

Cuba again

How to make a crisis

MAKING A CRISIS IS EASY THESE days. Just mix a couple of thousand Soviet troops in Cuba, a few spy-satellite photographs, and some intelligence officials anxious to kill the SALT agreement. Then add a senator desperately fighting for reelection, the usual bevy of hawks spoiling for a scrap, and a weak and incompetent President. Combine all the ingredients and—presto!—you have a crisis. It's as simple as that.

It's hard to believe that there have been so many fierce words over the Soviet brigade stationed in Cuba, a contingent so small that it poses no military threat to the United States or any other nation in the hemisphere. But the mood in Washington these days is sullen and frustrated, and there's nothing like a showdown to put some pep and vigor back in public life. "It's a test," says Senator Frank Church—speaking about the Cuban controversy, not the test he faces back home in Idaho against Republican Stephen Symms, although that is plainly much on his mind these days. "The Russians deployed a combat brigade in Cuba, attempted to conceal its presence, but they knew the brigade would be discovered by us. They're testing our resolve." Church wants the Russian troops out. "We must decide where to draw the line against the deployment of Soviet combat troops. If not in Cuba, where would it be?"

Never one to be outdone when it comes to anti-Soviet hysteria, Senator Henry Jackson has gone Church one better. The Soviets are trying to turn Cuba into "a fortress-state capable of threatening the United States," says the Washington Democrat, with his usual fine sense of proportion. "The time for the United States to reaffirm its position on what Soviet behavior we will not tolerate in this hemisphere is now." As a beginning, Jackson demands, we must "insist on no less" than the removal of Soviet combat troops and high-performance ground-attack aircraft and an end to the Soviet policy of providing submarines to Cuba. If the Soviets don't comply, he warns, "It means that SALT is down the tubes."

If SALT does go down the tubes, Jackson won't shed a tear, and neither will the intelligence officials whose well-timed leaks created the crisis. The first public word of a Soviet brigade came on July 17, at the SALT hearings, when Senator Richard Stone, Florida Democrat, used information from a leaked National Security Agency report to question Defense Secretary Harold Brown about the Soviet troops. (Ironically,

the NSA report, compiled from radio intercepts, was one product of an intensified intelligence surveillance of Cuba ordered last spring by Zbigniew Brzezinski, the President's national security adviser, when he was trying to find Castro's hand behind the revolution in Nicaragua. Were it not for Brzezinski's special fetish, the NSA evidence about the brigade, which goes back as far as 1975, would probably have remained buried in the files.) At Stone's insistence, the administration thereafter stepped up surveillance of Cuba to the highest level, and in August a spy satellite spotted the Soviet brigade on maneuvers a few miles from the Havana airport. But before the administration could decide what to do about this information, it was leaked to the press by intelligence sources, and the administration was forced to announce hurriedly, using Senator Church as a spokesman, that there were Soviet "combat troops" in Cuba. To the surprise of administration officials, however, Church combined the announcement with a demand that the troops be immediately withdrawn and a warning that SALT was in danger. The crisis was on.

What are Soviet troops doing in Cuba and how long have they been there? In its initial announcement, the administration failed to answer these questions, leaving senators free to spin bizarre tales of a Soviet strike force aimed at intimidating or invading nations in Central and South America. The facts, as usual, are a little less startling. It now appears that the Soviet "brigade," numbering 3,000 men, has been in Cuba at least since the early seventies—and perhaps since 1962. The Russians say the brigade is a remnant of the 22,000 troops there at the time of the Cuban missile crisis and withdrawn in 1963 and 1964.

Despite the wild imaginings of the senators, the Soviet troops, which have no air- or sea-lift capability, are not going to end up tomorrow in Miami Beach. Militarily, the controversy about the brigade is "a tempest in a teapot," says a high-level administration official. "This is no new threat to the United States. The USSR goes by the book when deploying forces, and this is the package set requirement for a unit sized to defend Soviet installations: artillery, armor and armored



personnel carrier units along with air defense elements.” One theory is that the brigade is designed to protect top-secret Soviet electronic listening posts or the new MIG-23 jets the Russians have delivered to Cuba. (The Soviets have ample reason to want to guard their installations: According to a former government official, in 1962, at the height of the missile crisis, Cuban troops seized one of the MRBM sites from the Soviets. Fortunately for us all, the United States did not learn this until a number of years later.) Another possibility is that the brigade, as the Russians insist, is a training force. The administration, which recklessly announced that the brigade was a “combat” unit, now concedes the possibility that the Soviets are telling the truth.

If this is the case, the administration will find itself in an embarrassing position. In the early days of the flap, when Senators Stone, Church, and Jackson were squawking loudest, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance declared, “I will not be satisfied with the maintenance of the status quo.” But what if the status quo in Cuba turns out to be nothing more than a continuation of the Soviet policies of the last seventeen years, policies that do not contradict U.S.–Soviet agreements on the existence of offensive weapons in Cuba, policies to which the United States has never raised an objection? Will the administration still insist that the Russians remove their troops? Will the Russians back down, as they did in 1962? And what will Carter do if they refuse?

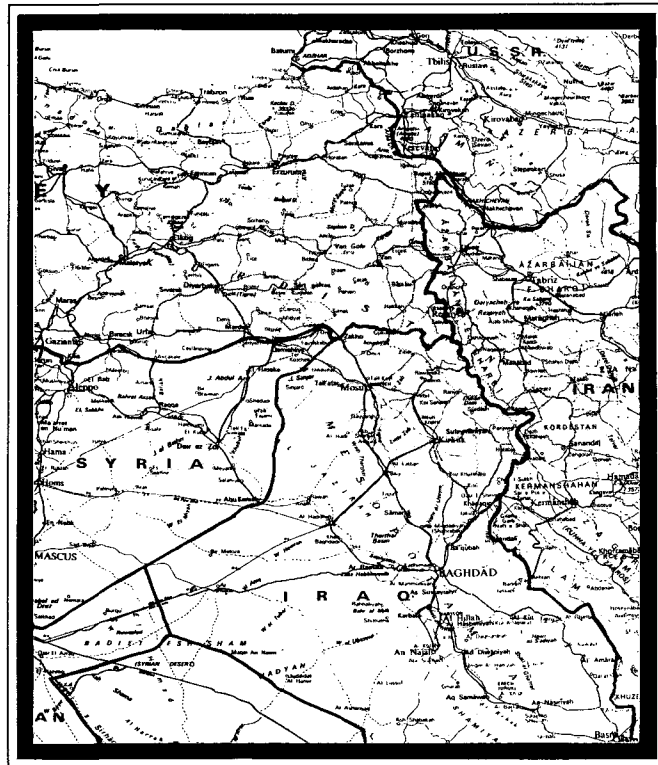
We just hope the President remembers that, as easy as it is to make a crisis these days, it’s not much harder, once you have a crisis, to add some strong language and careless gestures and come up with a war.

U.S. aid to Iran

The same old story

THE INDOMITABLE KURDISH PEOPLE have been in revolt since they were defeated by Cyrus the Great in 550 B.C. The Kurds are a mountain people with their own language and culture; they are spread over territory that straddles the borders of Syria, Turkey, Iraq, the Soviet Union, and Iran. In Iran, the scene of the latest Kurdish insurrection, the Kurds are racially similar to the Persians, but linguistically distinctive, and predominantly Sunni in a country that officially embraces the Shia sect of Islam. There are approximately 12 million Kurds in all, with about 4 million in north-western Iran along the Iraqi frontier.

The Kurds were promised the right to self-determination in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, one of the treaty settlements that followed World War I. But three years later, in the Treaty of Lausanne, the promise was taken back, as the oil-hungry victors of the war abandoned all pretense of ideals like self-determination in favor of “protectorates” over or alliances with the newly emerging nation-states of the Middle East. The Kurds, who had once been able to survive in the interstices of the multinational Ottoman Empire, now faced forced assimilation



at the hands of young nationalists. These nationalist rulers wanted central direction, undivided allegiance, and cultural homogeneity for their new countries. They were resolutely opposed to autonomy for the Kurds. In Turkey, the Kurds’ schools were closed, their publications banned, and their leaders arrested and executed. The very word “Kurd” was outlawed. Similar though less severe efforts to denationalize the Kurds took place in Iran. In Iraq, where Kurds are proportionally the strongest—about a quarter of the country’s population—the Kurds have fought their way through a series of triumphs and betrayals. There the Hashemite monarchy, various military radicals, and the Ba’athist party, each in turn, has come to power, promised the Kurds autonomy, broken the promise, and hence provoked a revival of the Kurdish struggle.

The Kurdish Democratic party, led by the Barzani clan, participated militarily in the short-lived Kurdish republic in Iran at the close of World War II. This republic was aided by Soviet military presence though it was not under Soviet tutelage. When the shah’s troops retook control of northern Iran in 1946, the Kurdish forces fled over the border into the Soviet Union. Following the overthrow of the Hashemites in Iraq in 1958, the Kurdish Democratic party leaders returned from exile confirmed non-Communists. There they fought on their own until 1973, when international oil politics and the Arab-Israeli conflict made them an attractive client for aid from Israel, Iran, and the CIA. Then in 1975, Henry Kissinger personally patched up the differences between Iraq and Iran. Part of the deal was an end to Iran’s role as a place of refuge for and channel of aid to the Kurds. The immediate consequence was military defeat for the Kurds; thousands died and tens of thousands became homeless refugees. Kissinger’s remorseless response to questions about America’s betrayal of the Kurds: “Covert action is not missionary work.” This episode was cited widely—and apparently, optimistically—as, in the *Washington Post’s* words, “an example of the cynicism that a new Democratic administration would eschew.” Yet once again the logic of an interventionist foreign policy is leading the

United States into involvement in the Kurdish question.

The recent full-scale fighting in Kurdistan is largely the Ayatollah Khomeini's doing, as William Branigin of the *Washington Post* reported. After a brief flare-up in Kurdistan, the Ayatollah ordered a general mobilization throughout Iran with the proclaimed intention of annihilating rebellion in areas of Kurdistan that were in fact peaceful at the time. In reality, the mobilization was primarily designed to rally the restive people of Iran to Khomeini's banner, but his proclamation proved a self-fulfilling prophecy by setting off a widespread Kurdish rebellion.

While emphasizing that they do not wish to secede from Iran, the Kurds do desire some form of substantial regional autonomy, something that is not guaranteed by the vague promises and unsuitable institutions of the Ayatollah's draft constitution. Even when faced with rebellion, the Ayatollah offers Kurdish autonomists little hope or consolation: "I tell the Kurds that all the Iranian masses are the same. There is no difference between the nationalities."

Khomeini has demanded unconditional surrender by the Kurds. His guards and committees have opposed the break-up of feudal estates by the Kurdish peasantry. He has outlawed the Kurdish Democratic party, calling it un-Islamic, "an agent of imperialism and Zionism," and Communist-inspired. The Kurds' "criminal leaders" must not be negotiated with, the Ayatollah says. "They must be crushed." If resistance by the Kurdish rebels persists, another religious leader says, "We shall eliminate them, no matter what the cost." Already hundreds of Kurds have been summarily executed under the supervision of the Ayatollah Sadegh Khalakali, who is nicknamed Judge Blood.

Khomeini has reserved his greatest scorn and venom for the Kurdish leadership's linkage of national autonomy to a need for liberal democracy throughout Iran. Abdul Rahman Qassem-lou, the leader of the Kurdish Democratic party, says: "We now demand democracy for all Iran, freedom for all political parties, and guaranteed freedom for the press." He adds that Khomeini has started an inquisition and is slowly returning Iran to a "religious dictatorship of the Middle Ages." Khomeini, like the Kurds, links the problems of Kurdistan and liberalization, but his approach is to denounce those who "want to give away the country under the guise of democracy."

Now what do you suppose the Carter administration's crusaders for human rights have chosen to do under the circumstances? They've decided that the time is ripe to improve relations with Khomeini by offering to send Iran the \$5 billion in arms and spare parts ordered by the shah but needed now because of the Kurdish rebellion. In briefing reporters, the U.S. State Department was careful to convey its view that the survival of a strong central government in Iran was more important than autonomy for the Kurds. The United States government—seemingly incapable of learning the most obvious lessons—is about to repeat the mistake it made in backing the repressive shah. Earlier, administration spokesmen, itching to prove their interventionist "nerve" even if only in Yemen, developed the concept of an Islamic "crescent of crisis." Then Carter, wanting to unite the populace behind his leadership, treated the energy problem like a wartime crisis. Now turmoil in oil-rich Iran threatens once again to inexorably involve the United States. We can only hope that the administration will heed the advice on Iran offered by the *New York Times*: "The risk is that the United States will indulge in activism for its own sake when the wisest course may be to stay out of the game altogether." □

Why gold glitters

The shrinking dollar

MARKET OBSERVERS HAVE BEEN amazed and confounded by the seemingly unchecked rise in the price of gold, now hovering at around \$345 an ounce. The most popular explanations for this rise appear to center around speculators' anxieties about possible disruptions in our oil supplies and the consequent increases in the price of gasoline and other petroleum products. Fears of more political unrest in Iran, greater instability in the Middle East, even an OPEC on the verge of massive price boosts, have all been blamed for the metal's popularity. Although there is probably a vein of truth in these analyses of why gold has become more attractive, they do not tell the whole story.

Gold's current appeal is a function not only of fears for the short-run future of the American economy; it is also a reflection of the continued flight from the paper dollar. What we are witnessing is not so much the appreciation of bullion but a dramatic erosion of American paper money. With inflation now running at more than 13 percent a year with no end in sight, holders of dollars are seeing the value of their savings shrink at an alarming rate. But it is only the acceleration of the rate of inflation that is startling. Inflation itself is something Americans have long been aware of. Indeed by the government's own measures, a dollar's worth of goods and services in 1973 would have cost only 28¢ in 1939 and today costs over \$1.70. So much for paper money!

Gold, however, has had a far more reliable record. An ounce of gold in 1939 was valued at \$35, and, if one so chose, could have bought a man an excellent suit; today the same ounce of gold can command an equivalent suit. A weekend on the town, double room at the best hotel, dinner and a show, would have run about an ounce of gold in 1939; and, once again, an ounce of the metal could command the same goods and services today. Even the cost of a New York subway ride has remained constant—700 rides for an ounce of gold. In light of gold's ability to keep its value over time, despite the constant depreciation of paper money, it is no wonder that more and more people are turning their savings into gold.

There is no need to have recourse to esoteric explanations for the popularity of the metal. The answer to why gold has suddenly found so many enthusiastic purchasers lies not in the popularity of bullion but in the increasing unpopularity of the dollar. Those with savings have learned that if the current rate of inflation keeps up, a dollar today will be worth only nine cents in purchasing power twenty years from now and that an ounce of gold will keep its value regardless of how much paper the Bureau of Printing and Engraving turns out. □

(A typesetter's interpolation changed the meaning of the concluding lines of our September 30 editorial on nuclear power. The final passage should have read: "If nuclear-power plants can prosper without government aid, so much the better. If they cannot, then bye-bye, nuclear.")

PHIL STANFORD

The quiet war on cults

THE YOUNG MAN, AN AIDE to Representative Richard Ottinger of New York, was squirming over the telephone. "There's not going to be a hearing," he said.

"Well," I said, forewarned that Ottinger's office was sensitive about semantics in this particular instance, "what's it called?"

"A seminar," said the aide. "But no date has been set."

For some time now, interested parties such as the Alliance for the Preservation of Religious Liberty and the American Civil Liberties Union, or just curious journalists have been trying to find out when the next round of congressional hearings on cults is to be held. As the strange behavior of Ottinger's legislative assistant indicated, it is a very touchy subject.

In February, shortly after the Jonestown massacre had made the subject of cults a hot item—one that a politician might conceivably use as a political issue—Senator Robert Dole convened what he called a "special informal hearing" for members of Congress to explore "the cult phenomenon in the United States." It was called an "informal" hearing because congressional leaders, apparently recognizing the constitutional difficulties involved, declined to create an official Committee on Cults, or whatever it might have been called. Congress, it will be recalled, is not supposed to make laws affecting the right of people to practice whatever religion they choose. Even if it isn't a majority religion.

Dole, however, was not one to be deterred by such constitutional niceties. As the press release from his office showed

quite plainly, he was also willing to play both sides of the question. DOLE TO SPONSOR HEARING ON CULT PHENOMENON, read the headline on the press release from his office. It was only in the text of the release that one learned that Dole, along with Senator Edward Zorinsky (D-Neb.) and Representatives Robert Giaimo (D-Conn.), Richard Ottinger (D-N.Y.), Hamilton Fish (R-N.Y.), and G. William Whitehurst (R-Va.), would be sponsoring an "informal" hearing.

The list of thirteen witnesses scheduled to appear before this non-hearing left no doubt about the intentions of Dole and his colleagues. All were active opponents of groups they consider to be cults. One was Ted Patrick, the notorious "deprogrammer."

At this point the ACLU and the Alliance for the Preservation of Religious Liberty, a coalition of mostly mainstream religious organizations, got into motion. They called the hearings a "witch-hunt," an instance of unconstitutional meddling by the state into religious activities. Cults, as they pointed out, are in fact nothing more or less than minority religions, entitled to the same protections as majority religions. The Alliance and the ACLU demanded that if the hearings were to be held, at least the list of witnesses be expanded to include speakers with other points of view.

The hearings were held, and the witnesses did include several who were critical of the committee and its activities. As a result of the timely pressure by the ACLU and the Alliance, the "cult phenomenon," which at one time had seemed like such a sure political winner, had become a rather sensitive issue. Dole, who happens to be running for President, resigned as unofficial chairman of the unofficial committee, leaving everything in the lap of Richard Ottinger.

The question now is, When does Ottinger plan to hold more cult hearings?

Originally, a session was scheduled for July. Then it was postponed. Last month a spokesman for Ottinger's office said it would be "sometime in September." At that time the event was still referred to as an "unofficial" hearing.

Now it seems it is to be called a "seminar" and no date has been settled on—according to Ottinger's squirming legislative assistant.

"You see," he says, "there are a number of highly arcane and involved legal questions involved here." The questions, he says "are not related to the activities of any particular religious groups." In fact, he says, "It's a matter of exploring exactly how does the Congress protect religious freedom."

Reassuring as this undoubtedly sounds, it is still a bit vague. Exactly what arcane questions does the committee intend to address?

Ottinger's aide says there are four questions: First, "What legal remedies have been sought by parents to remove their adult offspring from so-called cults?" Second, "Does the Constitution allow for a legal determination that an individual has been mentally coerced into joining a so-called cult?" Third, "When kidnapping charges have been brought against parents of a member of a so-called cult or a 'deprogrammer' obtained by the parents, can the parents or the 'deprogrammer' claim a 'justification' defense?" And finally, can "actions based on religious belief—as opposed to the beliefs themselves—under any circumstances, be regulated by government?"

So much, then, for the committee's professed interest in finding new and better ways for Congress to protect the freedom of religion. But as a matter of fact, it is impossible to imagine any questions, slanted or not, that would not belie the committee's pieties. As the committee's critics have pointed out, that a congressional committee should meet to discuss the legal status of certain religious groups is itself an intrusion upon the freedom to think or believe. Nor does calling it an "unofficial committee" or a "seminar" change things one bit.

READERS OF A MAGAZINE like this hardly need to be reminded that denying basic freedoms to even the most politically powerless and numerically insignificant groups constitutes a potential threat to everyone else. Once a form of oppression has been accepted in principle, it invariably spreads to larger and larger groups of victims, very much like a disease. Recent history offers more than a few examples of this principle at work. To name just one, the methods used against the Socialist Workers party were eventually directed at the Democratic party.

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