

# 'Carter plays down the Cuban Crisis to save the “SALT II” Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty' from Le Soir (3 October 1979)


**Caption:** On 3 October 1979, the Belgian daily newspaper Le Soir describes the response of US President Jimmy Carter to the Soviet military presence in Cuba and the measures he intends to take in an endeavour to avoid the failure of the SALT II agreement on the limitation of strategic arms.

**Source:** Le Soir. 03.10.1979, n° 230; 93e année. Bruxelles. "Carter dédramatise la crise de Cuba pour sauver l'accord «S.A.L.T.-2» de limitation des armes stratégiques", p. 3.

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## Carter plays down the Cuban Crisis to save the 'SALT II' Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty

Washington, 2 October (AFP)

Having failed to secure the withdrawal of the Soviet combat brigade stationed in Cuba, President Carter made do with the Kremlin's assurances about the unit's mission, in an effort to save the ratification of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II).

To justify this U-turn, the President of the United States, in his address to the nation Monday evening, emphasised that he did not want to risk a return to the 'Cold War' simply because of a brigade that is of no threat whatsoever to American security. He also announced that he would be sending more American troops to the Caribbean.

AFP has learned that the Soviet guarantees were the subject of an exchange of personal messages between Jimmy Carter and Leonid Brezhnev on 25 and 27 September. The Kremlin leader's replies last Thursday were what led to two emergency National Security Council meetings in less than 12 hours.

The United States thus secured four assurances from the Soviet Union:

- This Red Army unit in Cuba is a training centre that has not and cannot have any other role;
- The role of this unit will not be changed and its numerical strength will not be increased in the future;
- The military personnel stationed in Cuba constitute no threat to the United States or to any other country;
- The reaffirmation of the validity of the American-Soviet agreements concluded in 1962 (after the 'Missile Crisis') and in 1970 (over the submarine base at Cienfuegos), which prohibit any deployment of Soviet offensive weapons in Cuba.

Furthermore, a senior source in the American Administration states that the Soviet brigade discovered in Cuba consists of 2 600 men in three infantry battalions and an armoured battalion equipped with 40 tanks and 60 troop carriers. The primary mission of this brigade, according to a high-ranking member of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), is to train itself for combat.

The President has therefore announced an increase in the number of American troops in the Caribbean. A Joint Services Headquarters — which, according to senior American officials, will consist of some 60 officers — will be set up this week in Key West, Florida, opposite Cuba. The United States will also step up its naval manoeuvres in the region, as well as reconnaissance flights over the island. Finally, it will increase its economic aid to the Caribbean and Central American States, to which it has promised to provide assistance in the event of a Soviet or Cuban military invasion of their territory.

On Monday evening, a reliable source in Washington said that the United States will be sending 1 500 marines to Guantánamo Bay, its naval base on the eastern edge of Cuba, over the next few weeks on the pretext of exercises.

These manoeuvres will include amphibian-landing drills within the base, where 5 900 people (soldiers and their families) currently reside.

These measures, as all the observers point out, are an implicit admission that American diplomacy has failed to provide the satisfactory solution that it had set out as its objective.

President Carter, who spoke for 25 minutes, struck everyone with his moderate tone and determination to play down a crisis to which his Administration had largely contributed in blowing up all out of proportion. The President did not announce any of the direct economic reprisals against Moscow that had been referred to recently by the White House staff, and he took care not to attack the Soviet Government. He saved his

most biting remarks for Cuba, whose Communist regime, he said, 'is a complete failure and survives only through the grant of economic aid worth eight million dollars a day.'

By trying to set the 'brigade affair' within a calmer context, the President was actually addressing the American Senate, which should, in theory, take a decision on the ratification of SALT II before the end of the year, as much as he was the nation.

This crisis has, in fact, confirmed the reservations felt by numerous Senators who fear that the Treaty will turn to Moscow's advantage and has considerably reduced the chances of its ratification.

By reaffirming that the SALT II Treaty was 'sound', and by declaring that the United States should not mix 'political games and nuclear arsenals' if it did not want to lead the world to the edge of the abyss, President Carter tried to make the Senate see reason and assume its responsibility.

It now remains to be seen whether he will be heard. The initial reactions of Congress on Monday evening were very reserved. Demonstrating the disappointment of many of his colleagues, Frank Church, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, declared: 'Soviet assurances are welcome, but insufficient. If we do not want the SALT II Treaty to be rejected, we shall need more than that.'