

OFFICIAL NOTE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA

Numerous international press agencies reported today that the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, declared that as of January 2002, his country would close its military Electronic Radar Stations in Cam Ranh, Vietnam and Lourdes, Cuba.

With regard to Cuba, he stated that “after lengthy negotiations with our Cuban partners, it was recognized that withdrawing the Electronic Radar Station from Cuba would be a positive move.”

Also today, the chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, Army Commander Anatoly Kvashnin, declared that “Russia is withdrawing its military bases from Cuba and Vietnam as a result of the change in the military-political situation in the world, and in view of the savings in financial resources for the army and navy. The annual lease on the Electronic Radar Station is around 200 million dollars, without taking into account the maintenance of staff. With this money we can buy and launch 20 reconnaissance satellites, and purchase around 100 radars.”

To avoid any errors or confusion, the Government of Cuba would like to clarify that the two facilities should not have been lumped together in the Russian declaration, because they differ greatly in their origins, functions and importance.

Cam Ranh was a naval base built by the United States some 20 thousand kilometers away from its territory and leased to the USSR in 1979, years after the war had ended. It is of barely any use for a country like Russia, which has had practically no surface vessel fleet since the demise of the Soviet Union.

At this moment, Vietnam faces no danger of military aggression from the United States since relations between the two countries are normal. For Vietnam, the United States poses no risk whatsoever. There can be no doubt that the decision was previously discussed and approved by both countries.

The Lourdes Electronic Radar Station was established in 1964, two years after the Missile Crisis. The USSR did not pay a cent for the services it received from Cuba, in view of the close cooperation between the two countries at that time in both the economic and military fields.

In 1992, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the Russian Federation fully assumed the rights and privileges of the former Union, Russia unilaterally withdrew the military brigade that had remained in Cuba after the Missile Crisis for a period of some 30 years, all this as a result of negotiations and agreements with the United States. At the same time, however, Russia expressed interest in maintaining the Lourdes Electronic Radar Station as an important element for its strategic security, particularly as a means of verifying strict compliance with the agreements on nuclear disarmament and nuclear weapons reduction adopted by the United States and Russia.

Despite flagrant violations of agreements, economic losses and risks faced by Cuba, our government allowed the facility to stay with no charge whatsoever for the services that our country provided to Russia. This was the case for a certain period of time only, given that there was no longer the slightest political or ideological connection between Cuba and Russia. The leaders of Russia had unilaterally destroyed all of the agreements between the two countries. There was absolutely no reason left to provide it with free services of any kind.

Russia's reiterated interest in maintaining, expanding and modernizing the Lourdes Electronic Radar Station, for the reasons mentioned above, led to an agreement which included payment to Cuba in Russian commodities or hard currency in exchange for the services provided to the station. That payment totaled 90 million dollars in 1992, 160 million from 1993 to 1995, and the 200 million mentioned by Army Commander Anatoly Kvashnin from 1996 to 2000. This sum is not at all extraordinary when one considers that it is barely 3% of the damage caused to our country's economy by the disintegration of the socialist bloc and the USSR and the unilateral annulment of all agreements. At the same time, Cuba benefited from some of the information obtained related to our own country's security.

The United States has relentlessly pressured Russia over the existence of this facility, despite the fact that the United States itself has maintained a military base in our territory for over 100 years now, against our people's will.

During President Vladimir Putin's visit to Cuba in December of 2000, the heads of state of our two countries spent several hours at the station on December 14. Not a word was said about its closure. On the contrary, there was talk of further developing and modernizing it. President Putin literally said that day; "Russia and Cuba are interested in continuing to foster its activity. It has been fully functioning for some time, in accordance with international standards and regulations. It has done so successfully, and Russia and Cuba declare themselves as countries interested in continuing to foster its activity."

At that time, only minor differences emerged between the Cuban and Russian military authorities involved, since the Russians desired to reduce, by a relatively small margin, the economic compensation paid to Cuba. This had become customary every year during the reviews of the Russian side's repeated failure to meet its obligations.

Months later, a curious change was observed in Russia's policy towards the Lourdes Electronic Radar Station. This took the form of non-compliance with its financial obligations, resulting in an accumulation of unfulfilled payments, and unjustifiable and exaggerated demands for a reduction in the amount paid for services rendered, despite the threefold increase in the price of oil, one of Russia's main exports, and an obvious improvement in the Russian economy, reflected by the growth of its reserves from some 12 billion dollars to over 30 billion, among other factors.

It was at this stage that the current international crisis broke out, creating considerable tension throughout the world. There had been, at all times, contacts and fluid, friendly relations between our two governments, despite the fact that they have adopted rather different positions: Cuba is opposed to terrorism and opposed to the war, while Russia has offered broad support and cooperation for the war unleashed by the United States. But, both fully agree on the fight against terrorism and the need for the United Nations to play its role.

The negotiations we have been carrying out with regard to the Lourdes Electronic Radar Station have yet to be concluded. Yesterday, October 16, at 2:00 p.m., we had not reached an agreement. A special envoy urgently proposed the closing of the station. Our response was that this would be a most untimely measure to adopt. At this very moment, the U.S. government's stance is more aggressive and belligerent than ever, many countries are threatened in light of the U.S. president's speech on September 20, and military operations have already begun in Afghanistan. Under such circumstances, the withdrawal of the station would be a message and a concession to the government of the United States, which would constitute a grave threat to Cuba's security, and therefore we were not in agreement with its closure.

Just last night, we addressed the issue once again, putting forward a great many arguments with the Russian envoy, who had requested an urgent meeting. This envoy had brought another message from the Russian president, proposing something even worse: the advisability of publicly and immediately declaring that the agreement on the Lourdes Electronic Radar Station was cancelled. We responded that we were in absolute disagreement, and proposed that they study other options. We noted that they have a reputation for being good chess players, and were therefore aware that there were a hundred other moves they could make, and not just the one they were proposing.

Russia's urgency, it was explained, stemmed from their wish for President Putin to meet President Bush at the Asia-Pacific Cooperation Forum in Shanghai bearing these two pieces of news. It is easy to understand how much they would please their recipient: the one regarding Cam Ranh, although unimportant in reality, is highly symbolic; the one concerning Cuba would be a special gift.

Consequently, the agreement on the Lourdes Electronic Radar Station has not been cancelled, since Cuba has not given its approval. Russia shall continue negotiating with the Cuban government, given that there are still important issues to resolve with regard to the matter.

Unfortunately, perhaps President Putin, because of the time difference, did not have a chance to hear our well-founded arguments and suggestions on the matter in time, before making his public announcement.

Still, Cuba holds him and the enormous State of Russia in great esteem and deep respect.

For this reason, Cuba will refrain for the moment from making any judgments or criticisms regarding what was announced today by the press agencies. It will simply limit itself to offering absolutely factual information to our people, and to hoping that this disagreement can be resolved in a reasonable, fair and honorable manner.

There is something that should be clearly understood by everyone, and on which no one should entertain false illusions: in Cuba there is not and there never will be either panic or fear. This is the perfect atmosphere for serenity, cool-headed wisdom, integrity, dignity, and unlimited courage.

The Government of the Republic of Cuba
Havana, October 17, 2001