

Castro Bid to Block Zaire War Reported

San Francisco Chronicle
★ Sat., June 10, 1978

Washington

Cuban President Fidel Castro told the United States in mid-May that he knew of the invasion of Zaire's Shaba Province a month or more in advance and that he tried unsuccessfully to stop it, informed sources said last night.

The first half of Castro's statements on May 17 to the chief U.S. diplomat in Havana, Lyle F. Lane, seem to buttress the Carter administration's claim that Cuba had advance knowledge of the cross-border attack.

But the second half of the Castro statement — which has not been officially disclosed — contradicts President Carter's May 25 declaration that Cuba "obviously did nothing" to restrain the invaders.

The U.S. diplomat's report on his conversation with Castro was made available to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee yesterday.

Sources familiar with the diplomat's report said Castro told Lane that he tried to persuade the Angolan government of President Agostinho Neto to restrain the attack across Angola's border into Shaba Province.

Castro reportedly said he may have failed because Neto was ill and out of the country part of the time before the attack by Angolan-based Katangans on May 11-12.

There was no immediate explanation for the administration's failure to disclose Castro's claim that he sought to head off the invasion. CBS, which reported the story on its evening news Friday night, quoted a State Department source as saying the claim was not disclosed because the department did not believe Castro, but did not want to call him a liar.

The fact of Castro's meeting with the U.S. diplomat had been disclosed by administration officials

on May 18, the day after it occurred. The officials said then that Castro had said Cuba was not taking part, directly or indirectly, in the Shaba invasion. No further details were given.

Carter's press conference declaration May 25, which was drafted by a committee of White House and State Department officials, stated: "The government of Angola must bear a responsibility for the deadly attack, which was launched from its territory, and it's a burden and a responsibility shared by Cuba."

"We believed that Cuba had known of the Katangan plan to invade and obviously did nothing to restrain them from crossing the border. We also know that the Cubans have played a key role in training and equipping the Katangans who attacked."

The Carter administration's accusations that Cuba played a role in the attack have been rejected by

Cuba and questioned by some administration officials and members of Congress.

Central Intelligence Agency Director Admiral Stansfield Turner, in a series of classified briefings this week for four Senate and House committees, sought to prove the case that Cuban help was a factor in the invasion. According to some of the lawmakers he briefed, Turner did not mention Castro's statements to the U.S. diplomat.

Turner's two-hour closed session presentation yesterday to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee — like similar briefings to other Hill units — drew sharply mixed reactions from lawmakers who heard it and failed to resolve the controversy over Cuban aid to the forces that invaded Shaba.

Those who have tended to support Carter said Turner had convinced them that the President's charges are correct. But

those who have questioned the accuracy of the evidence said they still have heard nothing to put their doubts to rest.

Senator George McGovern (Dem-S.D.), who originated the committee's request for the administration's evidence, summed up the situation by saying:

"There's a definite parallel with what happened during the Vietnam War. Different people look at the same data and draw different conclusions from it."

It has become clear during the past week, the overwhelming mass of the administration's evidence consists of reports collected by the CIA from African diplomats, from captured rebels and from agents of other governments.

The CIA, which refuses to identify its sources, insists that its intelligence adds up to a "preponderance of evidence" about Cuban involvement.

Many say that much of this intelligence was obtained at second or third hand or comes from sources of doubtful reliability. As a result, the sources contend, the evidence is too circumstantial and too susceptible to differing interpretations to be conclusive.

Washington Post