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Cuba's Renewed Support for Violence
in Latin America

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Cuban Armed Forces and the Soviet Military Presence

Summary

Cuba has by far the most formidable military force in the Caribbean basin with the single exception of the U.S. In terms of size, its forces are larger than any other Central American or Caribbean nation. In all of Latin America, only Brazil--a country with a population 12 times that of Cuba--has a larger military establishment.

Since 1975 the USSR has undertaken a major modernization of all branches of the Cuban military, transforming it from a home defense force into the best equipped military establishment in Latin America with significant offensive capabilities. Equipment delivered to the ground forces has enhanced both its mobility and firepower. The Air Force now is probably the best equipped in Latin America, possessing some 200 Soviet-supplied MiG jet fighters. The Navy has acquired two torpedo attack submarines and a Koni-class frigate, all of which will be able to sustain operations throughout the Caribbean basin and will enable Castro to project power far beyond Cuba's shores, posing a threat to shipping in the Caribbean as well as intimidating and threatening neighbors.

As a result of this modernization program and Cuba's combat experience in Angola and Ethiopia, the Castro regime possesses a significant regional intervention capability. Although this capability is modest by Western standards, it is impressive in the Central American or Caribbean context. This capability would be most effectively employed in aiding an ally in the region against an external invasion or in the suppression of internal conflict. Cuba does not have the wherewithal to conduct an outright invasion of another nation in the region except for the Caribbean micro-states. Havana does not have sufficient amphibious assault landing craft, or aircraft capable of transporting heavy equipment.

Cuba has on occasion demonstrated some recklessness in the utilization of its capabilities. The most recent example occurred 10 May 1980 when Cuban air force fighters attacked and sank a clearly marked

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Bahamian patrol vessel in broad daylight inside Bahamian territorial waters, killing four crewmembers. The following day, Cuban MiGs buzzed a populated island belonging to the Bahamas for a prolonged period. In addition, a Cuban helicopter carrying Cuban troops landed on the same island in pursuit of the surviving crewmembers of the sunken patrol vessel.

The Cuban Military

Since the mid-1970s, when Cuba intervened in Angola on a large scale and the Soviet Union began to modernize Cuba's armed forces with new equipment, the Cuban military has changed from a predominantly home defense force into a formidable power relative to its Latin American neighbors. The list of Soviet arms delivered to Castro since 1960 exceeds 2 billion dollars. Since Cuba's involvement in Angola in 1975, the monetary value of annual deliveries has been more than double the value of annual deliveries made during the preceding 15 years. Thus far this year, the Soviets have provided Cuba almost 60,000 tons of military equipment, the highest figure since 1962. (250,000 tons - chart 1). Cuba's armed forces currently total more than 225,000 personnel--200,000 Army, 15,000 Air Force and Air Defense, and 10,000 Navy--including both those on active-duty either in Cuba or overseas and those belonging to the ready reserves, subject to immediate mobilization. With a population of just under ten million, Cuba has by far the largest military force in the Caribbean basin and the second largest in Latin America after Brazil, with a population of over 120 million. More than 2 percent of the Cuban population belongs to the active-duty military and ready reserves, compared with an average of under 0.4 percent in other countries in the Caribbean basin. (See charts 2 and 3). In addition, Cuba's large paramilitary organizations and reserves would be available to support the military internally.

The quantitative and qualitative upgrading of the armed forces since the mid-1970s and their recent combat experience in Angola and Ethiopia give the Cuban military definite advantages over its neighbors in Latin America. Cuba is the only country in Latin

America to have undertaken a major military effort abroad since World War II, giving both Army and Air Force personnel recent combat experience in operating many of the weapons currently in their inventories. We believe that about 70% of Cuban troops that have served in Africa have been reservists who were called to active duty. Cuban reservists generally spend about 45 days per year on active duty and can be readily integrated into the armed forces. Cuba has effectively used its civilian enterprises, such as Cubana airlines and the merchant marine, to support military operations. Havana has dedicated significant resources to modernize and professionalize its armed forces and to maintain a well prepared reserve. Cuba has demonstrated that when supported by the Soviet Union, logistically, it has both the capacity and the will to deploy large numbers of troops and can be expected to do so whenever the Castro government believes it to be in Cuba's best interest.

Equipment delivered to the Army since the mid-1970s, such as T-62 tanks, BMP infantry combat vehicles, BM-21 multiple rocket launchers, and ZSU-23-4 self-propelled antiaircraft guns, have begun to alleviate earlier deficiencies in Cuba's mechanized capability, as well as providing increased firepower. In addition to its qualitative advantage, the Cuban Army has an overwhelming numerical superiority in weapons holdings over all of its Latin American neighbors.

The Cuban Air Force is one of the largest and probably the best equipped in all Latin America. Its inventory includes some 200 Soviet-supplied MiG jet fighters, with one squadron of MiG-23s. The MiG-23s have the capability to reach portions of the South-eastern United States, most of Central America and most Caribbean nations (Chart 4). Cuban-based aircraft, however, would be capable of conducting only limited air engagements in Central America on a round-trip mission. Cuba's fighter aircraft could be effectively employed in either a ground-attack or air superiority role, however, if based on Central American soil-- a feasible option given the closeness of Cuban/Nicaraguan relations. A similar arrangement would be possible in Grenada once Cuban workers complete the construction

of an airfield with a 9,000 foot runway there. If the MiG-23s were to stage from Nicaragua and Grenada, their combat radii would be expanded to include all of Central America including the Panama Canal, the Caribbean and the northern tier of South America.

The Cuban Navy with a strength of 11,500 personnel remains essentially a defensive force, although its two recently acquired FOXTROT-class submarines and single Koni-class frigate, once fully integrated into the operational force, will be able to sustain operations throughout the Caribbean basin, the Gulf of Mexico, and, to a limited extent, the Atlantic. The primary vessels for carrying out the Navy's defensive missions are Osa and Komar class missile attack boats whose range can extend well into the Caribbean.¹ They are armed with SS-N-2 STYX ship-to-ship missiles, (See Chart 5). Although not equipped for sustained operations away from its main bases, the Cuban Navy could conduct limited interdiction missions in the Caribbean. In addition to the Navy, Cuba has a 3,000 man coast guard organization.

Cuba's capability to intervene in a hostile environment using its indigenous transport assets is modest by Western standards, but considerably more formidable in the Central American context. As in 1975, when a single battalion of Cuban airborne troops airlifted to Luanda at a critical moment played a role far out of proportion to its size, a battle-tested Cuban force interjected quickly into a combat situation in Central America could prove a decisive factor. Moreover, since the Angolan experience, Havana has increased the training of airborne-qualified forces, which now consist of a Special Troops contingent and a Landing and Assault Brigade, and has improved its air and sea lift capacity as well.

¹The Koni has an operating range of 2,000 nautical miles without refueling or replenishment. The FOXTROTS have a range of 9,000 nautical miles at seven knots per year and a patrol duration of 70 days.

Cuba continues to lack sufficient transport aircraft capable of supporting long-range, large-scale troop movements and would have to turn to the Soviets to achieve such a capability. Cuba does not have the capability to transport large numbers of troops and supplies within the Caribbean region, however, using its military and civilian air assets. Since 1975, the Cuban commercial air fleet has acquired seven IL-62 long-range jet transport aircraft and some TU-154 medium-to-long range transport aircraft, each capable of carrying 150 to 200 combat-equipped troops. (By comparison, Cuba conducted the airlift to Luanda in 1975 with only five medium-range aircraft, each having a maximum capacity of 100 troops). Cuba has recently acquired is the AN-26 short-range transport. The most effective use of this aircraft from Cuban bases would be in transporting troops or supplies to a friendly country, but it is capable, with full payload, of airdropping troops on portions of Florida and Belize, of Jamaica, Haiti and the Bahamas, and most of the Dominican Republic (See Chart 6). If based in Nicaragua, however, the AN-26s would be capable of reaching virtually all of Central America in either role. In addition, more than 30 smaller military and civilian transport planes, including the veterans of the Angola conflict, could also be used to fly troops and munitions to Central America.

Cuba's ability to mount an amphibious assault is constrained both by the small number of naval infantry personnel and by a dearth of suitable landing craft. Cuba would, however, be capable of transporting significant numbers of troops and supplies--using ships belonging to the merchant marine and navy--to ports secured by friendly forces if the US did not become involved.

Cuba's Paramilitary Organizations

Cuba's several paramilitary organizations involve hundreds of thousands of civilian personnel during peacetime and would be available to support the military during times of crisis. Although these groups would be far less combat-capable than any segment of the military, they do provide at least rudimentary military

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training and discipline to the civilian population. The primary orientation of these paramilitary organizations is internal security and local defense. (See Chart 7, which provides the mission, strength and subordination of each group).

The extent to which the military is involved in the civilian sector is further reflected by its activity within the economic sphere. In addition to uniformed personnel, The Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (MINFAR) has over 30,000 civilian workers employed in factories and repair facilities in Cuba and in building roads and airfields in Africa. Many are employees of MINFAR's Central Directorate for Housing and Construction which, in addition to military construction, builds housing and apartment complexes for military and civilian personnel of both MINFAR and the Ministry of the Interior. The Youth Labor Army also contributes to economic development by engaging in activities such as agricultural, industrial, construction, and transportation projects.

The Soviet Presence

The Soviet military presence in Cuba includes a ground forces brigade, a military advisory group, and an intelligence collection facility. There are 6,000-8,000 Soviet civilian advisors and 2,000 Soviet military advisors in Cuba. Military deployments to Cuba consist of periodic visits by naval reconnaissance aircraft and task groups.

The ground force brigade, located near Havana, has approximately 2,600 men and consists of one tank and three motorized rifle battalions, plus various combat and service support units. Soviet ground forces have been present in Cuba since shortly before the missile crisis in 1962.

Likely missions of the brigade include providing a small symbolic Soviet commitment to Castro, implying a readiness to defend Cuba and his regime, and probably providing security for Soviet personnel and key Soviet facilities, particularly for the Soviets' large intelligence collection facility. The brigade almost certainly

would not have a role as an intervention force, although it is capable of tactical defense and offensive operations in Cuba. Unlike such units as airborne divisions, the brigade is not structured for rapid deployment, and no transport aircraft capable of carrying its armed vehicles and heavy equipment are stationed in Cuba.

The Soviet Military Advisory Group on Cuba consists of at least 2,000 military personnel, who provide technical advice in support of weapons such as the MiGs, surface-to-air missiles, and the FOXTROT submarines; some are also attached to Cuban ground units. The Soviets' intelligence collection facility--their largest outside USSR--monitors US military and civilian communications.

Since the naval ship visit program began in 1969, 21 Soviet naval task groups have deployed to the Caribbean, virtually all of them visiting Cuban ports. The most recent visit occurred in April and May 1981 and included the first by a Kara-class cruiser--the largest Soviet combatant to have ever visited the island. Soviet intelligence collection ships operating off the US East Coast regularly call at Cuba during their patrols, as do hydrographic research and space support ships operating in the region. In addition, the Soviet Navy keeps a salvage and rescue ship in Havana for emergency operations.

Soviet TU-95 Bear D reconnaissance aircraft have deployed periodically to Cuba since 1970. Typically, these aircraft are deployed in pairs and stay in Cuba for several weeks. The flights have historically been associated with US, NATO, and Soviet exercises; the transit of US ships to and from the Mediterranean; and periods of increased international tension, such as the Angolan and Ethiopian wars.

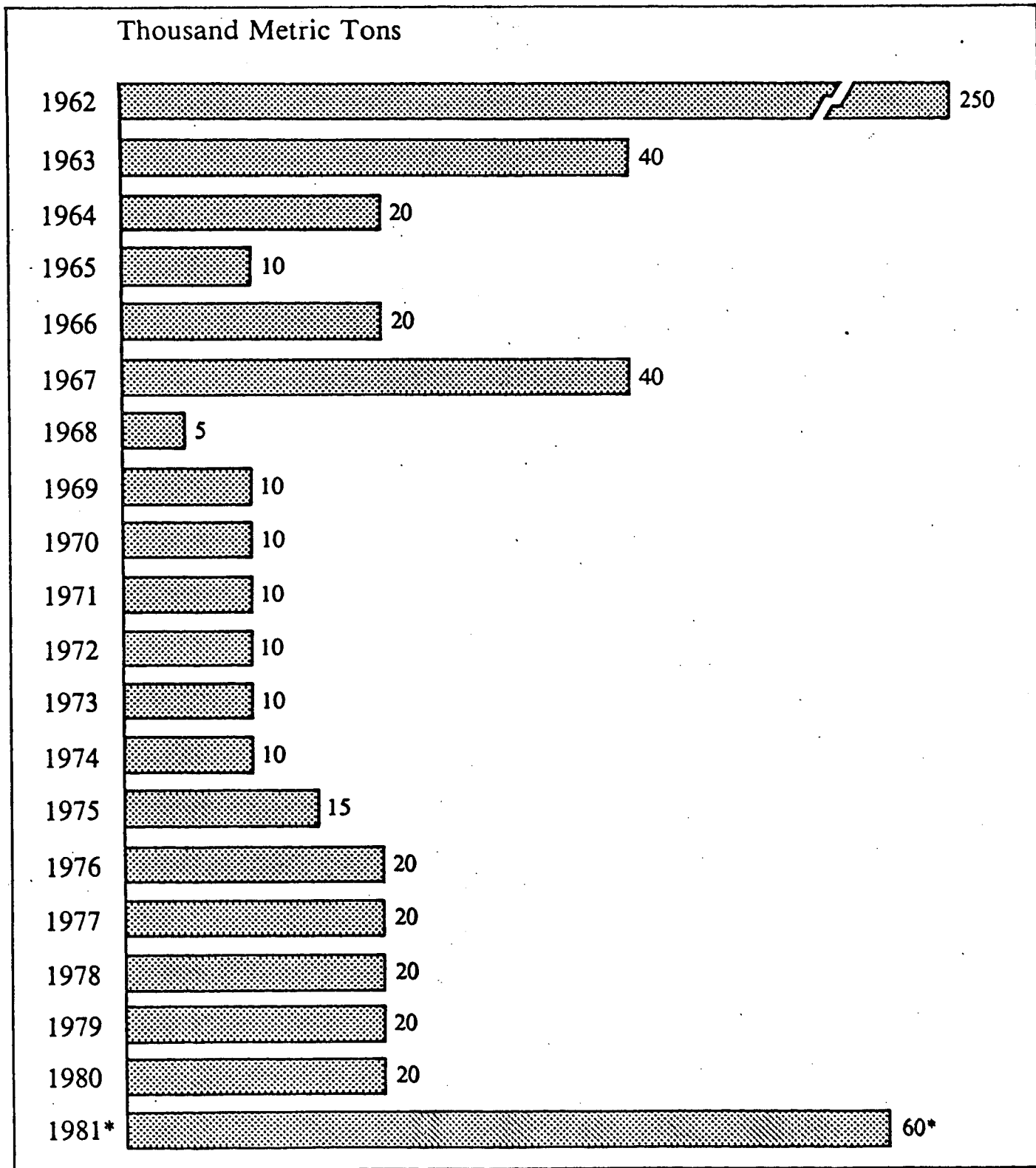
The Soviets apparently sent a significant number of pilots to augment Cuba's air defense during two periods--early 1976 and during 1978--when Cuban pilots were sent to Angola and Ethiopia. The Soviet pilots filled in for Cuban pilots deployed abroad, and provided the Cuban Air Force with enough personnel to perform

its primary mission of air defense of the island.

Threat to Hemispheric Strategic Defense

Cuban military ties with the Soviet Union, the Soviet presence in Cuba including the presence of a large Soviet telecommunications facility, and the periodic Soviet air and naval presence pose significant military threats to US security interest in the hemisphere. Because of Cuba's proximity to vital sea lanes of communication, the Soviets or Cubans, in wartime, could attempt to interdict the movement of troops, supplies and raw materials in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean sea and could strike key facilities in the area.

USSR: Seaborne Military Deliveries to Cuba



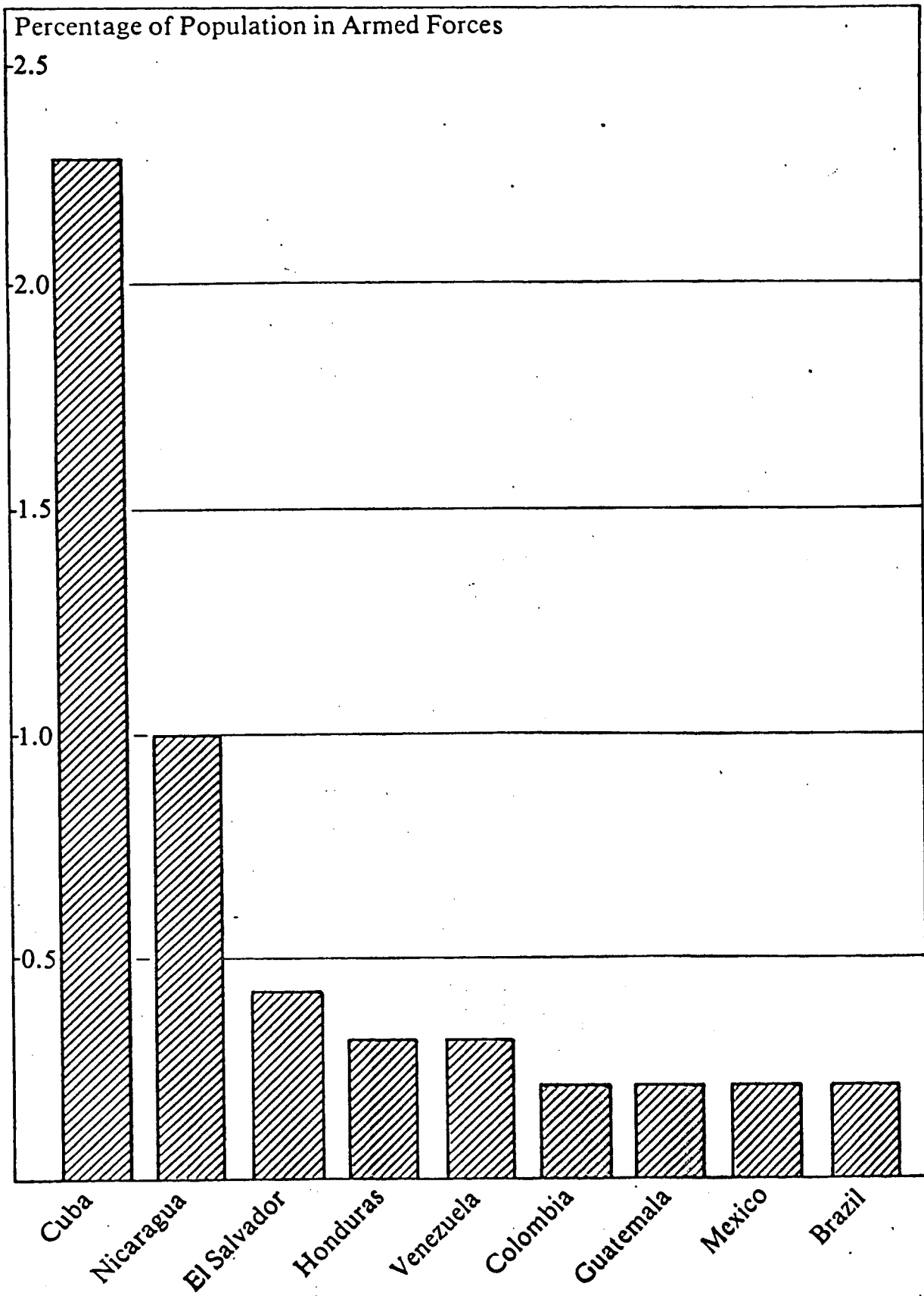
*January—September

For Selected Latin American Countries*

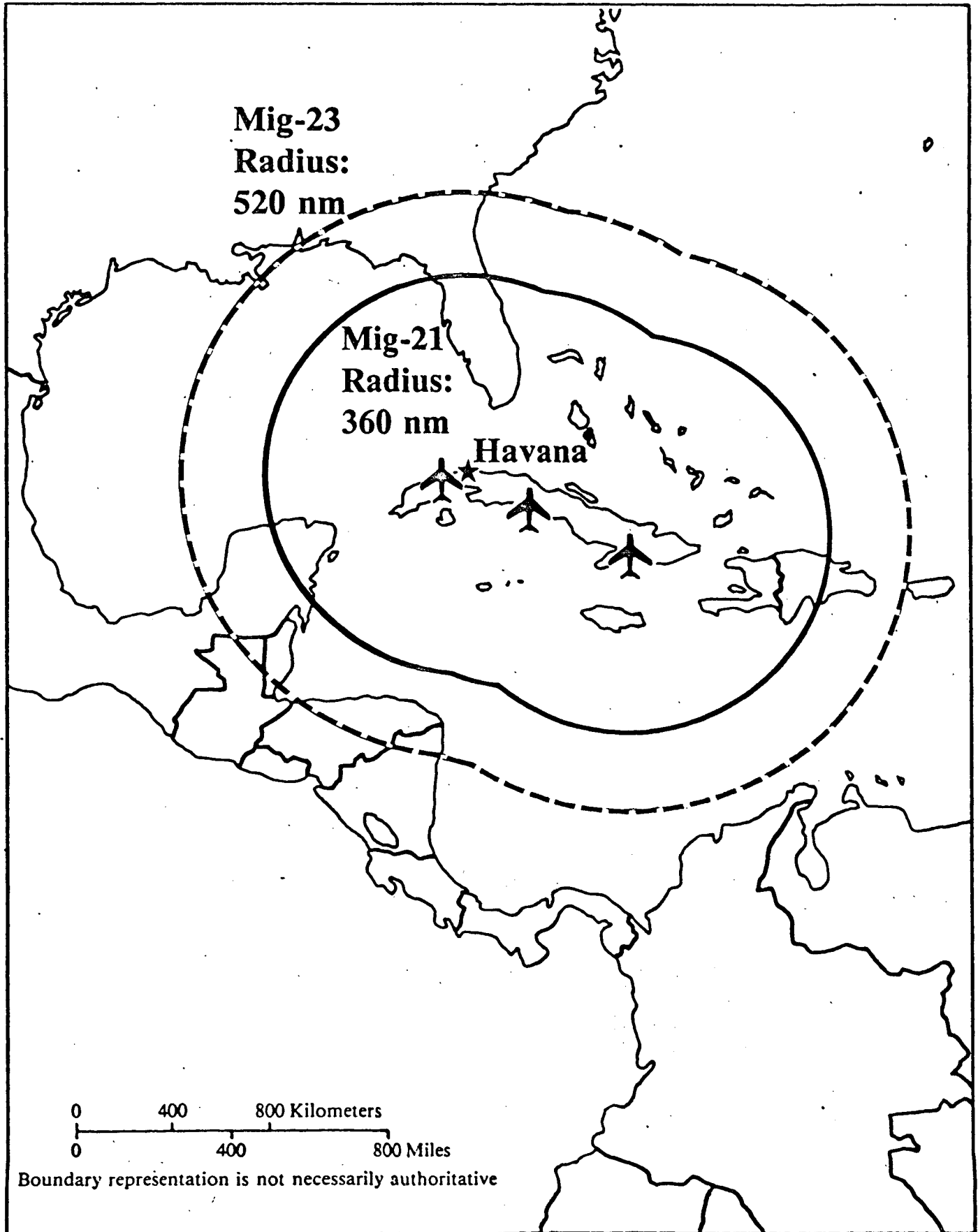
Country	Population (in thousands)	People in Military (in thousands)	Percentage of Population in Military
Cuba	9,900	226.5	2.29
Argentina	27,000	139.5	.51
Bolivia	5,285	23.8	.45
Brazil	126,000	272.55	.22
Chile	11,200	88.0	.79
Colombia	26,520	65.8	.25
Ecuador	7,900	38.8	.49
Paraguay	3,300	16.0	.48
Peru	17,400	95.5	.55
Uruguay	3,300	30.0	.91
Venezuela	15,400	40.5	.26
Dominican Rep.	5,620	19.0	.34
Guatemala	6,950	14.9	.21
Honduras	3,700	11.3	.31
Mexico	71,500	107.0	.15


* Data is from *Military Balance, 1980-81*.

Relative Military Strength of Selected Caribbean Basin Nations

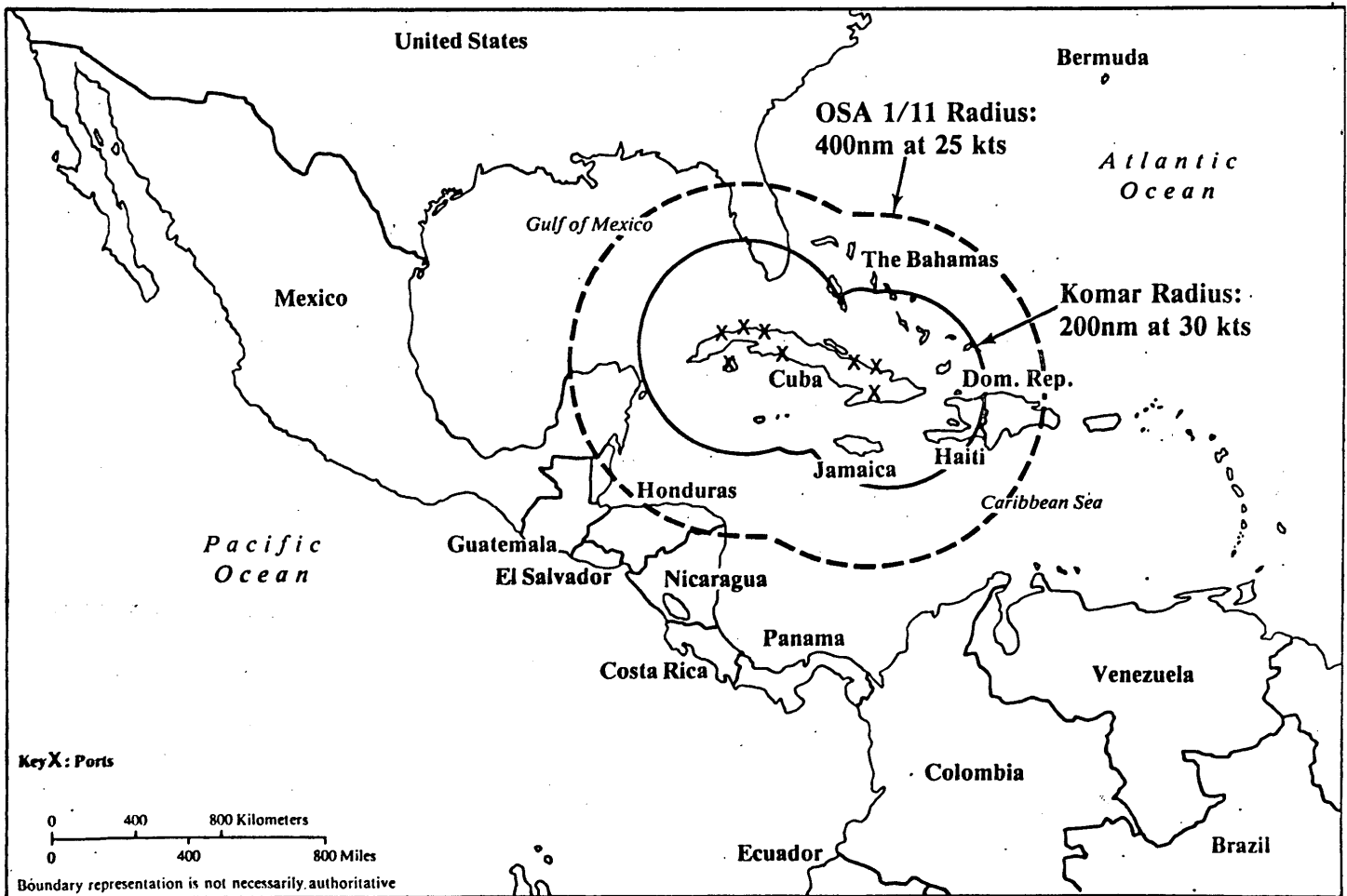


Optimum High-Altitude Combat Radius of Cuban Mig-21s and Mig-23s



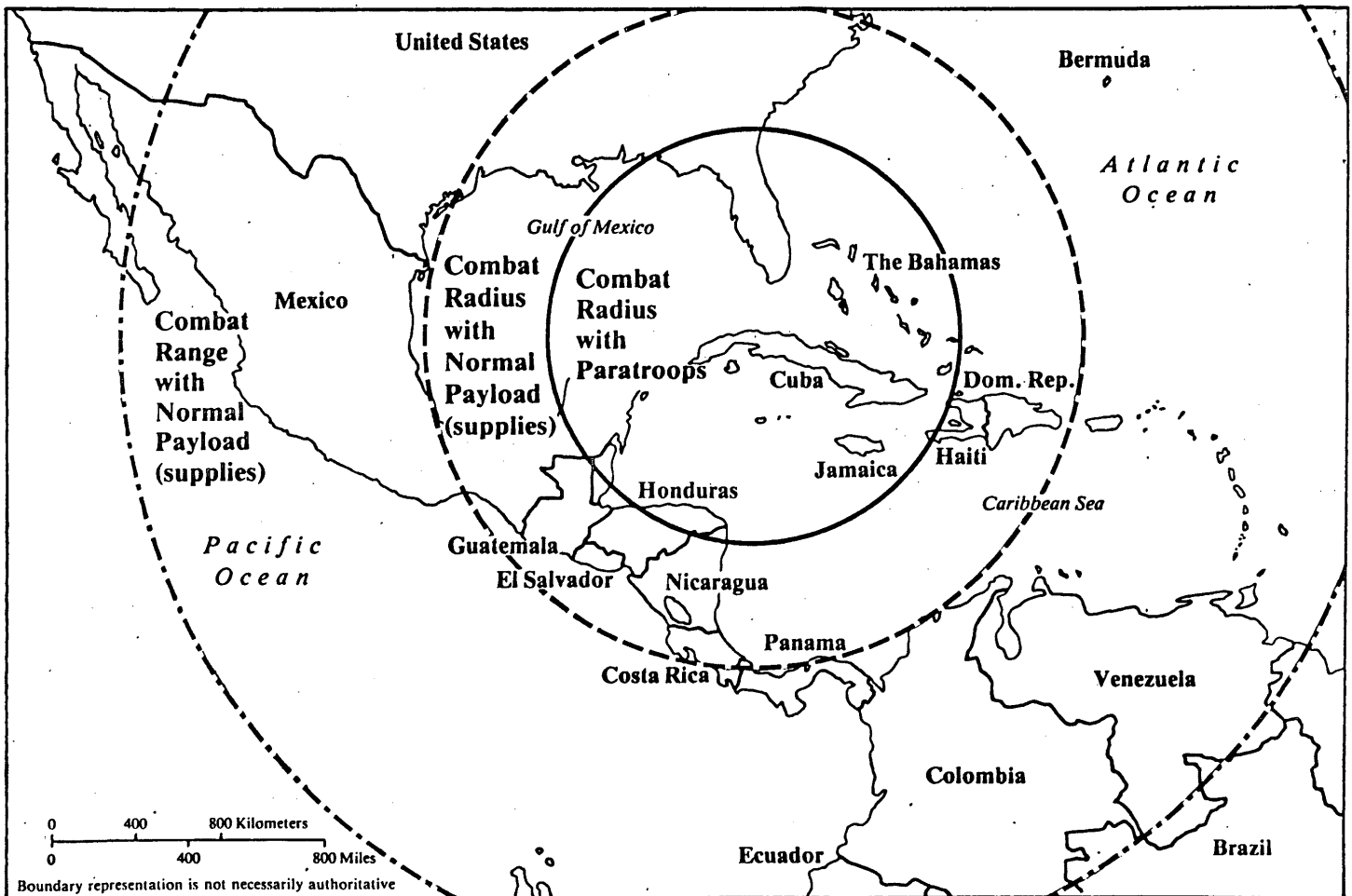
Key:  Mig-21/23 Base

Operating Areas of OSA- and Komar-class Guided Missile Patrol Boats from Cuban Ports*



*Operating areas shown are based on each craft's normal tactical speed, and could be up to 50 percent less if high-speed operations were being conducted. The maximum speed of the OSA is 36 knots and that of the Komar 40 knots.

Range and Radius of AN-26s from Havana



*Combat radius is the outbound distance attainable on a flight carrying payload to a destination, with sufficient onboard fuel reserves to return to point of origin. For a paratroop mission, stated radius allows for sufficient time-on-station to airdrop paratroops. For the delivery of supplies, stated radius allows for landing and take-off at destination, and assumes that entire payload is delivered before return. Combat range is the total distance attainable on a one-way flight carrying payload the entire distance.

Strength and Missions of Cuba's Paramilitary Organizations

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Subordination</u>	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Mission</u>
Youth Labor Army	MINFAR (Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces)	100,000	Civic action force, receiving little military training in peacetime. One wartime mission would be to operate and protect the railroads.
Civil Defense Force	MINFAR	100,000	"Military" units would assist in providing local defense; non-military would provide first aid and disaster relief.
Territorial Troop Militia	MINFAR	More than 500,000 at present; still forming	Regional security/local defense.
Border Guard Troops	MININT (Ministry of the Interior)	3,000 full-time, plus unknown number of civilian auxiliaries	Help guard Cuban coastline.
National Revolu- tionary Police	MININT	10,000, plus 52,000 civilian auxiliaries	Responsible for public order in peacetime; could help provide rear area security during wartime.
Department of State Security	MININT	10,000-15,000	Counterintelligence and prevention of counter- revolutionary activities.

CHART 8

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<u>Nation</u>	<u>Total Number Estimated</u>	
	<u>Military</u>	<u>Civilian</u>
Ethiopia	11,000-13,000	approx 600
Angola	15,000-19,000	approx 6,000
Nicaragua	(1,000)	5,000 total (4,000)
Grenada	(30)	approx 300