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Cuba's Armed Forces: From Triumph to Survival

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The past dozen years have been a time of profound transition and increasing tension for Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR). By the beginning of the 1980s they had reached a level of power and prestige unprecedented in the history of Latin America. With a total strength of more than 150,000 in regular forces, supplemented by additional units attached to the Interior Ministry (MININT) and conscripts assigned to the Youth Labor Army, the FAR was a modem and formidable army. The Soviet Union had equipped it with large amounts of relatively modern equipment, including NiG-23 aircraft, MI-24 combat helicopters, SA-6 surface-to-air missiles, and T-54/55 and T-62 main battle tanks. Although most of these forces were assigned to defense and internal security missions in Cuba, units and advisers were also stationed in nearly a dozen other countries, notably Angola, Ethiopia, Congo, Nicaragua, and Grenada. Estimates of the number of Cuban military personnel serving in such missions ranged to more than 60,000.

In addition to its regular military involvement, Cuba provided training and other forms of assistance to insurgent movements in many other areas, such as El Salvador, Colombia, and Namibia. At the same time, Cuba itself received major training assistance from the Soviet Union and other East bloc countries and had Soviet military units stationed on its territory. Cuban President Fidel Castro Ruz and the FAR had a heady sense of being on the winning side of history, as the tide of revolutionary socialism seemed to be steadily gaining ground in the third world.

By mid-1993 this situation had changed radically The FAR was initiating a major downsizing, its equipment was aging and becoming increasingly difficult to maintain, and its military training and assistance from other countries had virtually stopped. According to Defense Minister Raúl Castro Ruz, Fidel's younger brother, the only Cuban military personnel stationed outside the country were ten military attachés. Far from being on the winning side of history, Cuba found itself increasingly isolated, clinging to an ideology that had been rejected by most of the world and trying to forestall economic collapse. These changes brought into question the very nature and missions of the FAR and left its future difficult to ponder. How successfully the Cuban government in general and the Defense Ministry (MINFAR) in particular would be able to respond to these constantly growing problems and to adapt the FAR to the new national and international situation will prove fundamental to Cuba's future.

Historical Development of the FAR

The Cuban military differs from its counterparts in the rest of Latin America in many respects. It does not have its roots in the traditions of the Spanish conquest and therefore lacks the common Latin American tradition of sharp social cleavages between military and civilians or between officers and enlisted men. The FAR has never seriously tried to overthrow the government or, so far as can be told, even to force it to make basic policy triangles. The intricate web of ties between the FAR and the ruling Cuban Communist Party (PCC) maintain control over and ensure the loyalty of the armed forces. Fidel Castro's role as both leader of the Cuban revolution and virtual founder of the FAR further strengthens this process. His long-lasting ties with many senior officers, dating back in many cases to the insurgent struggle against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in the 1950s - not to mention the role of his brother Raúl - provide yet another level of control absent in most Latin American military establishments.

Although efforts have been made to link historically the FAR and the insurgents who fought for independence from Spain in the late 1800s, today's Cuban military consciously rejects all connections with the armed forces that existed from the beginning of the twentieth century until the triumph of Castro's revolution in 1959. The FAR's historical roots remain firmly planted instead in the 26th of July insurgent movement created and led by Castro. As a result, the FAR's military doctrine has always been a mixture of conventional and guerrilla strategies and tactics, an uneasy combination of Soviet training and Castro's own somewhat romanticized military experience.

From the start, the FAR identified world capitalism and imperialism in general, and the United States in particular, as its natural enemy. The experiences of its early years focused on what is still portrayed as its greatest triumph, the defeat of a US-backed exile invasion at the Bay of Pigs (Playa Giron) in 1961, and on the subsequent campaign against internal guerrilla forces (inevitably portrayed as mercenary puppets of the United States). Indeed, that entire campaign is officially styled as the "Lucha Contra Bandidos" (war against bandits), in order to deny those who fought against the revolution any sense of military legitimacy. This trend still continues, as the regime defines internal dissidents and even Latin American political leaders who dare to criticize the Cuban political situation as "puppets of American imperialism."

If the Bay of Pigs incident was the FAR's greatest triumph, the humiliation of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis is one of its most enduring traumas. That event remains a symbol of the possibility of a US invasion, stood for decades as a reminder of the tenuous nature of Soviet commitments to Cuban defense and provides clear evidence of the limits of Cuban military power. Determination to avoid such humiliations in the future has helped shape Cuban defense doctrine, as well as contributing to the continued portrayal of the United States as the ultimate threat to national sovereignty. At the same time, the terms under which this crisis was resolved actually reduced the danger of an imminent US attack and

allowed the FAR to develop into a modem, Soviet-style military institution during the subsequent decade.

The FAR achieved a peak strength of approximately 300,000 in the early 1960s. Much of this force, however, was poorly trained and equipped, and maintaining such numbers on active duty posed a huge burden for an already struggling economy. As a result, it was slowly reduced during the latter half of the decade, failing below 230,000 by 1970. Much of this force was employed in agricultural labor, especially during the annual sugar harvests, which proved both costly and inefficient. In the 1970s, reflecting in part increased Soviet influence, the armed forces underwent a major restructuring. Active forces were sharply reduced, failing to 117,000 by 1975, while equipment and training were significantly upgraded. An active reserve force of just under 100,000 was created, and a roughly equal number was assigned to the Youth Labor Army, a paramilitary force where the least-educated or reliable conscripts and officers were assigned and which devoted most of its time to agricultural and construction tasks.

All this reflected several basic changes in Cuba's military orientation. By the early 1970s both the threat of a US invasion and the prospects for a series of Communist guerrilla victories in Latin America, modeled on the Cuban experience, had receded. Economic failures increased dependency on the Soviet Union, which, in turn, led to growing Soviet influence over the military. The process of US withdrawal from Vietnam, coupled with the era of détente in East-West relations, created a world power balance in which Cuba's military role was less than clear. While Castro could still declare in 1974 that Cuba needed continued growth in its military capacity because, regardless of the state of East-West relations, "our defense can never depend on the good faith of imperialists," the Cuban armed forces seemed to be condemned to a largely static defensive role (quoted in Armies and Politics in Latin America [New York: Holmes and Meier, 19861).

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s ties between the state's political and military apparatus were established and strengthened. Their common origins in the insurgent struggle against Batista facilitated this process. So, too, did the overlapping of civil and military assignments and lines of authority in the early years of the revolution. Formal political indoctrination of the military began in 1961; two years later party chapters were officially organized within the FAR'. The party as an institution, however, never achieved the influence or control over the military that it did in many other Communist states. Instead, political indoctrination came to be viewed as a means of supporting discipline and assisting in achieving military goals. Although most officers joined the party or its youth organization, they identified primarily with the military. At the highest levels of the party itself, military influence predominated. In 1965, 69 percent of the PCC's Central Committee were individuals with military rank. The percentage of military figures in the Central Committee has declined over time, but members of the armed forces still occupy more than a quarter of the seats.

This blending of political and military functions reflects both the domination of the Castro brothers and the fact that the official party was in part a product of the

revolutionary army. In this regard, its heritage was closer to that of the army in Vietnam or China than to the prevailing system in most of East Europe. The result was to produce what Harvard Professor Jorge Domínguez has termed the "civic soldier." According to Domínguez, what developed in Cuba during the 1960s was a situation in which one could not, in traditional terms, "speak of either civilian control over the military or military control over the civilians." In stark contrast to the pattern prevailing elsewhere in the hemisphere, Cuba was:

> **ruled in large part by military men who govern large segments of both military and civilian life, who are held up as paragons to both soldiers and civilians, who are the bearers of the revolutionary tradition and ideology, who have politicized themselves by absorbing the norms and organization of the Communist Party, and who have educated themselves to become professionals in political, economic, managerial, engineering and educational as well as military affairs. (quoted in *Armies and Politics in Latin America* [New York: Holmes and Meier, 1986]).**

Although this arrangement has kept civil-military conflicts at a level well below that prevailing in most of Latin America, it has not eliminated all tensions. Disputes have arisen between military commanders and party functionaries, particularly when the latter have attempted to exert greater influence over military discipline and conduct. The FAR and the Interior Ministry have also developed an ongoing rivalry.

This competition grew out of some overlap in jurisdiction in areas of internal security and intelligence, the presence within MININT of combat units - the "Special Troops" (an elite unit directly under Castro's command) - and, after the reforms of the mid-1970s, the assumption of equivalent military rank by MININT officials. Finally, problems amuse between the military and civil society in general because of the introduction of compulsory military service under a system that allowed military officials to selectively hand out preferential assignments, training, and even shortened terms of service. The net effect of such problems, however, has been quite limited. In general, the Cuban model, at least until the end of the 1980s, appears to have served the interests of both the military and the party reasonably well.

"Internationalist" Mission

The 1960s also saw the beginnings of the "internationalist" mission of the FAR. As early as 1963 Cuban units were reportedly sent to Algeria to take part in that country's border conflict with Morocco. In 1966 troops were sent to Congo (Brazzaville), where

they supported a military regime for nearly a quarter of a century. In the early 1970s additional forces were introduced into South Yemen. But, compared to the massive interventions in Angola and Ethiopia in the latter half of the 1970s, these operations were relatively small in scale. In these latter cases, both Cuban army and air force units played major combat roles, suffering several thousand casualties but also achieving significant military successes. In Ethiopia they helped repel a Somali invasion in the Ogaden region, while in Angola they defeated attacks by both US- supported insurgents and regular units of South Africa's armed forces. Although their efforts depended heavily on Soviet logistical support, operational decisions remained largely in Cuban hands.

The end of the 1970s and the start of the 1980s also witnessed an apparent revival of Cuban-supported insurgencies in the Western Hemisphere. A revolutionary Marxist regime took power in Grenada, and the Sandinista National Liberation Front, which had a long history of ties to Cuba, overthrew the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza Debayle in Nicaragua. Suriname's military dictator asked for and received Cuban military support, and insurgent movements with varying degrees of ties to Cuba appeared to be gaining around in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Colombia. By the early 1980s, the FAR had become a force to contend with in wide areas of the third world.

The 1980s: A Decade of Crises

On May 1, 1980, Castro suddenly announced a major change in Cuban military doctrine and organization. A mass-based territorial militia (MTF), ultimately incorporating nearly 1.5 million people, was to be created, and national defense was to be based on the concept of a "war of all the people." This meant mass distribution of arms and plans for a prolonged guerrilla-style conflict. The creation of this militia also diverted resources from the FAR and created numerous potential problems, including the placing of overall responsibility for the MININT under rather than MINFAR and the assigning of local defense responsibilities to councils run by the head of the local Communist Party.

These changes were later justified as a response to the aggressive attitude of the administration of US President Ronald Reagan and to subsequent secret Soviet statements that they would not aid Cuba if the United States invaded. But because Castro announced the new policy long before Reagan's election, such explanations are inadequate. The MT7 was more likely created for political reasons: to mobilize popular support for the revolution, to revive fears of a possible US invasion, and to serve as a check on the FAR's power and independence.

Although the creation of the MT7 reduced the FAR's role in domestic defense, other developments in the first half of the 1980s began to erode its internationalist mission. Most notable was the US invasion of Grenada and the poor performance of the Cuban commander there. Cuba's expulsion from Grenada (and Suriname's reactive decision to expel its Cuban military advisers) was a humiliating defeat for the Castro brothers and revived real concerns about possible attacks on Cuba itself.

Problems in the internationalist mission continued throughout the 1980s. Reports of growing disillusionment with African operations, even among senior officers, began to spread. The war in Angola seemed endless, and in Ethiopia the Cubans found themselves tied to a brutal regime that dedicated its resources to fighting a popular uprising in Eritrea while its own population starved. At the same time, prospects for Marxist guerrilla victories in Central America had receded and the friendly Sandinista regime in Nicaragua found itself fighting for survival against a US-sponsored insurgency.

Ultimately, Cuba settled for a negotiated peace in Angola, which provided for Namibian independence, but also allowed the US-backed insurgents a potential share in the government. As Cuban forces began to withdraw from Africa, the regime's position in Latin America suffered further blows as its only significant supporters in the region - the Sandinistas and the regime of Manuel Noriega in Panama - were both defeated. In the case of Noriega, the instrument was a US invasion at the end of 1989; in the case of the Sandinistas, it was an electoral defeat brought about by a collapsing economy and the continuing internal war.

The most significant problems for Cuba and the FAR, however, were taking place not in the third world but in East Europe. The changes in Soviet leadership in the early 1980s brought to power a government dedicated to internal reform rather than to inter- national confrontation. This ultimately meant reducing subsidies to client states such as Cuba, seeking negotiated rather than military solutions to conflicts in areas such as Angola, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, and valuing accommodation with the United States and the West over ties with other socialist states. Castro, correctly, saw that the reforms proposed by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev would threaten both his version of communism within Cuba and his place in the international arena. The result was escalating tension in Soviet-Cuban relations. All this culminated with the collapse of Communist rule in East Europe and the breakup of the Soviet Union, which in turn led to a sudden termination of all military assistance, Russia's decision to withdraw its troops from Cuba, and an end to economic assistance - producing a massive, continuing economic crisis. These tensions had major repercussions within the FAR. Defections by officers, including Air Force (DAAFAR) Brigadier General Rafael del Pino, the first general ever to defect, increased. Rivalries between MINFAR and MININT escalated. Reports of discontent and rising corruption within the military began to spread. These rumors of FAR internal problems were given dramatic confirmation with the 1989 arrest, trial, and execution of several senior officers, most notably Division General Arnaldo Ochoa Sánchez, and MINFAR's subsequent virtual takeover of MININT.

Ochoa was one of the most prominent and popular officers in the FAR. He had commanded troops in Angola and had led the Cuban missions to Ethiopia and Nicaragua. just before his arrest he was scheduled to take command of Cuba's Western Army, the most powerful of the three armies responsible for national defense. Even the defector, del Pino, had listed Ochoa, long before his arrest, as one of the two most capable, honest, and popular generals in Cuba. Ochoa and the other officers were accused of corruption, notably involvement with the narcotics trade. While the evidence against most of the defendants, notably those assigned to MININT, was strong, that linking Ochoa to

narcotics trafficking was extremely weak. Indeed, his major crime seems to have been complaining about the treatment accorded Cuban troops returning from Africa.

Ochoa's show trial and execution, and the subsequent purging of MININT and its takeover by officers from MINFAR associated with Raúl, led to widespread rumors of anti-Castro plots within the military and the security forces. Later announcements of the removal of up to 70 percent of the officers in the Western Army, the force with the closest ties to Ochoa, added further fuel to the rumor mills. But little concrete evidence supports such suspicions. Government actions may have been designed more to prevent potential problems than to deal with any actual conspiracies. What seems clear is that discontent was growing, especially among officers who had served abroad or received training in the Soviet Union during the Gorbachev era. Some evidence also indicates that junior officers were beginning to show greater loyalty to their immediate commanders than to the national leadership. Such problems were concentrated within what might be characterized as the "perestroika generation" -- officers who had entered the military in the 1970s or early 1980s, when Soviet influence and FAR successes were at their peak. They were loyal to the institution, had no memories of the struggle against Batista, and expected to have careers as professional soldiers with a significant international mission. Many, especially those in DAAFAR, had received training in the Soviet Union or East Europe during the ferment of the 1980s. This generation found it hardest to cope with changed missions and reduced resources, and was more likely to follow immediate commanders, such as General Ochoa, than the Castro brothers.

Ochoa's execution sent a clear warning to this generation of officers and to any others within the FAR who might be tempted to question regime policies or the Castros' leadership. With massive economic and political problems looming ahead, Fidel and Raúl may well have believed that such a warning was necessary, regardless of the facts. Increased US aggressiveness toward those involved in the narcotics trade something that a few months later would contribute to the invasion of Panama, may also have prompted the purge, as the regime sought to undercut reports o its own involvement in such activities.

Surviving the "Special Period"

The years since 1990, an era characterized by Castro as a "special period in time of peace," have witnessed major changes in the FAR's missions and capabilities. Perhaps the most basic has been the end or at least the suspension of the internationalist mission. The last units left Africa in the spring of 1991, and in January 1992 Castro ended assistance to ins gent movements as well as military support for existing governments. Internationalism was now defined as maintaining a socialist state in Cuba to provide future hope for the world's more impoverished countries.

Coupled with the end of international involvement was the virtual cutoff of all foreign training and military assistance and the withdrawal of Russian troops from Cuba.

Training of the military in East Europe came to an abrupt halt, and promised deliveries of weapons and supplies were never fulfilled. Most notable in this regard was that Cuba received only eight or ten of a promised forty MiG-29 aircraft - a quantity so small that problems of maintenance and training may outweigh any military benefits.

The withdrawal in 1993 of the last Russian troops had a much smaller impact on Cuban defensive capabilities, but has probably had a significant psychological effect. The regime reacted to the news of the impending withdrawal first with intense anger, then with frantic, but unsuccessful efforts to link the withdrawal to the departure of the United States from its base at Guántanamo, and finally with resignation, conceding that, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, keeping such forces in Cuba no longer made any sense. What was clear throughout this process, however, was the regime's utter inability to influence Russian policy and Cuba's near-total military isolation. No amount of rationalization, political slogans, or claims of self-sufficiency could disguise these unsettling facts.

The economic crisis also began to erode the capabilities and training of the FAR. Between 1989 and 1992 the total value of Cuban exports declined by more than 60 percent, and the value of imports fell to only 26 percent of 1989 levels. Fuel supplies were especially hard-hit, forcing drastic curtailments in vehicle and aircraft operations. Spare parts for aircraft, ships, vehicles and other equipment became scarce, increasing equipment down time and forcing the substitution of inferior "arts or the cannibalization of existing equipment. Air force flight training was sharply reduced, and reports circulated that the navy's "submarine force appears no longer to be operational" (*CubaINFO*, June 18,1993).

In the army, tank training was increasingly carried out on homemade simulators. Bicycles and horsedrawn carts were replacing motor vehicles, and efforts were even made to power vehicles by charcoal generators. Although official pronouncements maintain that the military is as strong as ever, a growing body of evidence seemed to contradict such claims.

More difficult to assess is the impact of the "special period" on the FAR's human capabilities and morale. The purge of officers in the Western Army, the rise in the number of military defections, and the greatly increased emphasis in official orders on improving military discipline and political indoctrination all provide evidence of problems. Interviews with defectors support the thesis of declining morale and growing disillusionment with the leadership and the official ideology. But these same interviews show little evidence of any organized opposition movement or of emerging consensus as to an alternative future for the FAR. The most that can be said is that the military, Like the country at large, is not immune to the declining morale, growing cynicism and doubt, and even despair that follow from a massive economic decline like the one Cuba is currently experiencing.

While the FAR's international missions have ended and its combat capacity is declining, its role in the economy has recently increased, for several reasons. First, the

loss of foreign aid and national economic crisis have necessitated massive efforts to promote military self-sufficiency in food production as well as in maintaining existing equipment. Military units are increasingly assigned to economic tasks, in many ways returning to pre-1970 practices. Not only do they work in the sugar harvest, but they have been mobilized to help plant and harvest other crops, such as grains and tomatoes, and have even been put to work cleaning out the pipes of the Santiago de Cuba water system.

Not all of the FAR's economic activities are devoted to agricultural or civic projects. MINFAR has begun its own economic projects, largely related to the tourism industry, in the hope of Generating increased hard currency revenues. Most notable in this regard has been the heavy involvement of the FAR's own construction company, Union de Empresas Constructores, in building joint venture hotels and other tourist-oriented facilities. In addition, MINFAR also controls Gaviota, a major tourism business that provides internal transport, arranges tours, and even controls residences and restaurants used exclusively by tourists. Most of the hard currency generated by the activities of Empresas Constructores and Gaviota probably contributes to the military budget.

The FAR has also become more involved in problems of internal security and in what is officially defined as civil defense. The most obvious manifestation of internal security involvement is the virtual takeover of MININT's high command by FAR officers. This, in turn, has led to increased coordination of MININT and MINFAR efforts, including increased use of reservists in internal security and anti-crime activities. The two ministries, however, remain separate, and some junior MININT officers reportedly resent the assignment of FAR officers as their superiors. Judging the depth and impact of such attitudes is extremely difficult. MININT units, notably the border troops, remain the regime's first line of defense against internal disturbances, a role the FAR is quite content to let it retain. Most of the FAR's professional officers have no desire to function as police, nor do they wish to see internal security become their prime mission.

The prime focus of civil defense issues has been the continued and accelerated construction of a vast network of tunnels throughout Cuba, designed both to provide shelter and to facilitate communications and troop movements in the event of an invasion. Although diverting increasingly scarce resources to build tunnels as preparation for an invasion that will probably never come strikes most outside observers as ludicrous, MINFAR not only makes no effort to conceal this program, but it shows the project to international visitors and Raúl Castro brags about how much tunnel construction has increased since 1991.

While the FAR has been increasingly involved in picking tomatoes, cleaning pipes, and digging tunnels, the MTT and other sectors of the government and partly have taken growing roles in defense exercises. Official accounts of defense exercises increasingly emphasize the participation of the MTT and the role of local defense councils, headed by party officials, in organizing such events. Even the minister of higher education has been featured in a Granma story on the MTT. The government has also created a defense commission within the new National Assembly. The purpose and authority of this body,

which seems to be made up largely of military officers who are also members of the assembly, is still unclear.

In 1993 two massive defense maneuvers were held, with as many as 250,000 active participants and government claims that nearly 4 million Cubans would ultimately be involved in such exercises. Weapons were also being distributed to workers to deal with rising crime.

The increased emphasis on militia as well as (or even in place of) regular forces as a fundamental defense tactic has facilitated government plans to reduce the FAR's manpower sharply. Although this was announced officially only in 1993, the process may have begun two years earlier. The period of compulsory military service was reduced in July 1991 from three to two years, ostensibly to enable individuals to move more rapidly into the MTT. Current plans envision a 30 to 40 percent reduction in active military personnel, which should bring the FAR to a level equal to or below that of the mid-1970s.

While the strength of the FAR is declining and its capabilities apparently eroding, the presence of military figures within the government and the ruling party apparatus has remained significant. Military officers now serve as ministers of communication and transportation, as well as heading MINFAR and MININT. Of the 1,700 delegates to the 1991 Cuban Communist Party Congress, 240 were members of the military. Twenty-five members of the Central Committee and six members of the Politburo are also military officers. The Politburo members still come from the generation that fought against Batista, but several younger officers have recently been added to the Central Committee.

As the economic crisis of the special period continues and deepens, the strains on the regime and its armed forces become progressively greater. The result has been a series of ongoing dilemmas that offer few, if any, good options for the FAR.

Ongoing Dilemmas

Cuba's relations with the rest of the world in general and the United States in particular will obviously affect the missions, capabilities, and morale of the FAR. Anything that reduces Cuba's isolation and otters prospects for improving the economy would ultimately benefit the FAR. But efforts to improve relations with the United States risk undermining credibility of the threat and contradicting official statements of the intractability of the major potential foe. These contradictions emerged in the June-July 1993 discussions between Cuban military officials, notably Division General Ulises Rosales del Toro, FAR's chief of staff and the first deputy vice minister of MINFAR, and the unofficial delegation of retire US military and diplomatic officials, who visited Cuba through an arrangement with the Center for International Policy. In their discussions, which focused largely on substantive bilateral issues, the Cubans intermittently blamed Washington for the woeful state of the economy but also expressed appreciation for the lower level of rhetoric, prior notification of recent military maneuvers, and increased

contacts with US officials at Guantánamo instituted by the administration of Bill Clinton. Cuban office also tried to relate their past African experiences to peacekeeping operations and expressed interest in becoming involved in such activities. Peacekeeping operations, in many ways, would be an attractive potential mission for the FAR. They would afford them international legitimacy and a renewed sense purpose, and provide valuable hard currency. But official media continues to denounce United Nations operations in the Persian Gulf and Somalia as "punitive actions by imperialists. . .under the mantle of illegitimate UN Security Council resolutions" (Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Latin America Daily Report*, February 2, 1993).

Such contradictions cannot be lost on the more perceptive members of the officer corps. If imperialism is the intractable foe, then how can you hope for anything better from Clinton? If drugs weaken your major potential enemy, then why seek to cooperate with him in preventing drug trafficking? If peace-keeping is a cover for imperialism, then why be interested in peacekeeping?

Similar problems and contradictions arise in effort to improve relations with the countries of Latin America and other democracies. If Cuba is the last beacon of revolutionary ideology in the world, or at least the Western Hemisphere, then how can you abandon support for revolutions and praise some of the capitalist governments of that hemisphere? If the United States dominates this unipolar world, then how can you rationally expect governments to break with Washington and support Cuba? Any reduction of Cuba's isolation also undermines the credibility of the threat and raises questions about the official ideology.

The special period has also significantly complicated the FAR's task of defining the threats to national security and preparing to defend against such threats. The basic shift to the "war of all the people" took place long before the current crisis, but it has remained largely intact despite altered circumstances. If anything, the regime has become even more dependent on militia forces to at least deter, if not actually combat, a US attack.

Potential Role in National Defense

The potential role of the FAR in national defense has been diminished not only by current doctrine and growing logistical problems, but by lessons drawn from the gulf war. The absolute inability of Iraq's air force, considerably larger than Cuba's, to hinder allied operations and the disastrous experience of Soviet-equipped Iraqi tank formations have led to the open expression of doubts about the role such units could play in defending Cuba. Instead, current doctrine stresses guerrilla tactics, sharpshooters, and special forces, and, if necessary, retreat into Cuba's mountains and rural areas. The clear, if unspoken, assumption in such plans is that any role for air, sea, and armored units will be limited and brief.

Such implications cannot be lost on those assigned to such units. The impact of this situation on officers, notably fighter pilots and tank commanders, long accustomed to being among the FAR elite, is impossible to judge, but is potentially damaging to individual and unit morale.

Cuban defense preparations are increasingly hampered by the inability to confront such realities openly and by political inhibitions on many aspects of training. For example, at the Máximo Gómez School, the FAR's advanced school, training still concentrates on studying such things as Castro's campaign against Batista, the repulse of the assault at the Bay of Pigs, the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, and the unsuccessful German siege of Leningrad. Studies concentrate overwhelmingly on these and other socialist bloc successes even though their contemporary relevance is minimal. Grenada, the gulf war, the Falklands (Malvinas) conflict, or any other battle where Western forces have triumphed is given little if any attention. Moreover, their studies can neither anticipate the irrelevance of much of the FAR's current combat capacity, nor can they deal with any scenario in which foreign intervention comes only after and related to an already raging civil conflict within Cuba. Yet such scenarios are much more relevant to the actual world situation. Training that devotes more time to illusory threats and improbable scenarios than to the harsh realities is by no means unique to present-day Cuba. Bureaucratic inertia alone ensures that some degree of exists in virtually all military establishments. Nor does it mean that real world realities are ignored in internal FAR discussions at the highest levels. But the peculiar ideological and personal constraints imposed on the FAR by Castro's insistence on clinging to old beliefs and past successes exacerbate the problem considerably.

Any serious, informed Cuban officer would have to question the assumptions underlying much of the training, but any open questioning of such assumptions would imply direct criticism of the national leadership and could be expected to have a negative impact on his career prospects. Few, if any, senior officers can reasonably be expected to take such risks by challenging the assumptions of their maximum leader.

The growing involvement in economic tasks also detracts from training and strains morale. The transition from leader of a decorated combat unit in Angola to commander of a tomato-picking or yam-planting battalion has to be difficult and must provoke questions about the place and meaning of the military profession in today's Cuba.

Under such circumstances, some level of military discontent is inevitable. Evidence suggests that the Castros understand this and have taken steps to limit it. Although the military, like the population in general, has seen its standard of living decline and some of its privileges disappear, it has been insulated from the worst effects of the situation. Most retain job security and regular, though steadily depreciating, pay. Efforts at self-sufficiency give the military better access to food than the average Cuban, and uniforms are still available. Medical care remains above the national average, although shortages have forced even the FAR, on occasion, to resort to herbal remedies and Techniques such as acupuncture.

Assuming that the current government reacts as have the overwhelming majority of those throughout history when threatened by similar economic and political pressures, the military will continue to have greater access to pay, food, clothing, and other benefits than will most of the population. The simple logic of regime survival dictates such a course of action. But this, in turn, creates other problems. If the gap in living conditions between the military and civil society grows too large, resentment against the FAR will increase and efforts to identify the armed forces as the defenders of the people will lose even more credibility. In any case, security for those on active duty will have only a limited effect if their families, immediate and extended, face steadily increasing privation.

The decision to legalize the acquisition and use of US dollars by Cubans should help raise living standards for some, but it will create other difficulties for the officer corps. As a July 28, 1993, Reuters news story noted, any "market-oriented change in Cuba has profound social implications and risks cracking the psychological foundation of his (Fidel's] revolution," and the dollar reform "diminishes the state's historical role as the sole provider and ... risks creating two classes in a socialist society, with the privileges not going to the hardest workers or political loyalists, but to those who get the most help from relatives abroad." For Cuban officers, this reform risks eroding what remains of their traditional privileged access to imported appliances and other products. Yet those most tied to the regime are least likely to receive funds from outside Cuba. In any case, it could be career damaging and even personally dangerous for a mid- or high-level officer to have such ties with relatives abroad. For the military, the anticipated inflow of dollars could cause special problems if some enlisted men begin to enjoy a higher standard of living than do their superior officers.

Speeding up promotions is another way of containing discontent, especially when, as in Cuba's case, increasing evidence points to a generation gap within the military. But this is especially difficult to do when the armed forces are experiencing a major force reduction. Cuba's reductions involve a higher percentage of enlisted men than officers, therefore officers have some additional job security. But the down- sizing also creates a top-heavy institution where, in the long run, promotions must either come even more slowly or become increasingly less meaningful.

The question of promotions also involves confronting the regime's inherent mistrust of many of its own mid-level officers, especially those in DAAFAR, who were trained in and perhaps ideologically corrupted by Gorbachev's Soviet Union. The perestroika generation is more sophisticated and less willing to take regime pronouncements at face value. If younger officers are promoted, confidence in military loyalty may be weakened, but if they are discriminated against in promotion, their disaffection with current conditions will be further exacerbated.

The Castros must also deal with the problem of retired officers, especially if their numbers grow rapidly in coming years. There have been highly publicized efforts to organize veterans groups as yet another vehicle of mobilizing regime support. But such groups will be attractive only if they provide benefits for their members. If they do so,

then they will become a new, privileged class, providing another focus for popular discontent. If they do not, then at best they will become increasingly irrelevant; at worse they may become a forum for complaint or a source of organized opposition.

To be effective, a modem military force needs a sense of institutional identity and loyalty, and a special sense of pride and place that sets its members apart from the rest of the population. Efforts to create and promote such attitudes have long been a part of FAR propaganda and political training. Public statements also constantly stress the FAR's identification with the population, its role as the defender of the nation. The problem is that the greater the loyalty to the military institution as a whole and to one's own unit in particular, the more this loyalty may conflict with calls for unswerving obedience to the Castro brothers or to the official party and ideology. This is especially true during periods of major economic decline that can easily be blamed on the nature and policies of the national leadership. If such, polices negatively affect the capabilities, cohesion, and morale of the institution, loyalty to the institution leads to discontent and even disloyalty to the leadership.

When existing policies are seen as producing negative results for the nation as a whole and the military institution in particular, then efforts at political indoctrination and appeals to nationalist sentiments lose much of their potential influence. They may even become counterproductive, breeding cynicism more than loyalty and generating sardonic humor rather than greater efforts. Such attitudes and witticisms, which virtually all observers agree are steadily increasing within Cuba, especially among the young, are virtually impossible for official propaganda to counteract and inevitably lead to further erosion of regime support.

When all else fails, fear remains a potent tool for inculcating discipline, or at least inhibiting dissent. Military discipline itself is a key element of control. Respect for one's superiors, near automatic obedience to orders, pride in appearance, and unit performance all help keep a military occupied and effective. Traditionally, MINFAR has relied more on loyalty and pride than fear to inculcate discipline and maintain effective control. But mounting evidence indicates that this approach is losing its effectiveness and that fear and coercion are increasingly important in maintaining discipline and loyalty. As Phyllis Walker has observed, "In the final analysis, the challenge for the regime is to maintain the balance of loyalty over coercion" ("Political-Military Relations and the Revolution: Toward Understanding Political Control over the Armed Forces," unpublished ms., 1992). If current trends continue, this balance will not be maintained and the potential consequences for the regime are grim.

Generational gaps, involving disputes over such seemingly mundane issues as haircuts, uniforms, and mustaches, have long troubled the FAR. But the growing cynicism of the younger generation has worsened this situation. MINFAR's response has been to call for even stricter discipline and to increase inspections and unit evaluations. Because negative evaluations can damage or even end a commander's career, older officers, in turn, become less tolerant of any signs of individualism or dissent. Surface

conformity becomes more important than unit cohesion, aggravating generational differences and reducing respect for authority.

Fear is instilled in several ways. Harsher penalties for even a hint of dissent and, for officers, the knowledge that unquestioning conformity has replaced international service as the route to promotion contribute to this. So do efforts to control contacts between the military and civilians and to limit most flying assignments to married pilots, with further preference being accorded to those with children. The impact of the Ochoa trial and the subsequent purges in MININT and the Western Army, of course, provide the most graphic examples of the fate awaiting those who depart from regime norms. Finally, the harsh economic realities that would confront anyone discharged from the military undoubtedly limit dissent and promote conformity.

Not surprisingly, the regime has extensively utilized negative news from East Europe to demonstrate to the FAR what would happen to a country and a military institution ii the existing system collapsed. Fear of restored influence by the Cuban exiles in Miami and the US government is also used as a means of control. Paradoxically, some of the exiles' own propaganda, calling for vengeance against Castro supporters and vowing to dismantle all existing security forces, strengthens this government's case.

Finally, there remains the role of the state security apparatus, including a presumed extensive network of informants. The Ochoa case also underscored the regime's determination to treat the failure to report dissent or unauthorized actions within the FAR as equivalent to participating in such actions and as subject to the same extreme sanctions. Fear that sharing complaints or doubts with any fellow officer may lead to arrest - or worse - is an effective means of preventing plots from developing within the FAR. But it also undermines institutional cohesion, replacing ties of shared loyalties with mutual suspicion.

Fear as a means of controlling the FAR is the ultimate double-edged sword. A growing climate of fear and distrust within the military contributes to the growth of the very ideas and attitudes that it is designed to suppress. Increased reliance on coercion and fear as tactics inevitably raises questions as to the leadership's actual strength and confidence. Leaders, military or civilian, who rely on fear usually appear frightened and therefore weak. Though easily unleashed, fear as an instrument of policy becomes increasingly difficult to control or reverse. The longer a regime relies on such tactics, the greater the chances that they will ultimately produce precisely the attitudes and actions they are intended to prevent.

Conclusions

The crisis currently besetting the Castro regime has no end in sight. Consequently, the problems and dilemmas confronting the FAR can be expected only to intensify. The

armed forces find themselves engaged in a prolonged struggle for institutional and regime survival - two goals that are becoming increasingly incompatible.

If the FAR were a traditional Latin American military institution, such a situation would seem to invite a coup attempt. But, as previously noted, the FAR's heritage is distinct, with influences from the Soviet Union and the peculiar leadership and ideology of Fidel Castro and his revolution shaping its organization, missions, and sense of self identity. It has no tradition of coup-making or of negotiating as a united, autonomous institution with an existing government. Castro, the Revolution, and the nation have always been inextricably intertwined in its training and in the formulation of its missions. Although the ongoing crisis severely strains these linkages, the FAR lacks both the internal structures and the independent leadership needed to move effectively against the regime. The conclusion of the 1992 Randy study Cuba Adrift in a Postcommunist World, that an organized military coup offers an unlikely scenario for the end of the Castros' rule, is well founded.

Although the FAR is unlikely to take the lead in bringing down the regime, this does not mean that the regime's effective support is by any means guaranteed. Fidel and Raúl need several things from their armed forces. First, of course, is at least minimal loyalty, enough to prevent any serious effort to topple the regime. The second priority must be involvement in promoting the economy, ranging from increased efforts at self-sufficiency in food, spare parts, and other supplies to participation in national agricultural tasks, to promoting tourism. But the military's contributions here will always be limited, and as a whole it will remain more a drag on than an asset to the economy. Involvement in international peacekeeping could, in theory, reduce this problem, but US opposition makes any such involvement highly improbable. Growing economic pressures require that the FAR's size and costs be reduced rapidly and significantly.

This process, however, undermines the FAR's ability both to deal with potential internal dissent and to repel any external attacks. And in the real world of today's Cuba rather than that portrayed by official propaganda, control of internal dissent will increasingly pose a more likely threat than any external menace. The government has done what it can to prevent serious public disturbances from taking place. In addition to attempts to prevent or inhibit dissent, it has created groups outside the formal security apparatus, such as the "rapid-reaction brigades," civilian supporters organized to harass and attack any open opposition. But as the economy continues to deteriorate, the possibility increases that some form of civil disturbance could escalate beyond the ability of such groups and even the police to control. MININT forces can handle local disturbances, but their resources would quickly reach their limit if these spread throughout the country. If, for whatever reason, MININT units were unable to control the situation, the FAR would become the regime's last line of defense against its own population. But the military's own traditions and carefully cultivated self-image, combined with its growing internal dilemmas, undermine its reliability in such a situation. Although the regime cannot openly discuss even the possibility of such a situation, it continues to claim unbounded confidence in the FAR's total loyalty and reliability. Yet some defectors argue that the armed forces would never turn their

weapons on their own population. What would actually happen is, of course, impossible to determine. It would depend on the specific conditions and timing of the incident, the leadership present, initial actions taken, and other imponderable factors. As Donald Schulz has pointed out, the situation would become even more unstable and unpredictable if such incidents occurred while Cuba was trying to institute a controlled program of limited reform. The longer current trends continue, the less reliable will be the FAR's response should such disturbances break out.

Perhaps the most likely scenario in the event of large-scale internal disturbances would be deep internal splits within the FAR, with some units joining protestors, some trying to avoid involvement, and some FAR and MININT units actively supporting the regime. This would create a major dilemma for the United States as political pressures to intervene would rapidly mount. But such intervention would alter the nature of the conflict from a domestic clash to a foreign invasion. This, in turn, could lead wavering units to ally themselves firmly with the government in defense of their nation.

Such a crisis may not take place for years, if ever. The current regime could well survive into the next century. Meanwhile, the dilemmas confronting the FAR will continue to intensify. Carmelo Mesa-Lago of the University of Pittsburgh, a leading analyst of Cuban affairs, argues that in this event the most likely scenario is "growing militarization and repression without economic change" (*Cuba After the Cold War* [Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993]).

Noting that "the East European experience has taught the Cuban military and security personnel that they would be the big losers if the regime collapsed," he sees MINFAR and MINIT as reliable, if not enthusiastic collaborators in creating and maintain such a situation. Although his scenario is certainly plausible, the FAR's direct role under such conditions is far from clear. Rather than being directly involved in repression, it seems more likely that the FAR would try to stand aside as much as possible, leaving the more odious tasks to MININT. But this situation would depress morale and would be difficult to maintain. It would risk renewed divisions between MINFAR and MININT. If the public perceived the FAR as the potential, if not actual, defender of an increasingly unpopular, repressive, and economically disastrous regime, the military's prestige would rapidly deteriorate and its separation from the rest of society would increase. This, in turn, could produce internal divisions as the gap between loyalty to the nation and loyalty to the regime becomes more and more obvious.

The FAR has no good options in confronting the current situation. The skills and equipment is acquired to carry out its missions during the 1970s and 1980s are increasingly irrelevant to the problems of the 1990s. But it is in a poor position to instigate change. If many of the FAR's officers are unhappy with existing conditions within their institution and their nation and are worried about where they appear to be going, they nevertheless find it difficult to conceptualize alternate realities that offer significantly enhanced opportunities at acceptable levels of risk or cost. The military has an institutional interest in promoting more rapid change, and the claim that members of the high command actively desire such change is plausible. However, the military's

ability to exert its influence is limited because it is not configured as a policy-making body, and pushing the political leadership even further than it wants could be costly. In such a situation, the military is condemned to a prolonged struggle for institutional survival. Over time, such a struggle has an increasingly wearing effect on effectiveness, loyalty, and morale. What lies ahead for the FAR is a long descent to an ill-defined and undesired destination. But the absence of any better alternatives or independent leadership probably means that the institution will continued in this perilous descent for some time to come.