a Soviet nuclear submarine base on that island—the possibility raised by White House and Pentagon statements last Sept. 25—would violate that pact. The departure of a Soviet submarine tender from Cienfuegos—the Cuban port at which Washington thought a base might be under construction—has further helped to clear the air.

What remains curious is the comparatively long delay—eighteen days—between the announcement of Washington's suspicions and Moscow's release of the official, definitive Tass denial. This puzzling performance was particularly unfortunate because the immediate issue raised by the original charges was that of Soviet trustworthiness. Doubts on that score already had been fanned by Soviet and Egyptian missile trickery in the Suez Canal zone.

Without mutual trust there is no hope of ending the arms race or of settling other contentious issues. Fortunately the belated Tass statement and the submarine tender's exit from Cienfuegos suggest that at least some influential forces in the Moscow Politburo still understand the need for positive actions and words in this period of roiled relations.

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