

Rogers Tells of Soviet 'Naval Activity' at Cuban Port

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 23 — Secretary of State William P. Rogers said at a news conference today that there had been some Soviet "naval activity" recently in the area of Cienfuegos, the Cuban port where the Soviet Union is reportedly developing facilities for nuclear submarines. But he said there had been "no new construction" since President Nixon's news conference 10 days ago.

Mr. Rogers seemed reluctant to go into details about a situation that the Administration is watching through frequent U-2 reconnaissance aircraft flights, through a ring of United States Navy surface and underwater craft and through other secret means. However, he did say, in response to a question, that the United States was not discussing the issue at this time with the Soviet Union. "They know our attitude on this," he said. "We have an understanding."

In response to another question, Mr. Rogers observed that an "understanding" was not necessarily an "agreement." Rather, he explained, it could be a *modus vivendi*, or mutual comprehension of what the other party to a diplomatic negotiation will or will not do.

Meanwhile, other responsible officials appeared to be hardening the Administration's previous public warnings to Moscow not to establish a strategic nuclear base in the Western Hemisphere. Beginning in late September, President Nixon and high officials repeatedly fo-

cussed public attention on Soviet naval construction at Cienfuegos, which is situated on an excellent harbor on the southern coast of central Cuba.

They have told the Soviet Union that establishment of a base would violate President Kennedy's 1962 agreement with Nikita S. Khrushchev, who was then the Soviet Premier, to keep Soviet nuclear weapons out of the hemisphere.

"The Soviet Union should be under no illusion of the gravity with which the United States would regard the servicing of Soviet vessels armed with offensive weapons in or from bases in Cuba," said one responsible source.

Heretofore various Administration spokesmen, speaking at various times with varying degrees of precision, have concentrated on warning against the servicing of Soviet nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered submarines "in" Cuban ports or territorial waters.

The expansion of this warning to include such servicing "in or from" Cuban bases was taken to refer to the Soviet submarine tender that has attracted continuing concern since it first appeared at Cienfuegos in mid-September along with visiting Soviet fleet units.

The 9,000-ton Soviet tender had been playing a cat-and-mouse game, sailing in and out of Cienfuegos and other Cuban ports and cruising periodically about the Caribbean. It is watched constantly by United States aircraft and surface and undersea ships. At the moment it is reliably reported to be back in Cienfuegos, although

th Pentagon refused to confirm this.

Melvin R. Laird Secretary of Defense said at a news conference in late November that a submarine base required the presence of a tender, which normally carries spare warheads and machinery for repairs.

"It's the tender that's the important thing," he emphasized.

United States Naval sources have cited, in addition to the periodic presence of the tender in Cienfuegos, the permanent presence there of two 80-foot barges for storing radioactive effluent from a nuclear submarine's reactors, barracks capable of housing 200 men, a communications center, an anti-submarine net and other facilities

linked directly with Soviet nuclear submarine operations.

By using Cienfuegos as a base to allow submarine crews periodic time ashore for rest and recreation, they say, the Soviet Union can save 12 days in the normal 17-day round-trip its nuclear submarines would have to make from their stations at sea, 1,500 miles off the United States's east coast, to their home port near Murmansk.