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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, CU, JR
SUBJECT: SOVIETS DEFEND GROUND ATTACK ROLE OF MIG-23

REF: HAVANA 3902

1. SUMMARY: SOVIET ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN HAVANA ACKNOWLEDGES AND DEFENDS GROUND ATTACK ROLE OF MIG-23. ARTICLE REITERATES, HOWEVER, THAT AIRCRAFT IS NOT NUCLEAR ARMS "CARRIER". END SUMMARY.
2. SOVIET SPANISH LANGUAGE NOVOSTI PRESS BULLETIN RELEASED IN HAVANA, NOVEMBER 29, PUBLISHES ARTICLE ACKNOWLEDGING AND DEFENDING GROUND ATTACK ROLE OF MIG-23'S IN CUBA. ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED UNDER TITLE "ANOTHER ATTEMPT TO IMPEDE SALT II CONVERSATIONS". (WE ARE REPORTING ARTICLE BECAUSE OF SIGNIFICANCE OF ITS PUBLICATION IN SPANISH LANGUAGE IN CUBA AND IN EVENT IT HAS NOT APPEARED IN MOSCOW.)
3. 3. ARTICLE DESCRIBES MIG-23 AS "FIGHTER AND BOMBER" AIRCRAFT. AIRCRAFT CAN BE USED, ARTICLE SAYS, "TO PROTECT GROUND FORCES IN REPELLING AGGRESSION AND TO PROTECT AIRSPACE OF CUBA." THESE TWO ROLES ARE DESCRIBED AS "DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS" WHICH "DO NOT OFFER ANY DANGER

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TO THE SECURITY OF THE UNITED STATES." ARTICLE MAINTAINS THAT, ACCORDING TO CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT TENDENCIES IN ALL COUNTRIES, ANY NEW MILITARY AIRCRAFT IS DESIGNED TO HAVE "COMPLEMENTARY POSSIBILITIES TO PROTECT THE AIRSPACE OF A SOVEREIGN STATE AND THE GROUND FORCES." ARTICLE SAYS THAT, "IT IS VERY NATURAL FOR CUBA TO BE INTERESTED IN HAVING A MULTIPLE (PURPOSE) AIRCRAFT THAT IS CAPABLE OF REPELLING THE AIR AND GROUND ENEMY". (COMMENT: ARTICLE, THUS, APPEARS TO ACKNOWLEDGE GROUND ATTACK ROLE OF MIG-23 - EITHER CERTAIN MODELS OR WHOLE GENRE.)

4. ARTICLE DEFENDS DECISION TO SUPPLY MIG-23 TO CUBA BY STATING THAT THE SOVIET AIR FORCES, AS WELL AS AIR FORCES OF "US, BRITISH, AND OTHER COUNTRIES," ARE CONSTANTLY DEVELOPING. THUS, "FRIENDS OF SOVIET UNION ARE INTERESTED, NATURALLY, IN BUYING FROM USSR SIMILAR WAR MATERIAL SO THAT THEIR ARMED FORCES ARE NOT LEFT BEHIND..." ARTICLE ADDS THAT, "IT WOULD BE ILLOGICAL FOR CUBA TO BE SUPPLIED WITH ANTIQUATED MATERIAL IN THE FACE OF A PERFECTLY ARMED NEIGHBOR."

5. SOVIET ARTICLE STATES, HOWEVER, THAT MOSCOW HAS NEVER SUPPLIED CUB WITH MILITARY AIRCRAFT NUCLEAR ARMS "CARRIERS" (PORTADORES). (COMMENT: THE TERM "NUCLEAR-CAPABLE" IS NOT USED.) SUCH A SUPPLY, ARTICLE SAYS, WOULD BE VIOLATION OF NPT, AND TREATY OF TLAHELCO, AND WOULD CONTRADICT SOVIET UNGA PROPOSAL ON REINFORCING SECURITY GUARANTEES TO NON-NUCLEAR STATES. (COMMENT: PRESUMABLY, BY INTRODUCING NUCLEAR WEAPONS WHERE THEY HAD NOT BEEN BEFORE. ARTICLE MAKES NO MENTION OF 1962 US-SOVIET "UNDERSTANDING" ON "OFFENSIVE WEAPONS" IN CUBA.)

6. ARTICLE ADDS THAT SOVIET ARMS EXPERTS CONSIDER THAT ACCUSATIONS MADE BY WASHINGTON POST THAT "THE FORM (FORMA) OF MIG-23 PERMITS TRANSPORT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS" ARE "COMPLETELY UNFOUNDED". ARTICLE SAYS THAT THE TWO VERSIONS OF THE US PHANTOM - RECONNAISSANCE AND "CARRIER" (PORTADOR - THAT IS, NUCLEAR DELIVERY MODEL) - HAVE SAME CONFIGURATION (CONFIGURACION). IT IS "PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE", ARTICLE SAYS, "TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT IT CAN CARRY NUCLEAR WEAPONS WHEN IT IS IN FLIGHT." ARTICLE SAYS, "FOR THIS REASON (POR ESO) THE CONFIGURATION OF THE MIG-23 DOES NOT GIVE ANY BASIS FOR DEDUCING THAT IT IS A CARRIER OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS." (COMMENT: SOVIETS APPEAR TO BE SAYING THAT THERE IS NO WAY TO DISTINGUISH VISUALLY MIG-23'S WHICH CAN OR CANNOT CARRY NUCLEAR WEAPONS.)

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7. ARTICLE CONTINUES THAT "RIDICULOUS VERSION OF SOVIET THREAT TO US FROM CUBAN TERRITORY" IS BEING ARTIFICIALLY RAISED TO TRY TO SHOW THAT USSR IS NOT SINCERE ABOUT SALT II AND TO "PLACE IN DOUBT POSSIBILITY OF SIGNING THIS MOST IMPORTANT SOVIET-AMERICAN AGREEMENT."

ARTICLE STATES THAT MIG-23'S WERE SUPPLIED A LONG TIME AGO AND US "PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN" IN WHICH "HIGH OFFICIALS" ARE TAKING PART IS JUST BEING RAISED NOW WHEN PARTIES ARE COMING CLOSE TO SIGNATURE OF SALT II TREATY. JS, HOWEVER, ARTICLE SAYS, "CANNOT IGNORE FACT THAT CUBA HAS NOT BEEN SUPPLIED WITH ANYTHING MORE THAN DEFENSIVE EQUIPMENT."

8. SOVIETS CONCLUDE THAT "THOSE WHO WISH TO EXPLOIT CURRENT CAMPAIGN" SHOULD BE REMINDED THAT IT IS THE USSR THAT HAS REAL BASIS TO BE CONCERNED GIVEN FACT THAT US AIR FORCE IN JAPAN, TURKEY, AND SOUTH-KOREA, "IN IMMEDIATE PROXIMITY OF USSR, ARE SUPPLIED WITH EQUIPMENT CAPABLE OF DELIVERING NUCLEAR WEAPONS. NOT TO MENTION NATO MEANS OF DELIVERY IN EUROPE."

9. BEGIN COMMENT: SOVIET ARTICLE IS FIRST ADMISSION HERE, EITHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE, OF PRESENCE OF GROUND ATTACK VERSIONS OF MIG-23 OR, ALTERNATIVELY, GROUND ATTACK CAPABILITY OF ENTIRE GENRE (AS WELL AS FIRST CONFIRMATION THAT SOVIET AND CUBAN DEFINITION OF "DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS" INCLUDES GROUND ATTACK AS WELL AS AIR DEFENSE ROLE.) AS SUCH, ON FACE OF IT, ARTICLE WOULD APPEAR TO BODE ILL FOR POSSIBILITY OF WITHDRAWAL OF ANY GROUND ATTACK VERSIONS HERE - ALTHOUGH, CONCEIVABLY, PORTRAYAL OF ALL MIG-23'S AS GROUND ATTACK-CAPABLE COULD SERVE TO PROVIDE COVER UNDER WHICH SPECIFIC GROUND ATTACK MODELS COULD BE REMOVED WITHOUT UNDULY EMBARRASSING CUBANS.

10. APPARENT SOVIET AFFIRMATION THAT NUCLEAR-CAPABLE AND NON-NUCLEAR-CAPABLE MIG-23'S CANNOT BE DISTINGUISHED VISUALLY PRESUMABLY IS EFFORT TO BLUR SALIENCE OF DISTINCTION BETWEEN INTERCEPTOR AND GROUND ATTACK AIRCRAFT HERE - AGAIN AN INDICATION THAT SOVIETS ARE RELUCTANT TO SINGLE OUT GROUND ATTACK AIRCRAFT FOR REMOVAL. WHILE US OVERFLIGHT ISSUE IS NOT RAISED, SOVIETS MAY HOPE THAT AFFIRMATION OF INDISTINGUISHABILITY ELIMINATES REASON FOR ANY SUCH OVERFLIGHTS.

11. SOVIETS PRESUMABLY ALSO HOPE THAT RAISING OF SPECTOR OF US AND ALLIED FORWARD-BASED SYSTEMS ISSUE (PARA 8) WILL INFLUENCE US TO

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CEASE AND DESIST ON MIG-23 ISSUE. END COMMENT.
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