

Begin Text: "Cuba's Record of Deceit"

Summary

Fidel Castro recently made public acknowledgement of the key role played by thousands of Cuban combat troops in the Ogaden campaign -- after months of official Cuban denials that they were even there. The Castro Government has a long history of similar deceits in the past, ranging from the Guevara's secret intervention in the Congo and Bolivia in the 1960's to Cuba's dispatch of a 20,000-man expeditionary force to Angola in 1975-1976. Cuba denied its presence in Angola for nine months. Havana's subterfuge is so practiced that Cuba even accused British Foreign Secretary David Owen of the "grossest deceit" in April for warning that total Cuban-Soviet military forces in Africa now exceed 37,000; the total is more than that and most are from Cuba. This study, recalling other instances of Cuban deception, raises serious questions concerning the reliability of Cuban current disavowals of involvement in training and equipping Katangan rebels who recently invaded Zaire.

Fidel Castro, speaking on television in Havana March 15, finally acknowledged that Cuban soldiers played a decisive combat role in the Ogaden campaign. He praised the "magnificent combat qualities" of Cuba's "internationalist fighters." The same day that Castro spoke the Havana newspaper, Granma, printed details of the Ogaden combat roles of Cuban pilots, tank crews, artillery units and infantry brigades. Prior to these public acknowledgements the Cuban Government in step with Moscow, steadfastly denied foreign reports of a growing Approved For Release 2003/06/05 : CIA-RDP81B00401R002100020007-3 military involvement in Ethiopia -- denouncing

them as "imperialist fabrications." Early contingents of Cuban military personnel were described initially by Havana as "medical personnel," and only later as "military advisers on training missions."

The record speaks for itself, despite the flow of denials.

Even after hundreds of Cubans had assumed training and advisory roles and begun organizing Ethiopia's armed forces for the Ogaden counter-offensive, the Cuban Foreign Ministry, cited by TASS last November 5, asserted: "There is not a single Cuban unit, a single Cuban soldier, in Ethiopia." Cuban diplomats, acting under instructions from Havana, assured concerned foreign governments that published reports about a Cuban military buildup there were untrue. Unable, however, to conceal new call-ups of military reservists and the dispatch of additional military personnel to Ethiopia in mid-November, Cuba modified its story slightly. It said it was providing "some" additional instructors and advisers "requested" by Ethiopia. Cuba continued to deny the presence of combat troops, however.

Even after actual deployment of Cuban combat units to the Ogaden front in January 1978 for the counter-offensive which began in late January, the Cuban press in Havana published statements by Ethiopian officials that no foreign military personnel were fighting alongside their own forces. Cuban and other Soviet Bloc diplomats, it is now known, were under official orders during this period to deny Cuban military involvement in the fighting.

On February 26, Cuban Vice President Carlos Rafael Rodriguez told the London Observer there were only "Cuban specialists" in Ethiopia. At that time Cubans in Soviet tanks and jet fighters were spearheading the final drive on the key Ogaden city of Jijiga.

This propaganda line was shattered March 2, when Colonel Mengistu, the Ethiopian leader, revealed on national radio that "Cubans ... are standing alongside the Ethiopian people's defense forces on the front lines." Even so, it took Havana until March 15 to acknowledge their involvement.

Throughout this period Cuba, along with the Soviet Union and other partners, attempted to project a reversal of roles. That is, they systematically issued propaganda charging a NATO and Western buildup in Somalia directed against Ethiopia. The propaganda even borrowed words from foreign press reports concerning Soviet supplies of war materiel to Ethiopia, by claiming a "massive airlift" of military supplies to Somalia from neighboring and western countries, which were charged with plotting violence against the revolutionary regime in Addis Ababa.

#### HISTORIC PATTERN OF DECEPTION

This Cuban deception in Ethiopia follows a pattern of deception discernible in past Cuban foreign military adventures -- including the Cuban role in Angola. After a campaign of subterfuge and half truths, Castro finally admitted the presence of an expeditionary force in Angola only in January 1976 -- nine months after the first contingents

arrived. By then Cuba had placed 9,500 combat troops in Angola, with 1,000 more enroute.

Just as in Ethiopia, Cuba attempted to conceal its military intervention in Angola. Some of the first Cuban arrivals posed as Portuguese; others termed themselves "volunteers," in mid-1976, Castro promised the Prime Minister of Sweden he would withdraw Cuban troops on a systematic basis, a pledge which has proven to be only a propaganda maneuver. Some troop rotation ensued, but there are thousands more Cubans in Angola today -- a total of about 25,000. Including over 20,000 troops -- than there were during the Civil War.

There are other earlier examples of Cuba's manipulation of the truth. Not until after his death did Cuba admit that the Guevara had attempted to incite region-wide revolution from a guerrilla front in Bolivia. And only then did Havana also admit that Geuvara had earlier tried to do likewise in the Congo (now Zaire), despite Cuba's intensive training programs and other assistance over the years for rural and urban guerrilla fighters and terrorists, Havana denies any connections with terrorist groups, yet the international terrorist, Carlos, was trained in Cuba and three Cuban intelligence officers were ordered out of France after two French security agents were killed in a shootout with Carlos.

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TALKING POINTS - The Cuban Presence in Angola

I. The President has been fully briefed concerning Cuban involvement in training and planning the recent incursion by Katangan elements into Shaba. The evidence is persuasive and the President is satisfied that Cubans bear a responsibility for what occurred.

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II. In view of his past record, Castro's statements should not be accepted as credible. For example, Castro repeatedly falsified about his support for guerrillas in Latin America. Regarding Angola, he concealed the deployment of Cuban combat troops in October 1975. In 1977, Castro denied training Katangans to fight in Zaire, when in fact he had been doing so for months previously. Additionally, Castro is motivated today to conceal his responsibility for supporting the violation of an existing national boundary.

III. It is impossible to believe that the Cubans had no part in the plans or training or foreknowledge of the attack in a country in which they play a major role in civilian administration and a dominant role in internal security. There are some 5,000 Cuban civilians and at least 19,000 Cuban military -- advisors and combat troops -- in the country as a whole. The Cubans have a major headquarters and facilities at Saurimo, Angola, which is the center of the area where the Katangans have been billeted and trained.

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