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# Cuba: Soviet Military Deliveries in 1985

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**An Intelligence Assessment**

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# Cuba: Soviet Military Deliveries in 1985



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An Intelligence Assessment

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This paper was prepared by [redacted]  
Office of African and Latin American Analysis, [redacted]  
[redacted] and [redacted] the Office of  
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Comments and queries are welcome and may be  
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Division, ALA, [redacted]

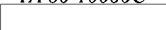
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**Cuba: Soviet Military Deliveries in 1985**

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**Key Judgments***Information available as of 1 October 1986 was used in this report.*

In 1985, as it has every year since 1980, the Soviet Union delivered a large quantity of military goods to Cuba. The tonnage of arms delivered, however, declined sharply from the record high levels of the preceding four years—an indication that the cycle of rapid expansion of the Cuban Armed Forces that began in 1981 may be nearing an end. Nonetheless, military deliveries in 1985 remained well above the levels of the late 1970s, and as a result of the major expansion and modernization of the Armed Forces that has taken place over the last five years, Cuba's military capabilities and operational readiness are at an alltime high. Soviet deliveries continue gradually to improve Cuba's defensive capabilities and raise the potential cost to the United States of any attempt to neutralize Cuban forces by invasion, airstrike, or blockade.

Key features of the 1985 deliveries were:

- Shipments of military equipment dropped some 40 percent—from an average of 58,000 metric tons per year in 1981-84 to 34,000 metric tons.
- Shipments from East European countries, including small arms, ammunition, and light aircraft, amounted to 10,000 tons—double the tonnage for each of the last two years.
- Among the most important items delivered were 75 medium tanks and more than 80 other armored vehicles.
- The Cuban Navy received its first deliveries of Stenka patrol boats, and the SSC-3 antiship missile system was deployed for the first time in Cuba, while the air defense forces received SA-13 surface-to-air missile launchers and state-of-the-art jamming equipment.

In addition, Cuba's Air Force benefited from the delivery of at least one MIG-21 and two MIG-23 fighters, and two MI-17 helicopters—although these deliveries represented a decrease from 1984. A second IL-76 heavy-lift transport aircraft was delivered to Cubana Airlines, giving a boost to Cuba's military airlift capability. The Cuban Navy continued to modernize its mine warfare fleet with the acquisition of two Sonya-class coastal minesweepers.

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Most of the military goods delivered to Cuba probably have remained in that country.

Cuba continues to serve as a conduit for the transfer of Soviet military equipment to other Third World countries, particularly Nicaragua and Angola.

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The drop in deliveries suggests that Soviet arms shipments to Cuba have begun to stabilize at a new level—lower than the record deliveries of the last four years, but substantially higher than those of the previous decade. We do not expect this decline to affect Cuba's ability to operate the large numbers of fighters, missiles, tanks, armored vehicles, and naval combatants already in the Armed Forces inventory. Replacements and spare parts are available for most equipment; pilots and technicians have become proficient on new weapons; and a number of military projects, such as the upgrading of air and naval facilities, the addition of new command and control systems, and the hardening of air defense command centers, have been completed recently.

Although the drop in 1985 deliveries may signal a curtailment of Havana's rapid expansion program, the improvement in the Cuban Armed Forces since 1980 has been dramatic. Even without taking hostile action, Cuba's Navy and Air Force could have a significant impact on the allocation of US naval and air forces in time of war or crisis because of the potential threat to merchant shipping and troop convoys entering and exiting the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico. Moreover, the appearance of ground-launched antiship missiles in Cuba for the first time in over 15 years strengthens Havana's ability to threaten Caribbean shipping lanes in time of war. Cuba's small but growing offensive capability and its potential for intervention in the Caribbean and Central America also threaten US interests, because many states in the region have little ability to defend themselves and would look to the United States for protection.



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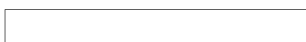
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### Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Scope Note	iii
Key Judgments	v
Introduction	1
Military Deliveries in 1985	1
General Patterns	1
Major Arms Deliveries	2
Shipments From Eastern Europe	3
Transshipment of Arms to Third World Nations	3
Impact of Arms Deliveries on Cuban Military Capabilities	7
Ground Forces	7
Naval and Coastal Defense Forces	8
Air and Air Defense Force	9
Benefits to the Soviet Union of Military Aid to Cuba	10
Outlook and Implications for the United States	11



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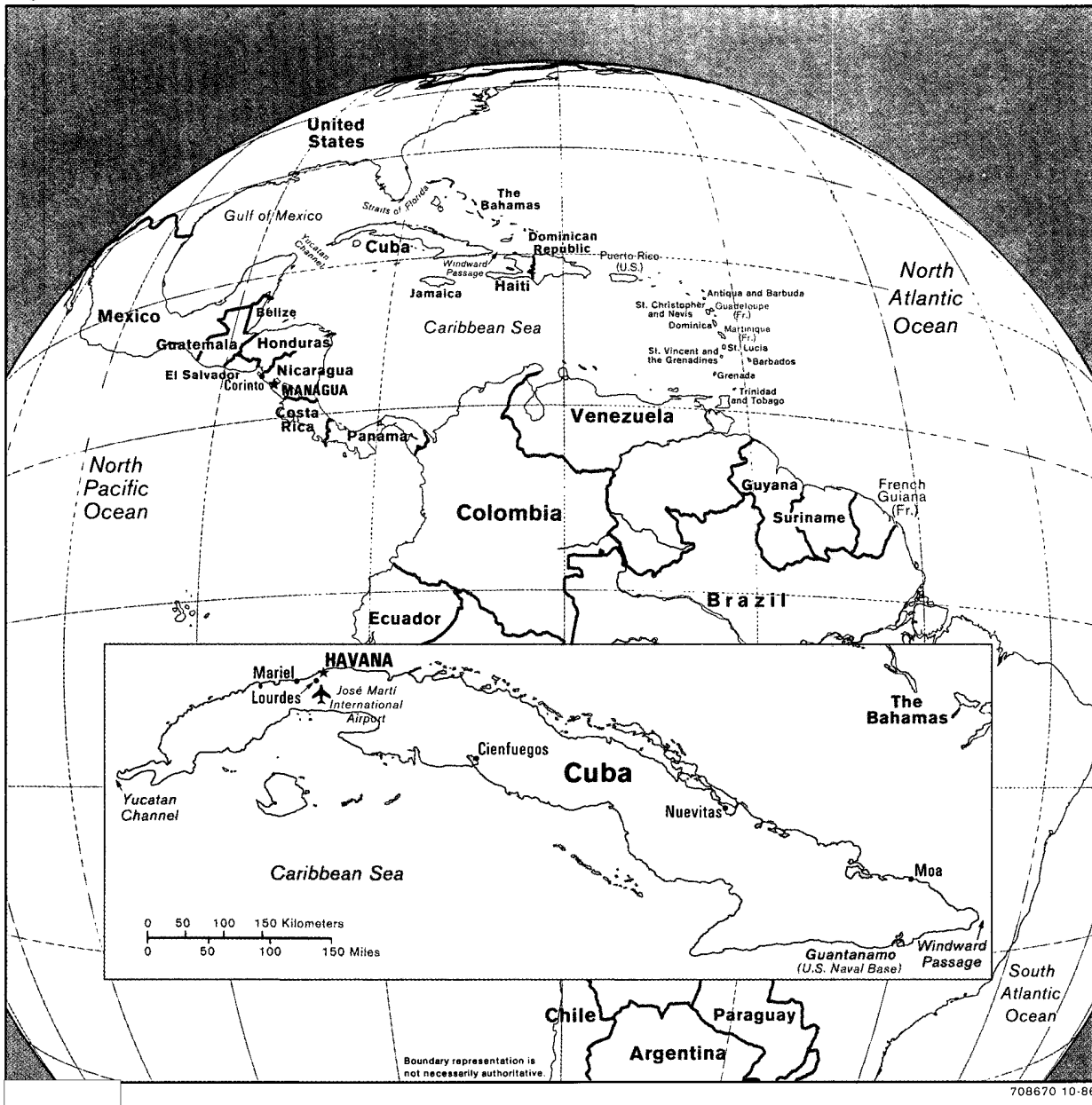
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Figure 1



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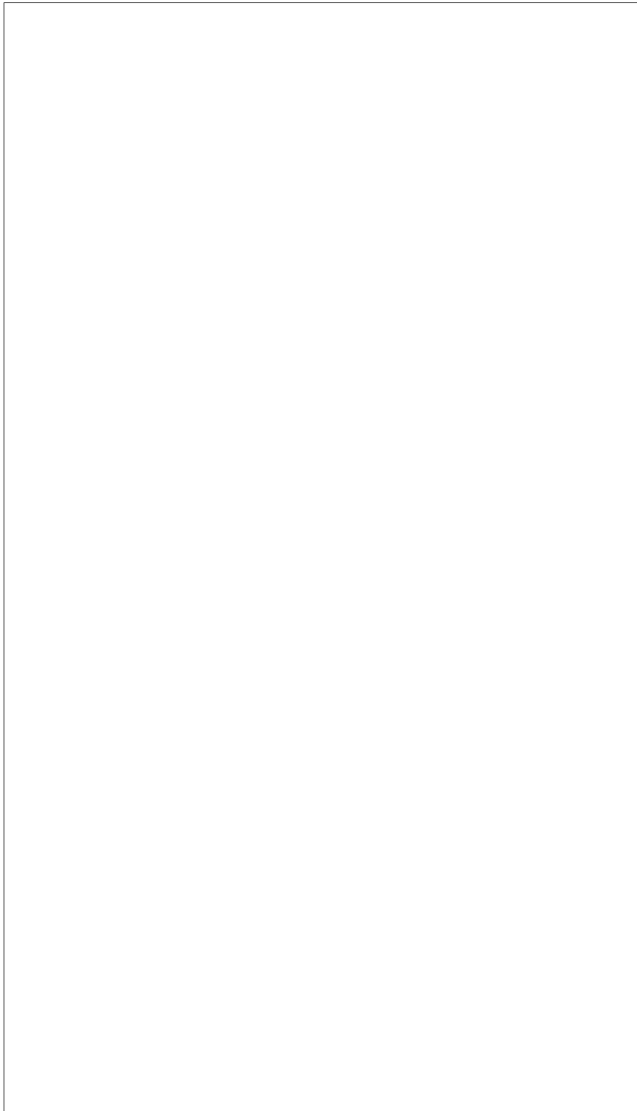
**Cuba: Soviet Military Deliveries in 1985**



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**Introduction**

This paper details the available information on shipments of major arms and military-associated equipment to Cuba from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during 1985, identifies and discusses trends in weapons deliveries, and assesses the impact of these acquisitions on Cuban military capabilities.



**Military Deliveries in 1985**

**General Patterns**

The overall tonnage of Soviet seaborne military deliveries to Cuba in 1985 was some 40 percent less than the average volume of deliveries in the previous four years



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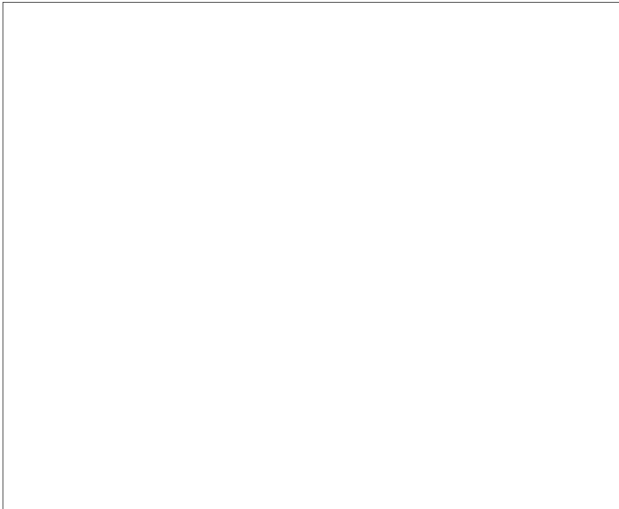
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Cuba receives all of its military equipment from the Soviet Union free of charge. We estimate the market value of the equipment received in 1985 at US \$350 million. Compared with the \$4.5 billion per year in economic aid and subsidies Cuba has received from the USSR in recent years, we do not consider this an inordinate amount for the Soviets to spend in ensuring Cuba's effective participation in Communist military activities in the Third World.



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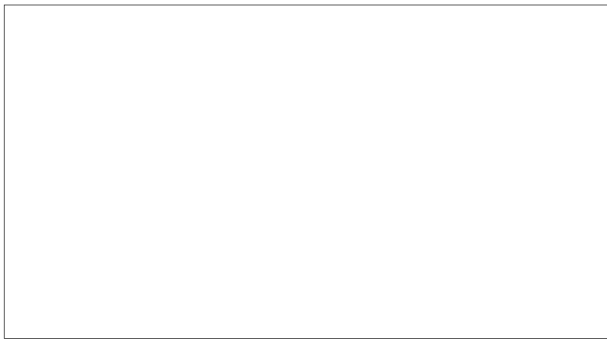
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handful of jet fighters, including one MIG-21 and two MIG-23s, as well as two MI-17 helicopters.<sup>2</sup> Cuban air defenses were strengthened by the delivery of 12 SA-13 surface-to-air missile launchers [redacted]. The Navy received its initial shipment of three Stenka patrol boats and five additional Zhuk patrol boats—which may be passed on to Nicaragua—and doubled the number of coastal minesweepers in its inventory with the delivery of two more Sonya minesweepers.

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Among the most important items of equipment delivered in 1985 were at least 75 medium tanks—25 T-62s and 50 T-54/55s—and more than 80 other armored vehicles. The Cuban Air Force received a



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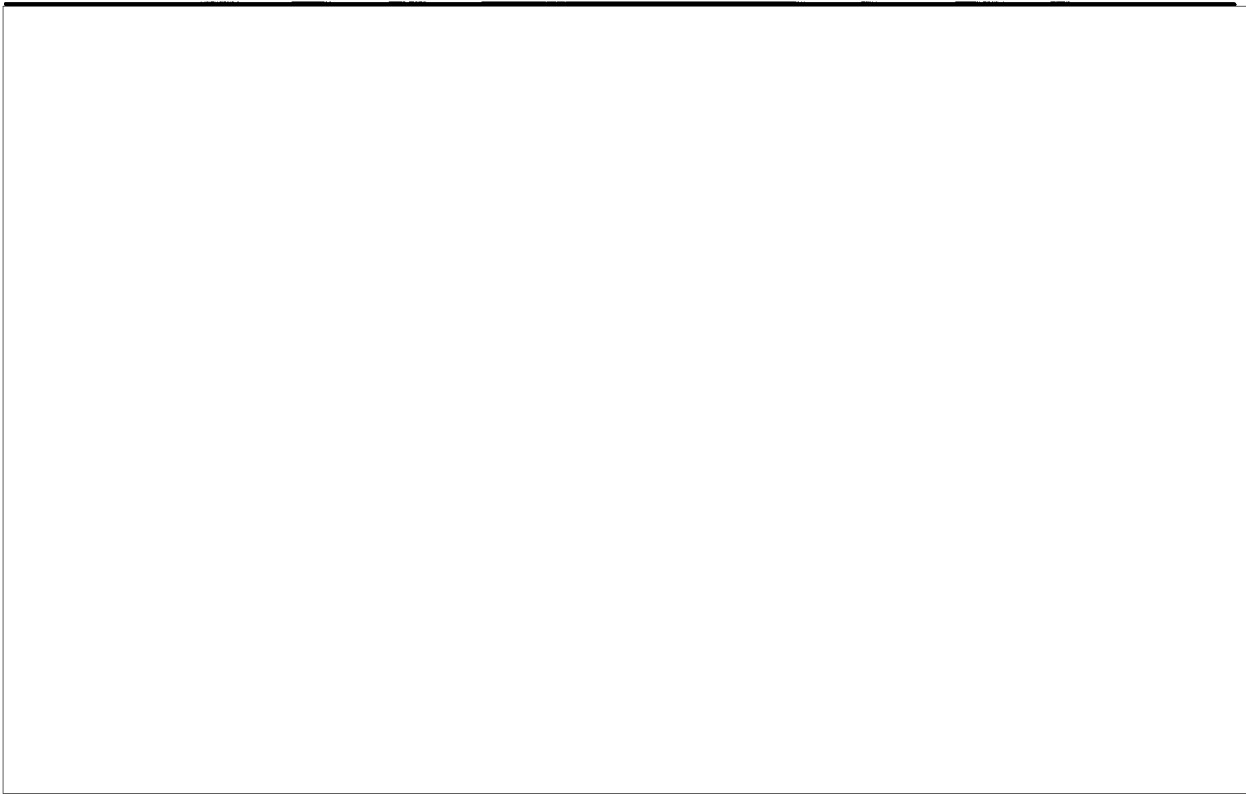
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[Redacted] the SSC-3 coastal defense missile system—with a maximum range of 45 nautical miles—was noted for the first time in Cuba [Redacted] last year. [Redacted]

**Shipments From Eastern Europe**

As in the past two years, a substantial volume of military items, not included in the tonnage figures presented here, was delivered by East European suppliers in 1985. [Redacted]



[Redacted] it is clear that the volume of deliveries from Eastern Europe rose dramatically in 1985. [Redacted]

Deliveries of some 400 trucks and jeeps from Romania, a large quantity of small arms from Yugoslavia, light aircraft from Czechoslovakia, and aircraft spare parts and ammunition from Poland sharply increased the tonnage of East European shipments

last year. [Redacted] [Redacted] even conservative estimates of the tonnage delivered by sea suggest that the volume of East European military deliveries in 1985 was more than double that for each of the previous two years. [Redacted]



[Redacted] Although no major weapon systems were delivered to Cuba from Eastern Europe during the year, Yugoslavia shipped some 50,000 rifles, some 1,000 machineguns, and millions of rounds of ammunition to Cuba in late 1985, [Redacted] In addition, Zlin-142 light aircraft shipped from Czechoslovakia enabled Cuba's Border Guards to establish an aerial reconnaissance squadron last year. [Redacted]

**Transshipment of Arms to Third World Nations**

Cuba serves as a conduit for arms and military equipment to other Soviet client states in the Third World, particularly Angola and Nicaragua. Most

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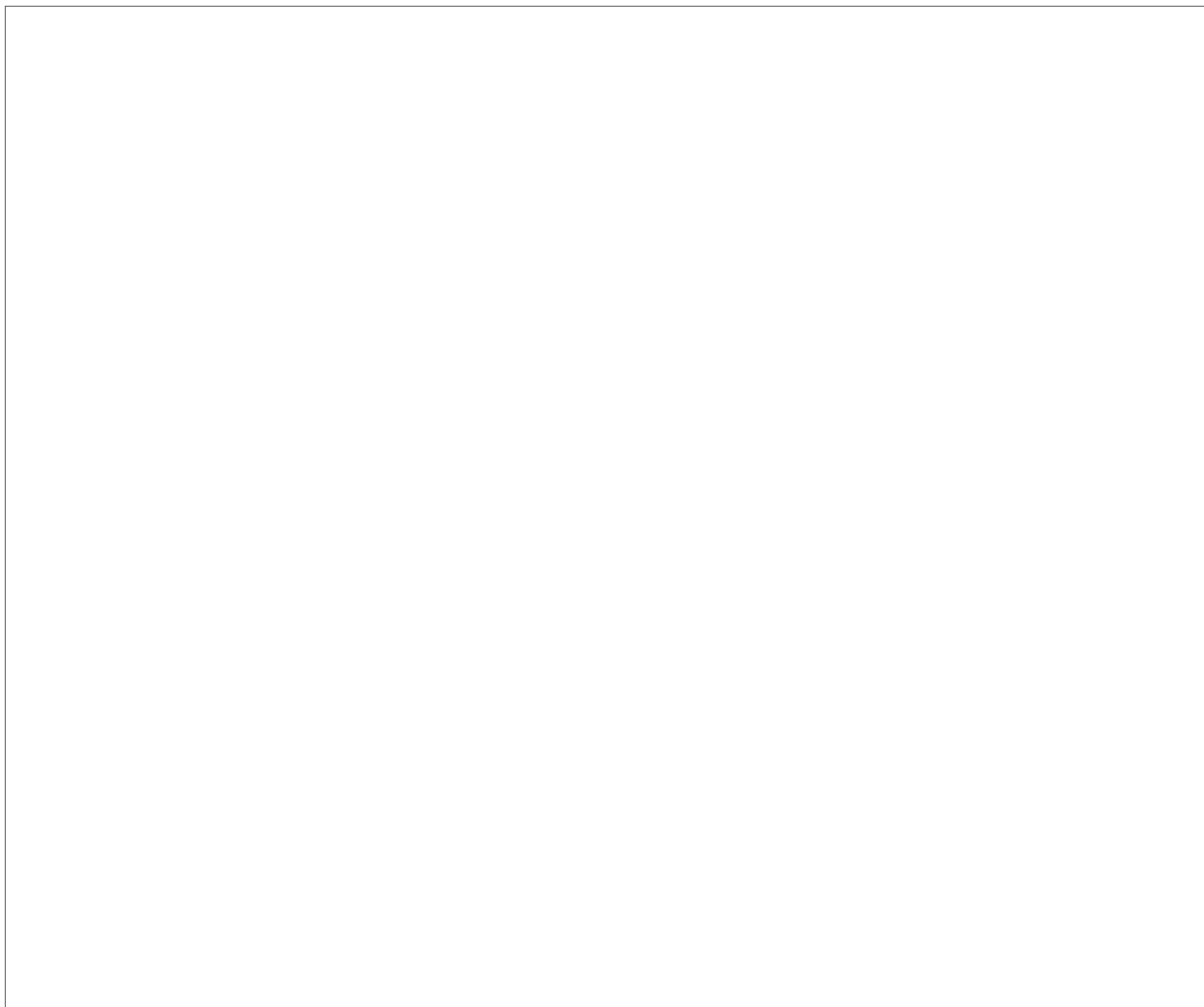
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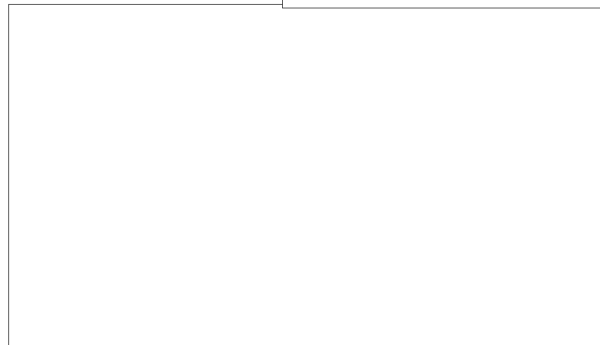


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military deliveries to these countries, however, continue to be shipped directly from the Soviet Union. We cannot quantify the proportion of Soviet military deliveries to Cuba in 1985 that were shipped to other countries, but we believe that most equipment has remained in Cuba. [Redacted]

Cuban merchant ships that regularly (up to five times per month) sail to Corinto, Nicaragua, apparently deliver some military or military-related equipment to the Sandinistas. Nicaraguan merchant ships also travel periodically between Cuba and ports on Nicaragua's east coast—taking advantage of the

greater security of this route, which avoids the Panama Canal—to bring in arms and military equipment as well as general cargo. [Redacted]



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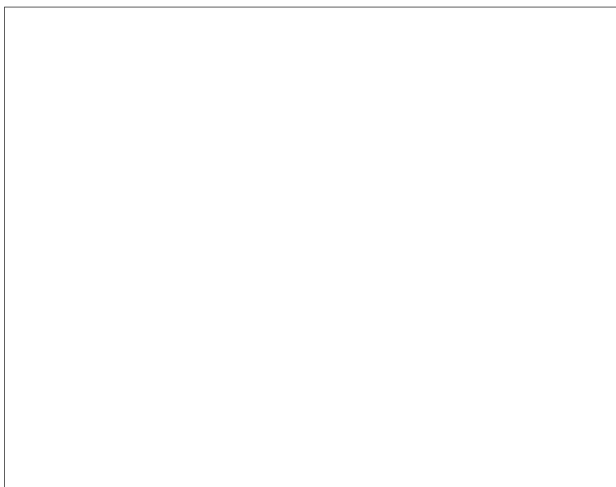
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Figure 3. Deliveries of Soviet BMP infantry combat vehicles (left) and T-62 tanks (right) improved the mobility and firepower of Cuba's Ground Forces.

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**Impact of Arms Deliveries on Cuban Military Capabilities**

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Most of the modern weapons and major items of equipment now in Cuban operational inventories were delivered since 1980. The military equipment delivered in 1985 will enhance Cuba's Ground Forces capabilities, strengthen its coastal defenses, and upgrade its airlift capability.

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**Ground Forces**

Cuba's Ground Forces, which are the least modern of the three armed services, received the bulk of the military equipment delivered in 1985. The addition of some 75 T-62 and T-54/55 tanks and 80 other armored vehicles to an already substantial armored inventory has enabled Cuba to effect a major restructuring of five of its nine active motorized infantry divisions. A light tank brigade—a combined-arms unit composed of tanks, BMP armored personnel carriers, self-propelled antiaircraft and field artillery, and combat engineers—has now replaced the motorized infantry regiments in each of these divisions, and provides greater firepower and protection. The Soviet

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Seaborne shipments of arms from Cuba to Angola usually consist of heavier, and usually older, military equipment—such as T-34 or T-54/55 tanks and BTR-60 armored personnel carriers, for example—and typically occur at least once per quarter. More modern weapons, for Cuban or Angolan use, are shipped directly to Angola from the Soviet Union.

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**Table 3  
Inventory of Selected Cuban  
Ground Forces Weapons and Equipment <sup>a</sup>**

	1975	1980	1985
<b>Modern medium tanks</b>			
T-62	0	50	237
T-54/55	(400)	630	784
<b>Other armored vehicles</b>			
BMP infantry combat vehicle	0	30	81
BTR-60 armored personnel carrier	(80)	340	453
BRDM reconnaissance vehicle	(40)	90	130
<b>Field artillery</b>			
M-1973 SP 152-mm howitzer	0	0	6
M-1974 SP 122-mm howitzer	0	6	18
B-21 122-mm multiple rocket launcher	(0)	40	72
130-mm field gun	(100)	110	176
122-mm howitzer	(140)	160	225
<b>Air defense artillery</b>			
ZSU-23/4 SP air defense artillery	0	28	45

<sup>a</sup> Total estimated inventory.

Note: Parentheses denote substantially greater uncertainty.

armor deliveries also have allowed the Cubans to replace most of the T-54/55 tanks and BTR-60 armored personnel carriers they had shipped to Angola during the previous year.

Air defense of Cuban ground force units also has been improved with the delivery last year of 12 SA-13 surface-to-air missile launchers. This short-range, low-level air defense system was seen for the first time with a Cuban unit last year. An improvement over the SA-9 mobile launcher, the SA-13 launcher is mounted on a tracked vehicle for better mobility, and the SA-13 missile has slightly better range and altitude characteristics than the SA-9. The SA-9 and SA-13 systems are both effective against helicopters and subsonic fixed-wing aircraft, and in the Soviet military they both appear in the air defense battery of motorized rifle or tank regiments.

**Naval and Coastal Defense Forces**

The Soviets delivered only two coastal minesweepers and eight patrol boats to Cuba in 1985. This made the tonnage of naval vessels delivered last year substantially less than the deliveries during 1984, when two major combatants—a Koni frigate and an F-class submarine—and nine Zhuk patrol boats were received by Cuba.

The most notable of last year's naval shipments was the delivery of three Stenka patrol boats. The Stenka is used by the Soviet KGB as a border patrol craft and had not been exported previously by the USSR. The version shipped to Cuba, however, had the torpedo tubes, depth charge racks, and dipping sonar removed, and was equipped with a quadruple SA-N-5 surface-to-air missile launcher, twin 30-mm gun mounts fore and aft, and two 16-barrel chaff launchers astern.

The armament and outfitting of the Stenkas suggest that they will be employed in a border guard role. Five additional Zhuk patrol boats also were delivered last year—on top of the nine delivered in 1984—most of which probably will be passed on to Nicaragua.

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**Table 4**  
**Inventory of Selected Cuban**  
**Navy Assets <sup>a</sup>**

	1975	1980	1985
Foxtrot submarines	0	2	3
Koni frigates	0	0	2
Guided-missile patrol boats			
Komar	(16)	6	3
Osa-I	5	5	5
Osa-II	1	7	13
Torpedo boats			
P-4/P-6/Komar conversion	(24)	(19)	13
Turya hydrofoil	0	4	9
Patrol boats			
Zhuk	(0)	12	26
Stenka	0	0	3
Minesweepers			
Yevgenya	0	7	12
Sonya	0	1	4
Polnocny landing ship	0	0	2

<sup>a</sup> Operational inventory only.

Note: Parentheses denote substantially greater uncertainty.

Two Sonya minesweepers delivered in 1985 doubled the Navy's inventory of coastal minesweepers and are a major improvement over the smaller Yevgenya inshore minesweepers that have been the mainstay of Cuba's mine warfare capability. The new minesweepers are bigger, faster, better equipped and can stay at sea longer than the smaller Yevgenyas, and give the Cuban Navy greater flexibility in performing a variety of roles other than minesweeping, such as mine-laying and antisubmarine warfare.

Cuba's coastal defenses were significantly improved in 1985 with the deployment of the SSC-3 ground-launched antiship missile system. This truck-mounted, highly mobile missile system has a range of some 45 nautical miles, posing a significant threat to shipping lanes in the Caribbean—especially the Florida Straits, Yucatan Channel, and Windward Passage. With a greater range than the cruise missiles

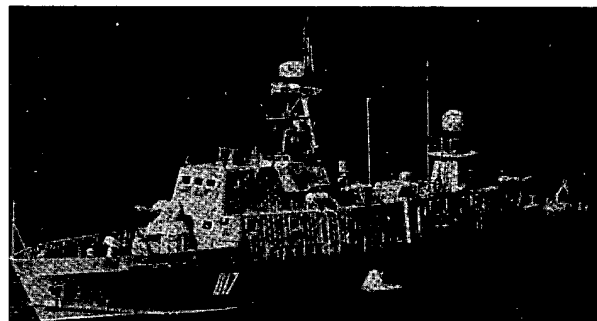


Figure 5. The most notable naval shipments in 1985 were three Stenka patrol boats

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carried aboard Cuba's Osa patrol boats—and the added advantage of greater concealment afforded to a land-based system—the new missile system gives Cuba an effective means of challenging US control over Caribbean sea lines of communication in time of war, and could threaten US freedom of navigation operations in peacetime as well.

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#### Air and Air Defense Force

Soviet deliveries of fighter aircraft to Cuba decreased significantly in 1985, amounting to only one MIG-21 and two MIG-23s, compared to four MIG-21s and three MIG-23s in 1984. —aside from the SA-13 system that went to Cuba's Ground Forces. Other air-related shipments in 1985 included the transfer of a new IL-76 heavy-lift transport, the most modern Soviet air defense jamming equipment, and two MI-17 helicopters.

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The delivery of a second IL-76 transport to Cuba in June 1985 increases Havana's heavy airlift capability and improves its potential for providing long-range logistic support to its allies and forces overseas. Although the IL-76s are subordinate to Cuba's national airline Cubana, and carry its markings, the aircraft were designed to serve as military transports. Like all Cubana aircraft, they are the property of the

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**Figure 6.** The SSC-3 ground-launched antiship missile system was noted for the first time in Cuba in 1985. This truck-mounted, highly mobile missile system has a range of some 45 nautical miles and could pose a significant threat to shipping lanes in the Caribbean.

Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces.

The acquisition of the IL-76 transports has given Cuba the ability to airlift heavier loads—40 tons instead of the 20-ton capacity of the IL-62—anywhere in the Caribbean Basin. In addition, small payloads of about 10 tons can be flown up to a distance of 5,000 nautical miles. Each aircraft also can carry up to 140 passengers or 125 fully equipped paratroops. Before the arrival of the IL-76, Cuba had no capacity to airlift bulky or heavy items, such as armored personnel carriers, light aircraft, or large loads of ammunition. Thus far, Cuba has used the IL-76s principally for commercial flights to Panama.

**Table 5**  
Inventory of Selected Cuban Air and Air Defense Force Weapons and Equipment <sup>a</sup>

	1975	1980	1985
<b>Modern jet fighters/trainers <sup>b</sup></b>			
MIG-23	0	12	44
MIG-21 <sup>c</sup>	(95)	138	161
L-39 trainers	0	0	30
<b>Other aircraft <sup>b</sup></b>			
MI-24 attack helicopters	0	0	11
MI-8/17 helicopters	(3)	30	58
AN-24/26 transports	(2)	24	30
<b>Surface-to-air missile launchers</b>			
SA-2 <sup>d</sup>	102	120	132
SA-3 <sup>d</sup>	6	24	42
SA-6	0	20	20
SA-9	0	0	20
SA-13	0	0	12

<sup>a</sup> Operational inventory only.

<sup>b</sup> Through 1980 there were also decreasing numbers of older aircraft.

<sup>c</sup> Includes MIG-21H (reconnaissance) but excludes older MIG-21 variants whose operational status is uncertain.

<sup>d</sup> Includes only launchers associated with sites assessed to be primary occupied/operational sites (excludes dispersal sites).

Note: Based on a recent reassessment. Parentheses denote substantially greater uncertainty.

#### Benefits to the Soviet Union of Military Aid to Cuba

The USSR does not charge Cuba for the military aid it supplies, but these costs are more than offset by the military and political benefits it derives from supporting the Castro regime. These have included the use of Cuban troops as a surrogate force, most notably in Angola, Cuban assistance in penetrating Western governments and influencing nonaligned nations, and the use of Cuban territory as a base for signals and electronic intelligence collection against the United States. Perhaps the greatest benefit to the Soviets, however, is that the growing Cuban military threat could force US military planners to allocate resources

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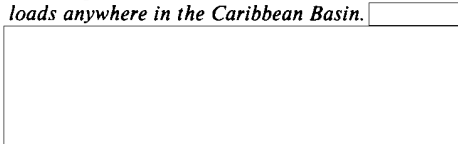
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Figure 7. The acquisition of two IL-76 transport aircraft gives Cuba the ability to airlift heavier loads anywhere in the Caribbean Basin. [Redacted]



for maintaining the security of vital sea lanes of the Caribbean Basin in times of war, thereby diluting US forces available for deployment to Europe or other potential areas of US-Soviet confrontation. [Redacted]

The Soviets also maintain a presence in Cuba of nearly 13,000 personnel, more than half of whom are military advisers. Some 7,000 to 8,000 Soviet military personnel are associated with the Soviet combat brigade, the signals intelligence facility at Lourdes, and the Soviet Military Advisory Group. The effort expended by the Soviets to train and equip their ally in the Caribbean reflects not only the importance of Cuba's location and military forces to the Soviet Union, but also Moscow's confidence in Cuba's ability to disseminate Soviet military doctrine throughout the Third World. [Redacted]

**Outlook and Implications for the United States**

We judge—based on the downward trend in military deliveries seen in the past two years—that Cuba will continue to modernize its Armed Forces during the rest of the decade, but probably at a more moderate pace. The rate of growth in Cuba's military capabilities will continue to depend on Moscow's assessment of Cuban usefulness to Soviet aims, and its evaluation of the risk of provoking the United States. In our view, Soviet deliveries to Cuba over the past five years indicate that Moscow is firmly committed to strengthening Cuba's defenses against a possible US attack or

blockade, but that it understands that the introduction of purely offensive weapons, such as medium bombers, would cause a crisis. While the Soviets appear willing to help Cuba improve its regional intervention capabilities, they probably will move cautiously to gauge US reactions. [Redacted]

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Cuba probably will continue to develop its ground-based air defenses; for example, the expansion of surface-to-air missile forces already underway in central and eastern Cuba will in turn require the delivery of more radars, missiles, and communications equipment. [Redacted] that Cuban forces in Angola operate at least one missile system that has not yet appeared in Cuba—the SA-8—and we believe this system is a likely candidate for future deliveries. Another, but less likely possibility, would be the SA-5—a long-range, high-altitude system that the Soviets have supplied to Syria, and more recently, to Libya. [Redacted]

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We believe that the Soviet Union will continue to supply Cuba with replacement aircraft for the five fighters lost in accidents in 1985, but that Cuba's inventory of fighter aircraft will remain relatively stable for the next few years. The Air Force has just completed a major reequipping and retraining program, and therefore is not likely to acquire any new types of aircraft in the near future. One possible acquisition, if Moscow were willing to risk US reaction to provide it, would be the MIG-25 Foxbat high-altitude fighter. Cuban President Castro—long nettled over what he considers to be unnecessary and provocative US SR-71 overflights—has challenged the right of the United States to fly such missions and probably wants a weapon, like the Foxbat, that could threaten the SR-71. The Cubans may also want to acquire the reconnaissance version of the MIG-25, which they might fly near US borders in retaliation for the SR-71 reconnaissance flights over Cuba. The Soviets may provide Cuba with several more IL-76 transports, which would expand Cuba's capability to deploy troops and military equipment over long distances—although it would still be dependent on the USSR for any large-scale redeployment of forces. [Redacted]

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Cuba can be expected to continue replacing its older T-54/55 tanks with T-62s, and to acquire sufficient armor for adding tank brigades to the three remaining active motorized infantry divisions. Air defense of Cuban Ground Forces units also probably will continue to improve with the acquisition of additional SA-9 and SA-13 missile launchers, and perhaps several more SA-6 launchers. [redacted]

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Based on our assessment of trends in past deliveries, we believe the Cuban Navy probably will receive at least one major surface combatant or submarine from the USSR during 1987. By the end of the decade, it could acquire one more Koni frigate, one or two more amphibious landing ships, and perhaps as many as three additional submarines. Cuba's acquisition of the Nanuchka-class missile patrol boat is also a possibility, since it uses the same missile as the SSC-3 ground-launched missile system. Cuba also may acquire more SSC-3 launchers, and is almost certain to continue modernizing its minesweeper force by acquiring more Sonya coastal minesweepers. [redacted]

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In time of war or crisis, Cuba's regular Armed Forces could threaten merchant shipping passing through the Caribbean or exiting the Gulf of Mexico, and, even without taking hostile action, would likely cause US military planners to divert air and naval assets to protect troop convoys bound for Europe. The substantial improvements in Cuba's Armed Forces over the past five years also would raise the cost to the United States of any attempt to neutralize Cuban forces. [redacted]

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Cuba's small, but growing, military airlift and sealift capabilities also pose a potential threat to neighboring countries in the Caribbean and Central America. Many of these countries have no conventional armed forces, and we believe that in a crisis they would look to the United States for protection from any Cuban threat. [redacted]

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