

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

16 April 1963

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CIA-DIA-NSA MEMORANDUM FOR USIB

SUBJECT: SOVIET FORCES IN CUBA

1. The purpose of this paper is to review judgments previously made about the number of Soviet military personnel in Cuba, to provide a current evaluation of the number of Soviets withdrawn, and to render some conclusions concerning the strength, status, and capabilities of the Soviet forces which remain.

2. The figure of 17,500 Soviet military personnel estimated to have been in Cuba prior to the February-April withdrawals was derived from a series of judgments about the probable strength of each of the Soviet manned weapons systems present in Cuba. The figures assigned to the different elements were held with varying degrees of confidence depending upon our previous knowledge of the type of military unit concerned. Thus the total of 17,500 was never regarded as a completely firm figure and it was always allowed that the actual figure could vary either way by as much as several thousand.

3. Since mid-February a minimum of 4,600 Soviet personnel have been withdrawn from Cuba

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and only a very few are known to have arrived. Most of those departing can be inferred to have been military rather than civilian. We cannot determine with any degree of certainty, however, the specific units to which these troops belonged and consequently we cannot estimate reductions on a unit basis. Also, unless entire units are seen to depart with their equipment, or unless entire weapons systems are turned over to the Cubans, we are unable to conclude that particular Soviet units are no longer present. Further, since the total of 17,500 was conceded to be only approximate, we are unable to give a net current figure with any exactness. Our best judgment is that total Soviet

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military strength in Cuba has probably been reduced by about 20 to 30 percent.

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5. Indications observed to date are discussed as they relate to the surface-to-air missile (SAM) system, MIG-21 aircraft, the four major Soviet camps, the cruise missile system, and the Komar boats.

6. SAM System: Because the turn-over of the SAM system to Cuban control might lead to a confrontation of the USSR and the US in Cuba, it can be argued that it would be the last system which would be turned over to the Cubans prior to the departure of tactical Soviet units from Cuba.

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7. Our previous estimate assigned some 5,000 Soviet personnel to the SAM system. We believe that the bulk of these personnel remain in place. Probably only some support personnel or less critical personnel have been replaced by Cubans. The system

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efficiency of the SAM units has probably remained about the same and it is unlikely that there will be any loss of capability unless a large number of Cubans are brought into the system. Even then the rate of transition would determine the extent to which loss of effectiveness occurred.

8. Major Soviet Camps: Although there has been no significant change in the equipment at the four Soviet armored camps during the period of recent Soviet withdrawal there are indications that some personnel at these camps may have departed Cuba. The primary mission of the armored camps was probably to protect the strategic missiles. Since these missiles have been withdrawn and the armored units are not used to assist Cuban forces in anti-insurgent operations there is less justification for their continued presence unless their mission has been changed. If these units now have a training mission, there is no reason to maintain them at full T/O strength.

9. The personnel figure previously estimated for the four Soviet armored camps was about 5,000. This figure assumed that these units were fully manned. However, there was no firm evidence that the full T/O strength was achieved, and in any case the full strength could have been as much as a thousand more or a thousand less than 5,000.

10. We conclude that withdrawals have probably taken place, but we have insufficient evidence to be able to state the number of these troops either withdrawn or remaining. If the camps are to have a training mission it may be that only a small training cadre and maintenance groups will be needed to effect a turnover of the equipment to the Cubans. The units are not large enough to intervene effectively in any major crisis of the regime in which the main body of Cuban forces was involved.

12. The turnover to the Cubans of the 42 MIG-21 aircraft would increase the total number of jet fighters in Cuban hands by nearly 50%. Furthermore it would provide a greater intercept capability, particularly if the Soviets also supplied the air-to-air missiles used with the MIG-21. However, the total effectiveness of the MIG-21 fighters might be reduced by lack of qualified pilots, controllers, and maintenance personnel.

13. Komar boats: There is relatively less evidence on the operations of the Komar boats than on some other Soviet weapons systems. We infer that the Soviets remain in control of these vessels.

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[redacted] We believe that the Soviets would see no serious obstacle to turning over Komar boats to Cubans; they have been given to Egypt and Indonesia.

14. The acquisition of the 12 Komar boats by the Cuban naval forces would improve Cuban defensive capabilities against an invasion force. It would also increase the number of boats available for patrol duties.

15. Coastal Defense System (Cruise Missiles): The four cruise missile sites (two launchers per site) are believed to be still under Soviet control.

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[redacted]

16. Cuban capability to repel an invasion force would be significantly increased if the four operational cruise missile sites and the estimated 115 crated cruise missiles stored in Cuba were turned over to Cuban control. The 115 cruise missiles in crates are sufficient to establish at least 15 more sites which would be enough to protect most important landing beaches and ports.

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Conclusion

17. The recent Soviet withdrawals may have reduced the number of personnel involved in the operation of the major Soviet weapons systems in Cuba. However, there is no ground for a conclusion at this time that the overall operational effectiveness of these systems has been significantly reduced.

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