

TOP SECRET

APPRAISAL OF CUBAN AND SOVIET MILITARY STRENGTH IN CUBA

INTRODUCTION

Since the missile/bomber crisis of October 1962 and the subsequent withdrawal of Soviet strategic weapons and associated personnel, the military posture in Cuba remains essentially a significantly improved Cuban military establishment backed by Soviet air and ground units, highlighted by air and coast defense systems, particularly an integrated island-wide air defense network of high-performance aircraft and surface-to-air-missiles.

SOVIET MILITARY STRENGTH IN CUBA

Since 13 February, substantial numbers of passengers have departed Cuba en route to the USSR. Reliable reports indicate that probably a total of about 3,000 have been withdrawn, the great majority appearing to be military. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that some of the many Soviet ships that have arrived in Cuba since 13 February have carried military replacements. Evidence presently on hand thus still does not permit a firm conclusion as to the actual numbers of Soviet military personnel that remain. In view of the foregoing and coupled with the fact that no basic changes have been observed in the Soviet military establishments in Cuba, we have not yet revised the estimate of Soviet military strength as being in the magnitude of 17,500.

We have no indications that Soviet personnel and equipment are being withdrawn from the four Soviet military camps at Holguin, Remedios, Artemisia, and Santiago de las Vegas. About 5,000 Soviet troops have been estimated to be in four highly mobile armored groupings at these camps, well equipped with modern, sophisticated weapons, and about 5,000 involved in the 24-site SA-2 missile system. The remainder are manning the other Soviet-controlled installations and equipment or are attached to Cuban ground, air, and naval units as advisors and instructors. There are also military personnel from other Bloc countries, principally Czechoslovakians, probably totalling not more than a few hundred. Based on all available evidence, we believe basic Soviet capabilities in Cuba have not been diminished since the withdrawal of the strategic weapons, and our estimate of Soviet troop strength in Cuba remains essentially unchanged.

The precise Soviet intentions for their continued military presence in Cuba are not definable at this time, particularly since the scope and

Copy 8 of 8 copies each  
of 5 Approved For Release 2004/03/15 : CIA-RDP65B00383R000100250076-3

- 1 -

EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC  
REGRADE: DOD DIR 5200.10  
DOES NOT APPLY

JCS and DIA review(s) completed.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

phasing of the projected Soviet troop withdrawal are not yet clear. However, Moscow apparently hopes to maintain a sizable military presence in Cuba for some time. The Soviets probably calculate that such a military presence serves as a politico-psychological deterrent to a possible US/OAS intervention in force. They also probably value possessing a means to apply pressure and assert influence on Cuban policy in any critical stage of disagreement with Moscow. They probably estimate that the Soviet troops in Cuba could play a key role in the maintenance of a Communist regime. The Soviets also probably assess that a prolonged military presence in Cuba will establish a precedent in the Western Hemisphere.

Retention of sophisticated weapons systems under Soviet control - - such as the MIG-21 aircraft, SA-2's, coastal defense cruise missiles, and the KOMAR guided-missile boats - - may eventually raise irksome questions of Cuban sovereignty and some Cuban resentment of the Soviet role in Cuba. Castro, on occasion, has already indicated his opposition to the Soviet failure to challenge continued US overflights. The presence of Soviet combat groupings may also strain Soviet-Cuban relations because of their ability to intervene in Cuban affairs.

Castro's internal security apparatus is in itself highly effective and, to date, has proved quite capable of suppressing the sporadic anti-government actions attempted thus far in Cuba.

CUBAN MILITARY STRENGTH AND CAPABILITIES

The numerical strength of the Cuban ground forces is about 175,000 - - approximately 75,000 in the standing army and 100,000 in the ready reserve. In addition, there are some 100,000 home-guard militiamen of insignificant combat capability but useful as a police reserve. The standing ground forces have substantially completed basic unit and combined arms training at battalion combat team level.

The capabilities of the standing army and ready reserve have been enhanced by new equipment brought in during 1962 and by further training and experience, including mobilization during the crisis. The Cuban ground forces are probably well able to control internal resistance and to repel small-scale attacks from abroad. Their ability to defend against a large-scale US military invasion would be limited by their lack of training and experience and joint operations on the division level. In such a

TOP SECRET

contingency, they would have to revert fairly quickly to static defense or guerrilla operations, but only a relatively small proportion of the Cuban military establishment would be able or likely to carry out prolonged operations of this type.

The most significant change in the Cuban military situation since July 1962, other than the introduction and removal of Soviet strategic weapons, is the improvement in air defense capabilities resulting from the presence of the Soviet-manned radar and communications networks, SA-2 missile sites, and 42 MIG-21 fighters. The strong Soviet air defense presence - - supplemented by the Cuban-manned jet fighter force composed of about 65 MIG-15/17/19's and a considerable quantity of Cuban anti-aircraft artillery - - now gives Cuba an integrated air defense system. Although Cubans may be trained eventually to operate the more advanced Soviet air defense equipment, there are now some indications that such training is presently taking place. However, for some time Soviet manning will be required for effective use of the equipment.

Considerable improvement has occurred within the past year in Castro's capabilities to combat guerrilla elements within his own country. Castro now has a "vertical envelopment" capability involving the use of land-based helicopters and paratroopers, thus severely restricting the ability of anti-Castro guerrilla elements to carry out sustained operations in significant strength. Furthermore, MIG fighter aircraft provide an island-wide capability for applying air attacks against guerrilla actions.

Cuban capabilities for military operations overseas remain severely limited by the lack of the requisite air or sea lift. The Cubans probably could only undertake an overseas operation in limited strength of somewhat less than a battalion. However, for political as well as military reasons, the Castro regime is most unlikely, under present circumstances, to undertake military operations of this nature.

POSSIBLE MILITARY THREATS FROM CUBA

Military actions against the United States from Cuba are considered highly unlikely because of the risk involved in provoking a retaliatory response from the United States. The principal conventional military actions which can be envisioned are possibly air raids on Southern Florida by single or several MIG's or B-26's, or hit-and-run demolition sabotage carried out by squad-sized groups using motor torpedo boats or the KOMAR guided-missile boats.

TOP SECRET

Because Castro has demonstrated a fanatic's zeal and volatile temperament, we cannot totally discount the possibility that, should he deem it necessary to sustain his cause or his position, he might attempt aggressive actions against US shipping, the Guantanamo Naval Base, or possibly even the southeastern portion of the United States.

An added threat to US security could be posed by the possibility of Soviet use of Cuban ports for logistic support of their submarines. Although we cannot predict Soviet intentions, we have no evidence that the Soviets are establishing a submarine base in Cuba, and every report concerning this contingency is pursued thoroughly.

Based on the conclusion that, with the 1962 withdrawal of missiles and bombers, no such systems are presently in Cuba, we do not believe a nuclear threat from Cuba currently exists. Although the Cubans almost certainly use some caves for storage of supplies, ammunition and equipment, intensive intelligence collection and analysis has failed to provide any evidence to substantiate numerous and persistent rumors and reports that ballistic missiles are hidden in caves and secret installations in Cuba. Furthermore, comprehensive evaluation of all available information has produced no evidence of the presence of nuclear weapons in Cuba. Storage facilities at the missile sites were either never completed or have been abandoned. In addition, there is also no evidence of the elaborate security precautions which the Soviets customarily take with respect to such weapons.

In general, we believe that situations are unlikely to develop in which Castro would openly intervene in the Western Hemisphere with substantial forces in the face of prompt and vigorous US and probable OAS counteraction. Castro probably prefers to continue his extensive propaganda campaign and to concentrate on rendering clandestine support to insurgency in other Latin American countries, with particular emphasis on guerrilla training and ideological indoctrination of revolutionary leaders invited to Cuba and sent back to lead anti-government activities in their homelands.

In conclusion, while current Soviet/Cuban military capabilities do not constitute a direct threat to the United States, continued Soviet military support and presence will progressively strengthen Communist Cuba as an active, relatively secure base for subversion and as a potential military operational base.

TOP SECRET

US DEPLOYMENTS IN RESPONSE TO THE CUBAN/SOVIET THREAT

As has been previously discussed, the continued presence of Soviet military units in Cuba do not, per se, pose an immediate threat to the United States, nor will their departure at some future date have any significant impact on our deployments to provide for the security of the Southeastern United States. What is of significance is the continued presence of Soviet troops in this hemisphere and of weapons systems that could conceivably be employed in a hit-and-run attack against the United States, our aircraft or our shipping. The recent "shrimp boat" incident lends credence to such a potential. On balance, however, it is difficult to envision circumstances in which either the Castro regime or the Soviet authorities would find such a course of action to their advantage. Nevertheless, the defenses of Southeastern United States have been significantly strengthened. Two Hawk battalions, one Nike battalion, and increased numbers of fighter aircraft have been deployed to Southern Florida to cope with such an eventuality. However, the bulk of US forces deployed during the October crisis have returned to their normal stations. Our continuing analysis reveals that present arrangement of forces planned for Cuban contingencies is appropriate, regardless of whether Soviet units remain or depart Cuba.