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6308 – Cuban Situation, Variance in Intelligence Reports

Guest: Senator Strom Thurmond (D-SC)

Morphew: Introduction...you have been active in bringing up the facts in the situation in Cuba...as to the intelligence reports, why has there been a variance in them and the figures that they contain?

Thurmond: Well, Dick, I do not and would not challenge the capability of our intelligence services to collect accurate information on the Soviet forces in Cuba. I do have serious doubts, however, about what happens to that information when subjected to news management. I cannot forget the official brush-off of my statement in a speech on the Senate floor on January the 15th, 1962, that missile bases were being constructed in Cuba, nor the official denial of my statement of September the 3rd, 1962, that there were intermediate range ballistic missile bases in Cuba. This coupled with the assistant Defense Secretary Sylvester's recent statement that the government has the right and duty to lie causes me to put less than full faith in their denials. We have been told by official sources that there has been no Soviet military buildup in Cuba since last October at which time the official statements of our government admitted to the presence of only a few thousand Soviet technicians in Cuba. Now, it is admitted that there is a Soviet division and battalions of armor together with innumerable other types of weaponry including cruise missiles. If they weren't there in October and they didn't come since, when and where did they come from?

Morphew: You have brought out in speeches various figures about soviet armor buildup in Cuba...you said there were more than 2000 pieces of artillery, the DOD made only a partial denial of this statement, saying there were less than 2000 pieces, you cited 1000 mortars, the DOD admitted to 800, you said there were 600 Soviet tanks, the DOD said 400...in other words, they have confirmed everything you've said, just revising the

numbers but they've made it appear that there's a wide variance...is there really that much difference?

Thurmond: Well, Dick, there is really not that much difference. They have admitted to a large extent what I have charged. In replying to the figures on armaments which I have quoted, the Defense Department admitted for the first time that the Soviets have in Cuba 400 tanks, almost 200 armored personnel carriers, almost 2000 pieces of artillery, 800 mortars, almost 1200 rocket launchers, almost 600 SA2 anti-aircraft missiles on 24 sites, 150 cruise missiles, 200 airplanes including over 100 migs, and 40 navel vessels including 12 Carmar (???)class missile boats. Nor have they denied my report of 4 battalions of nuclear-tipped frog missiles and 15,000 vehicles. It would stretch credulity to believe that this tremendous quantity of armaments could be manned and maintained even by the 17,000 Soviets which the government admits are in Cuba, much less by the mere 6,000 fighting men in organized military units, as the government suggests. We cannot afford a breakdown in intelligence similar to that we apparently had preceding October the 14th of last year. Each day the government fails to face the situation realistically in Cuba, the more difficult and drastic will have to be the eventual remedy. A do-nothing policy in Cuba leaves the security of the western hemisphere in grave danger.

Morphew: The administration has said that on-site inspection is really the only way to know for sure whether soviet missiles have been removed from Cuba and yet hasn't it also been said recently that on-site inspection is a dead issue?

Thurmond: Well, Dick, I would simply refer you to a question and answer that was propounded to the president and his reply at his last news conference, and this was the question, a news reporter asked him this, "Mr. President, what is the administration's position now, about the on-site inspections that you were insisting upon in October? Is that now a dead letter?" And this was the president's answer, "That is right. Cuba did not agree to on-site inspection unless there was inspection of the United States which we did not agree to as part of that was the question of the no-invasion pledge and the rest. So there has been no on-site inspection and I don't expect to get any. And I don't expect Cuba will agree to the kind of on-site inspection that would give us more assurances than we have at the present time through photography." So it looks like on-site inspection is out under the president's answer. In my opinion, Dick, the only way we can definitely tell exactly what is in Cuba is through on-site inspection. We should demand on-site inspection and the president should not give up hope here and throw up his hands and say, because Cuba won't agree to it. Castro and Cuba don't have to agree. Khrushchev and the communists are running Cuba. They're in complete control in Cuba. Castro is a mere figurehead. We should demand of Khrushchev on-site inspection and we should not give up until we get it.

Morphew: McNamara and others in the administration have characterized the buildup as primarily that of defensive weapons...you're a major general in the army yourself and have some knowledge of weapons, what is your opinion on that?

Thurmond: Well, Dick, in my opinion, this is a lot of hokum. Any military man knows that 2,000 pieces of artillery, whether it's for offense or defense, is a hazard and that steps should be taken to see that it's eliminated in a country that close to the United States as is Cuba. Now, there are various pieces of other weapons we could go into, tanks instance. Are tanks offensives or defensives? Certainly, they were offensive when General Patton was running across France during World War II. We used them offensively to take that territory and to go on into Germany. Now, to say that the tanks are defensive in Cuba to me sounds silly. I could go into other weapons, but I think the same principle applies to most of those weapons and that is that they can be used defensively or offensively. And for the United States to hide behind the cloak of saying that these are defensive weapons is not facing up to reality.

Morphew: High officials in the State Department and other offices of government have said recently that Congress and the public should stop talking about foreign policy and leave this to the executive branch...what do you think the proper roles are for Congress and the public in determining foreign policy?

Thurmond: Well, under our system of government, the executive branch is responsible for foreign policy. The State Department has been formulating foreign policy for many, many years. The foreign policy here, under the State Department, has been similar under Truman, Eisenhower, and now under Kennedy, showing it's carried over from one administration to the other. In my opinion, however, the American people have a right to know what this foreign policy is. They have a right then to criticize it. And they have a right, if they want to, to demand that it be changed. After all, these people in the State Department, they are not elected, and even if they were elected they are subject to the will of the people of the United States. We have a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, and we should never forget, those of us in public office, that we are merely humble servants of the public, that we are merely fulfilling a role to carry out the policies, invoking the will of the people of this country.

Morphew: You have received a large public support for you stand, but critics say that those who criticize the government are merely voicing negative criticisms...if it were in your power to determine the policy, what would you do about the situation?

Thurmond: If I made the determination on Cuba, I would see that communism is clean out of Cuba. That's a positive statement. That's a positive act that would be required. Cuba is only 90 miles from the shores of the United States. We cannot allow communism to remain there. We cannot permit it to be a sanctuary for communism in the western hemisphere. We cannot permit this island to remain an island of communism. It's too close to us, and there is bound to be jeopardy to our people and to our nation if it does remain there. So I would say first, Dick, we should clean communism out of Cuba. After that decision is made, after we've made the decision to win this Cold War, to clean communism out of Cuba, then it's just a matter of procedure. There are various steps could be taken. For instance, an economic blockade could be thrown around Cuba and starve 'em to death. And if that didn't bring 'em to the knees, other steps could be taken. I think the decision is the big thing right now, to clean communism out of Cuba, and if

necessary, later, the military can be called upon to take the necessary steps to bring this about, if that becomes necessary.

Morphew: In other words, you would get back to enforcing the Monroe Doctrine?

Thurmond: I certainly would. The Monroe Doctrine provides that no foreign country will gain control in the western hemisphere. The communists have now gained control in the western hemisphere. They now control Cuba. Castro doesn't control Cuba, he is a mere figurehead as I said a few moments ago. Khrushchev and the Communists are dominating Cuba. They are giving the orders. They have brought in the weapons and equipment. They are the ones that purportedly took out the missiles or some of the missiles. The communists are in complete control of Cuba today and the Monroe Doctrine has now been violated. In my judgment, we should enforce this Monroe Doctrine and not permit these foreign powers to hold sway in Cuba which is so close to the United States.