

CUBA — STATEMENT OF PRIME MINISTER FOLLOWING TELEVISION  
BROADCAST BY PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

Right Hon. J.G. Diefenbaker (Prime Minister):

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition called me a few moments ago and suggested that it might be appropriate if something were said at this time with regard to the speech just delivered on television by the President of the United States. Naturally it is impossible to say much. The speech was a sombre and challenging one.

The president pointed out that on the island of Cuba preparations were being made, and had already been advanced, for the construction of bases for the launching of offensive weapons in the form of I.R.B.M.'s and that this constitutes a threat to most of the cities of North America including our major cities in Canada. The reason that I agreed to the suggestion of the Leader of the Opposition was to ask Canadians as well as free men everywhere in the world not to panic at this time. This is a time for calmness. It is a time for the banishment of those things that sometimes separate us. Above all, it is a time when each of us must endeavour to do his part to assure the preservation of peace not only in this hemisphere but everywhere in the world. The existence of these bases or launching pads is not defensive but offensive. The determination of Canadians will be that the United Nations should be charged at the earliest possible moment with this serious problem.

The president has stated that the matter will be brought before the security council at once and, whatever the reactions of the U.S.S.R. are to the statements made, by President Kennedy, I think what people all over the world want tonight and will want is a full and complete understanding of what is taking place in Cuba. What can be done? Naturally, there has been little time to give consideration to positive action that might be taken. But I suggest that if there is a desire on the part of the U.S.S.R. to have the facts, if a group of nations, perhaps the eight nations comprising the unaligned members of the 18 nation disarmament committee, be given the opportunity of making an on-site inspection in Cuba to ascertain what the facts are, a major step forward would be taken.

This is the only suggestion I have at this moment; but it would provide an objective answer to what is going on in Cuba. As late as a week ago, the U.S.S.R. contended that its activities in Cuba were entirely of a defensive nature, and that the hundreds, if not thousands, of citizens of the U.S.S.R., mechanics, technicians and the like, were simply in Cuba for defensive purposes. As to the presence of these offensive weapons, the only sure way that the world can secure the facts would be through an independent inspection.

I should like to hear the views of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Pearson) on this, and the leaders of the other parties, for in times like these the divisions between us always diminish. Any suggestion that can be made that will bring about an alleviation or a diminution of the obvious tensions that must grip men and women all over the world tonight, will be helpful. Our duty, as I see it, is not to fan the flames of fear but to do our part to bring about relief from the tensions, the great tensions, of the hour.

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Canada has taken a strong stand throughout the years on behalf of peace. Canada knows the meaning of war. Canadians want peace, as do all free men in all parts of the world. My prayer this evening is that those who have the responsibility of statesmanship will always have in mind the need for doing everything that can be done to assure peace.

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