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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

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EXECUTIVE BRIEF

MIG-29s In Cuba

- o Cuba has received at least seven MIG-29 aircraft and will probably fill out the squadron (12 fighters) this year. A regiment (36 fighters) is unlikely to arrive before the latter portion of the next Cuban-Soviet five-year-plan, 1991-1995.
- o A squadron of MIG-29s--probably combat-ready in mid-1991--would modestly improve Cuba's defensive capabilities and its capacity to threaten US reconnaissance flights.
- o A regiment of MIG-29s, by virtue principally of increased numbers, would improve Havana's island-wide defense. The prospective transfer to Cuba of the regiment of MIG-23s presently in Angola would, however, also strengthen Cuban defenses.
- o The Soviets likely view the deliveries as a technical rather than political issue. They probably regard US protests as similar to past complaints and unlikely to affect superpower relations.

This Executive Brief, requested by the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, was prepared by the National Intelligence Officer for Latin America. It was coordinated within the Intelligence Community at the working level. Information as of 22 February 1990 has been included in this assessment.

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Current and Projected Deliveries

The arrival of two MIG-29 trainers in November 1989 was the initial delivery of this fighter aircraft to Cuba. At least five more MIG-29s were delivered by a Soviet ship on 13 February. There are no indications that further deliveries are underway or likely in the next few weeks.

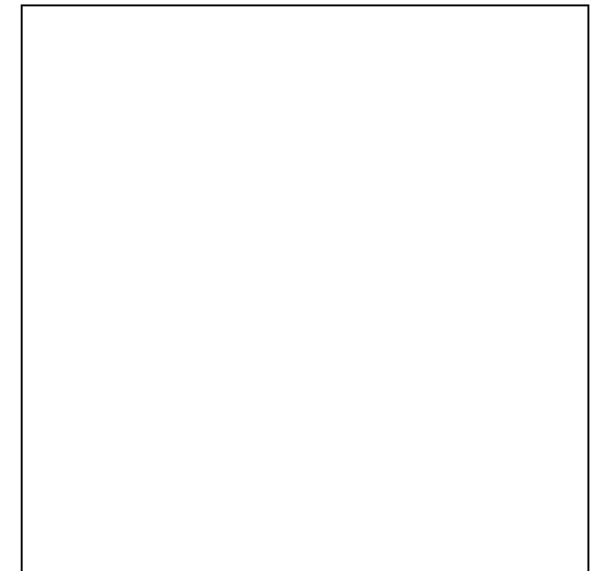
We expect, however, that Cuba will receive at least seven additional MIG-29s--enough to constitute a full squadron--probably this year. []

[] the Soviets agreed in 1986 to provide one squadron (two trainers and 12 fighters) in response to a Cuban request for a full regiment (three squadrons). Moscow will probably deliver the remaining aircraft to fill out the squadron some time this year in order to fulfill its contractual obligation under the current five year military assistance plan--due to be completed at the end of 1990.

We have no direct evidence that the Cubans are to receive more than a squadron any time soon. There is, in fact, some circumstantial evidence to suggest that the Cubans will not receive additional squadrons of MIG-29s over the next year or so:

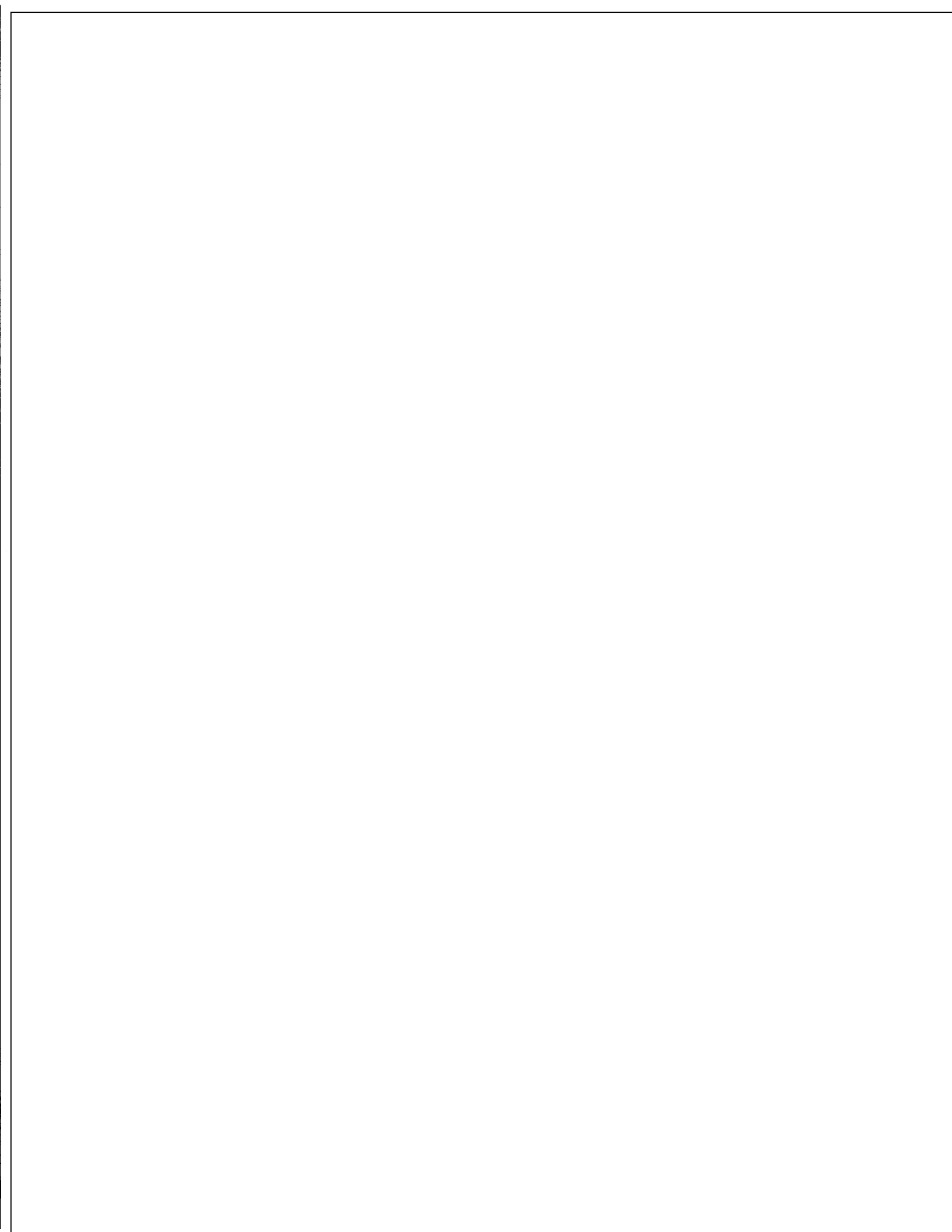
- o In 1978, the Soviets initially supplied a squadron of MIG-23s to Cuba while subsequent deliveries--two additional squadrons--were spread out over a period of six years (1981-86).
- o The Soviets export the MIG-29 under hard currency or barter arrangements to other countries such as India and Iraq while the Cubans receive the aircraft--as they do all Soviet military aid--for free. The delivery of two additional squadrons would represent a potential opportunity cost of at least \$700 million to the Soviets--a cost they are probably reluctant to bear in the short term. Moreover, the Soviet air force is itself short of MIG-29s.

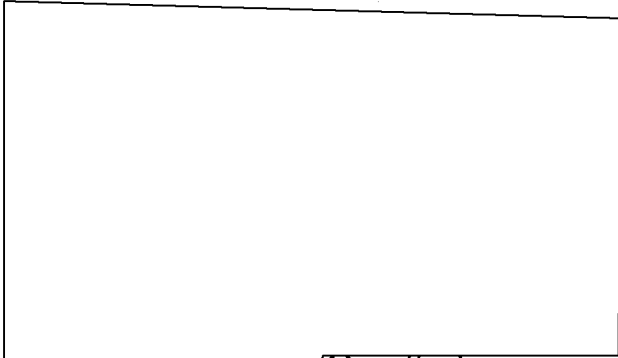
- o We do not believe that the MIG-29s are one-for-one near term replacements for the 38 MIG-23s now in Cuba.¹ Most of the MIG-23s are still in the first stage of their life cycle (5-10 years) and are not in need of immediate replacement. Though the Soviets no longer build the MIG-23, they do produce spare parts for it. We anticipate that the MIG-23s will continue to be refurbished and will remain in active service for years more. The MIG-29s are most likely replacements in the sense that as some MIG-23s eventually reach the end of their useful life, they will be gradually supplanted by MIG-29s. (We note also that at least one squadron of Cuba's MIG-23s are comprised of the ground attack variant, for which the MIG-29--a fighter--is not a likely replacement.)



Thus, Cuba will probably acquire more MIG-29s, but over the longer term--perhaps a regiment during the next five year plan (1991-95).

¹ In late January, Soviet First Deputy Foreign Minister, Bessmertnykh informed our Embassy in Moscow that the Soviet Union did not intend to send more MIG-29s to Cuba than needed to replace the MIG-23s.





Over the longer term, the addition of the Angolan-based MIG-23s to the Cuban inventory would also mean the Soviets could eventually be replacing 77 MIG-23 aircraft and this higher number could argue for some acceleration of the replacement schedule. Cuba's high pilot to plane ratio (2:1) could also accommodate a speedier expansion and upgrade of inventory.

Impact on Cuban Military Capabilities

The MIG-29 surpasses Cuba's MIG-23 interceptor variants and MIG-21s in performance, with improved avionics and greater maneuverability. Its air intercept radar gives it a look-down capability, but it will not be able to take advantage of this with the air-to-air missiles currently in the Cuban inventory (the AA-7 and AA-8). The more advanced AA-10 could be introduced to Cuba--giving Cuban MIG-29s a true look-down/shoot-down capability--but this is not likely to occur before 1992-93, given the example of other recipients of the MIG-29. India, for example, which received the plane in 1986, is still negotiating for the AA-10.

A major disadvantage of the MIG-29 is its relatively small fuel capacity--its range is about the same as that of the MIG-23. (See Chart) It has a limited ability to conduct ground attack missions, and the Cubans will probably not use it in that role.

One squadron of MIG-29s would be a modest improvement to Cuban air defense capabilities in the Havana area, where it will be based. It could provide a small increase in Havana's ability to attack US reconnaissance aircraft. Cuban pilots may

have received some training on the MIG-29, but a full squadron would probably be only marginally proficient by the end of 1990 and would not be combat ready before mid-1991.

A regiment of MIG-29s would provide a significant improvement in Cuba's air defense, principally as a result of the sheer increase in the numbers of Cuba's fighters. The addition of two more squadrons would allow Havana to redeploy other aircraft out of Havana, thereby improving air defense island-wide. The addition of the regiment of Angolan-based MIG-23s, however, would also result in improved island-wide defense over the next two years.

The MIG-29, like the MIG-23 and MIG-21 in Cuban inventory, could be configured to carry nuclear weapons. However, the Soviets have not exported this capability or nuclear weapons, and we do not expect them to do so.

Soviet Calculations

The Soviets are aware of US sensitivities concerning military deliveries to Cuba, but they probably regard the delivery of MIG-29s as a technical issue rather than a political statement--a continuation of the consistent but measured improvements of Cuba's air defense capabilities that the Soviets have made for nearly three decades. Moscow's provision of the aircraft to Havana is consistent with the pattern of previous deliveries to Cuba and with its military shipments to other countries. The Soviets have made the MIG-29 their primary export aircraft and it is possessed by North Korea, India, Iraq, and Syria, among others. Moscow probably assesses Washington's complaints about the delivery as in the same vein as US disgruntlement when the MIG-23s were first delivered--an event that ultimately had no significant impact on superpower relations.

