

September 12, 1983

THE CASTRO DOCTRINE MAKES GAINS

INTRODUCTION

The 7,000 Cuban troops and "advisors" now in Nicaragua dramatize Havana's continuing role in the radical politics of Latin America. Although Cuba has been regarded since the early 1960s as a perennial threat to hemispheric stability, only in the last decade has it acquired the military and financial means to mount a sustained offensive in Latin America and the Caribbean. The subsidization of the Cuban economy by the Soviet Union, the placement of Soviet troops and arms on Cuban soil and the establishment of working contacts with international terrorist organizations such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) have enabled Cuba to pursue ambitions otherwise precluded by its geographic and resource constraints. Driving Cuba is the "Castro Doctrine" which targets at least a dozen Latin American countries for destabilization and revolution.

The current phase of Cuba's offensive focuses on Central America. Essential for Cuba is the consolidation of Sandinistan rule in Nicaragua, a regime which came to power in part because of Cuban support. Havana apparently views Nicaragua as a springboard from which to depose the governments of El Salvador and Honduras. For this, Cuba has been marshalling considerable material and personnel. Havana seems determined to keep the region roiling in instability, to block efforts to implant democracy and to undermine governments sympathetic to the U.S. As such, Cuba poses its greatest threat yet to Central American peace and democracy and to U.S. interests in the region.

BACKGROUND

Cuba As Maverick (1959-1967)

From the start, leaders of Cuba's 1959 Revolution saw themselves as the vanguard of the contagious region-wide revolt

against the established order. The attempted export of revolution followed a "focos" strategy, involving the establishment of armed focal points in key areas from which small bands of guerrillas could initiate a continental revolution.¹

While Fidel Castro committed Cuban resources throughout Latin America, the primary targets for exported revolution were the Dominican Republic, Bolivia and Venezuela.² In June 1959, a guerrilla expedition, organized, armed and trained by Cuba, invaded Santo Domingo hoping to destroy the Trujillo regime. This expedition was soundly defeated by Dominican military forces. In February 1964, the Organization of American States (OAS) charged Cuba with attempting to overthrow the Betancourt government of Venezuela.³ In late 1967, Castro's longtime associate "Che" Guevara led a 100-man expedition force into Bolivia to overthrow the government. The Cuban organized, armed, and trained force was decisively defeated by U.S.-trained Bolivian military forces assisted by local peasants and townsmen. Guevara himself was killed.

Cuban interference prompted the Dominican Republic and Peru to break diplomatic relations with Havana, while Guatemala, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Haiti suspended relations, and El Salvador, Honduras, Venezuela, and others expelled many Cuban envoys for fomenting insurgencies within their countries. In 1962, the OAS itself expelled Cuba for its policy of aggression throughout the region, and its consequent "incompatibility with the purposes of principles of the inter-American system."⁴

Cuba As Conformist (1967-1978)

Failure abroad and increasing economic woes at home forced Castro into a Napoleonic retreat. Domestically, he concentrated on socialist economic development; diplomatically, the focus was on ending Cuba's isolation by establishing government-to-government relations in the region. Many Latin American governments did in fact re-establish relations with Havana.

While Castro was mending fences in this hemisphere, he was stirring up trouble elsewhere, as Moscow's proxy. By using the troops of its client states, as in Angola and Ethiopia, the Soviet

¹ On the early phase of Castroism, see Kevin Devlin. "The Permanent Revolutionism of Fidel Castro," Problems of Communism, January-February, 1968; and Andres Suarez, Cuba: Castroism and Communism, 1959-1966 (The MIT Press, 1967).

² For contemporary accounts of Cuba's activities see for instance "How Communists Plan to Get Latin America," U.S. News and World Report, March 9, 1964; or "Revolution For Export," Time, August 22, 1960.

³ For summary of OAS' findings on this matter see "Cuban Intervention," Americas, April 1964, p. 44.

⁴ Maurice Halperin, The Rise and Decline of Fidel Castro (University of California Press, 1972), p. 121.

Union was able to pretend to abide by the spirit of detente and yet seriously challenge American interests in strategic areas. Soviet aggression was masked by a "foreign legion" of Cuban and Eastern European forces.

Cuba As Active Partner (1978-Present)

Almost immediately, the benefits of this symbiotic relationship became apparent: Use of Cuban troops enabled Moscow to pursue destabilizing foreign policy goals while enjoying the fruits of detente; Soviet material and moral support enabled Cuba to divert its resources to ambitious policy goals against the backdrop of the Soviet shield. In exchange for Soviet support, moreover, Cuba portrayed the Soviet Union as an ally of the Third World in the "North-South conflict." For example, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was described by Castro at the Cuban Communist Party Congress in December 1980 as an act of national liberation.

In exporting revolution, the haphazardness of the Che Guevara's day has been replaced by institutionalized force projection. Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) are operationally controlled by the Ministry of FAR (MINFAR), headed by Fidel Castro's brother Raul. Counterintelligence and covert activity are the purview of the Direccion General de Inteligencia (DGI) and the Departamento de America (DA) of the Central Committee.

The DGI was established in 1961 with Soviet assistance.⁵ After seven years of Soviet-Cuban tensions on the matter of DGI personnel selection, Cuba succumbed to Soviet economic pressure and permitted Moscow to reorganize radically the DGI and to bring it under close KGB control. According to British strategist Brian Crozier, the DGI is the only satellite service known in recent years to have received a Soviet financial subsidy specifically to enable it to extend the range of its activities abroad.

The Departamento de America (DA) was established in 1974 to centralize supervision of covert activities. Drawing on the resources of the military and of the DGI, the DA has successfully set up training camps in Cuba and abroad, networks for the covert transfer of material and personnel, and a highly sophisticated propaganda machine. Agents of the DA populate every Cuban diplomatic mission in Latin America and the Caribbean, and are frequently employed by Cuba's official press agency Prensa Latina, by Cubana Airlines, and by the Cuban Institute of Friendship with People.⁶

⁵ For a more extensive description of the DGI see Brian Crozier "The Soviet's Surrogate Forces," Institute for the Study of Conflict, Conflict Studies, #62, 1980.

⁶ Information provided here on these various organizations is from: "Castro's Long March," Economist Foreign Report, July 11, 1979; and, "Cuba's Renewed Support for Violence in Latin America," op. cit.

Cuba's Current Strategy

Cuba's strategy and tactics for exporting revolution have been transformed extensively in the past decade. The "focos" strategy has given way to a dual emphasis on what the Cubans term "the unity of the opposition," and "the quality of the vanguard." The first means that Cuban aid is extended on the condition that opposition groups in the target country unite in a military-political front; the second, that control is centralized in a cadre ideologically indoctrinated and armed by Cuba and Soviet bloc countries. Underpinning both is the persistent use of terrorism and violence aimed at keeping tension levels high and forcing authoritarian governments into ever more repressive stances, thereby undermining prospects for moderation and gradual reform.

The thrust of this contemporary strategy recalls the methods of the Bolsheviks. Violence and terrorism are employed precisely to prevent what Marxist-Leninists call the "bourgeoisification of the masses"--the forsaking of violence and revolution in favor of institutional reform. Governments are driven to abandon reform programs and adopt more repressive policies just to maintain the status quo. The struggle between the government and its foes is thus made more urgent, immediate and decisive. Marxist-Leninist ideology, meanwhile exaggerates the evils of the regime under attack by contrasting them with ideological utopianism.

In the consequent polarization, moderates and members of the "loyal opposition" are drawn into anti-government fronts or coalitions. In these, the military predominates and in the military group, the Cuban trained and armed cadre is the "vanguard."

Since the goal is revolution not reform, the struggle against the government is intensified, not appeased, by governmental concessions. If, as was the case in Nicaragua (and in tsarist Russia), the government is ousted, the "vanguard of the revolution" then consolidates its rule by unburdening itself of its coalition partners.⁷

The Nicaraguan Model

The 1979 Sandinista victory in Nicaragua and this regime's subsequent support of anti-government guerrillas in El Salvador and Honduras, vindicate Cuba's contemporary strategy. Cuba gave some training and arms and provided safe havens to Nicaraguan guerrilla forces throughout the 1960s and 1970s. As Nicaragua was not then "ripe for revolution" and was in fact a powerful anti-Marxist bastion, Castro's objective was to exploit rather than to force opportunities.

⁷ For further discussion of this communist tactic, see Robert Strausz-Hupe, et al., Protracted Conflict (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 54-58.

In July of 1978, Havana announced the unification of the major guerrilla factions into the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). At that time, according to the U.S. State Department White Paper on communist involvement in El Salvador, a network was established that shipped arms from Cuba and Panama, transshipped them to Costa Rica, then carried them overland to FSLN troops based in northern Costa Rica. This network was controlled by the Cuba's Departamento de America from its center in San Jose. Arms shipments were followed by Cuban advisors, and in early 1979, by the arrival of a Cuban organized, trained and equipped "internationalist brigade."

Prior to the FSLN final offensive in mid-1979, Castro met with its leaders to ensure continued unified action. During that offensive, Cuban advisors from the Department of Special Operations (DOE) accompanied FSLN troops and maintained direct radio contact with Havana.⁸

Since the Sandinista victory, 5,000 to 6,000 Cuban advisors have been dispatched to Nicaragua to help consolidate the "revolucion sin fronteras"--the revolution without frontiers. Among them are 1,800 "social service workers" and more than 1,000 military and security personnel assisting in police and counterinsurgency operations training. Nicaragua is the staging area for Cuba's offensive against El Salvador.

The El Salvador Offensive

Flush from its Nicaraguan victory, Cuba stepped up efforts to implement the unity of the opposition/quality of the vanguard--cum terrorism strategy in neighboring El Salvador. Cementing the unity of El Salvador's leftist groups became particularly essential in late 1979 when a reform-minded civil-military government took power in El Salvador. To prevent more moderate opposition elements from rallying to the reformers, Cuban supported forces intensified violence and terrorism to slow the pace of government reform efforts. A Salvadoran guerrilla, Alejandro Montenegro, captured during a raid on a guerrilla safehouse in Honduras in August of 1982, confirmed that Nicaragua remains Cuba's primary conduit for insurgency weapons and ammunition throughout Central America.⁹

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Guatemala

The promise of Cuban aid on condition of unification led to 1980 to the meeting of Guatemala's four major guerrilla groups:

⁸ "Cuba's Renewed Support for Violence...", op. cit., p. 72.

⁹ Further, Nicaragua's Sandinista regime assists in recruiting and transporting guerrillas for Cuban training programs. According to the U.S. State Department White Paper on El Salvador, one Salvadoran guerrilla who defected to Honduras in September of 1981 reported that he and 12 others went from Nicaragua to Cuba where over 900 Salvadorans were receiving training.

the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP); the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR); the Organization of People in Arms (OPRA); and the dissident faction of the Guatemalan Communist Party (PGT/D). After signing an agreement on cooperation, the Guatemalan representatives journeyed to Cuba where they met with Castro and again agreed to create a military command based in Managua. The resultant organization is called the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG) with a revolutionary directorate called the General Revolutionary Command (CGR).

In February 1982, a group of prominent Guatemalan exiles in Mexico announced the establishment of the Guatemalan Committee for Patriotic Unity (CGUP). Members of this "unified political front" met in Havana the following day to celebrate the event.

Following these major steps towards opposition unification, Cuba increased military supplies and training to Guatemalan guerrilla forces. Throughout 1981, arms were sent to Guatemala from Nicaragua via Honduras. These arms included 50mm mortars, submachine guns, rocket launchers, and small arms. The guerrillas' primary target has been Guatemala's economic infrastructure; crop-burning and activities to destroy the tourism industry are employed to create widespread dissatisfaction through swelling opposition ranks.

Honduras

Here Cuba also has been unifying the major anti-government groups: the Honduran Communist Party (PCH); the Popular Liberation Movement (MPH-Cinchoneros); the Lorenzo Zelaya Commando, the military arm of the Revolutionary People's Front (FRP); the Morazanista National Liberation Front (FMLH). As the prospective vanguard, Cuba seems to prefer the MPH-Cinchoneros--a group known to have close ties to the Salvadoran guerrillas. The indigenous Communist Party (PCH), which eschews violence, is helpful to Cuba only to the extent that it very vocally opposes cooperation between Honduras and the U.S. in combating regional insurgency.

As Honduras is considered not yet "ripe for revolution," its present function is an arms and aid conduit to neighboring areas. In January 1981, Honduran officials uncovered a large cache of arms earmarked for Salvadoran guerrillas. In November of that year, the Honduran government revealed the presence of a guerrilla safehouse outside the city of Tegucigalpa, containing an arsenal of automatic weapons and explosives and documents showing recent attendance in training courses in Cuba. Later that month, two additional safehouses were uncovered in La Ceiba and San Pedro Sula.

Costa Rica

During the Nicaraguan civil war, Costa Rica was covertly used as a conduit for arms shipments to the Sandinistas. According to a Special Legislative Commission established in June 1980 by the

Costa Rican legislature, there have been at least 21 flights carrying war materiel between Cuba and Llano Grande and Juan Santamaria Airports in Costa Rica. The Costa Rican pilots involved in arms transport told that Commission that they frequently had been accompanied by Cubans. The Commission found that over 1,000,000 pounds of arms had been transported to Costa Rica from Cuba and elsewhere during the Sandinistas' war against the Somoza government.

Many of these weapons, including anti-aircraft machine guns, rocket launchers, bazookas and mortars, remained in Costa Rica after the Sandinista victory and were redirected to Salvadoran insurgents. This still active clandestine arms network is overseen by the Cuban Departamento America from its secret operations center in San Jose, and--more recently--from the Cuban consulate itself, according to the State Department.

Terrorism has played a significant role in insurgency operations especially since 1981. In March of that year a steady terrorist offensive began; its first victims were a Costa Rican chauffeur and three Marine security guards from the U.S. Embassy in San Jose.¹⁰ Costa Rican authorities have uncovered links between domestic terrorists and South American groups such as the Argentine Montoneros, the Uruguayan Tupamaros, and Columbia's M-19--all alleged to receive varying degrees of Cuban support and training.

The findings of the Costa Rican government investigation, and the subsequent implication of several high ranking Costa Rican authorities for aiding terrorist groups, led Costa Rica to close its consulate in Havana and to remove the 1977 Costa Rican-Soviet Technical and Economic Cooperation Agreement.

South American Targets:

Argentina

Throughout the 1970s, Cuba provided training and tactical advice to Argentina's two most powerful terrorist groups: the Montoneros and the Peoples' Revolutionary Army (ERP). At one time, Cuba used its Buenos Aires embassy to maintain direct contact with those groups. When the Argentine government decisively suppressed the two groups in 1978, Cuba permitted Montoneros to establish headquarters (and later, intelligence facilities, labor union organizational apparatus, and top command facilities) on Cuban soil. From there, Montoneros groups are sent to infiltrate Argentina and to participate in "internationalist brigades," such as those that fought with the Sandinista guerrillas.

¹⁰ For a full description of this terrorist offensive, see Barbara Crossette "Terrorism in Costa Rica Causing Concern in U.S.," New York Times, March 23, 1982, p. 2.

Argentina is the home base of the Junta de Coordinacion Revolucionaria (JCR) founded in February 1974 to coordinate the activities of guerrilla movements in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Bolivia. The JCR was disbanded in 1977 but reactivated in the summer of 1979 following the Sandinistan victory in Nicaragua. JCR recruits are trained in Cuba near Guanabo, on an estate under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry.

Uruguay

According to Claire Sterling, an internationally recognized expert in terrorism, the leader of Uruguay's Tupamaros terrorist group met with Castro in 1966 to set up arms and training arrangements. Four years later, the Tupamaros launched a campaign of terrorist bombings, kidnapings and assassinations. In 1972 the elected parliament invited military leaders to assume governmental control in an effort to suppress the terrorists.

Following the successful governmental counteroffensive, Tupamaros forces retreated to Cuba, where they were further trained in military and terrorist tactics, and intelligence operations. During the Nicaraguan civil war, Tupamaros participated in the Cuban organized "internationalist brigade" dispatched to aid the Sandinistas.

Chile

In the early 1970s Cuba provided arms and training for Chile's Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR). During the three-year rule of Salvador Allende, Cubans received a total of 1,386 diplomatic visas and 1,294 official visas to travel to Chile. Most of them remained in Chile during this time. At the time of the September 1973 coup that toppled Allende, nearly 1,000 more Cubans were discovered to have entered the country illegally. Thus, more Cubans went to Chile during this period than to any other country in Latin America.

Cuban commitment intensified after the fall of Allende's Marxist regime and further increased in 1979 following the fall of Nicaragua's Somoza government. Intelligence sources report that over 100 Cuban trained MIR terrorists had infiltrated Chile by early 1980 and were responsible for a number of bombings and bank robberies.

Chile's Communist Party (PCCH), led by Luis Corvalan, has abandoned its longstanding policy of seeking revolutionary change by nonviolent means. In 1980, Corvalan met with Castro in Cuba and later announced that the new party line supported the armed struggle to overthrow the Chilean Government. In early 1981, the PCCH signed a unity agreement with various Chilean extremist groups including the MIR, calling for coordinated support for mass resistance and terrorism.

Colombia

Cuban arms and training were provided on a limited and steady basis throughout the 1970s to Colombia's M-19 (April 19 Movement), the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Cuba's special relationship with M-19 emerged following that group's two-month occupation of the Dominican embassy in Bogata in early 1980. While the principal demands of \$50 million and the release of 311 political prisoners were not met, the group was flown to Cuba and given asylum there. Twelve months earlier, M-19 had masterminded a raid on an army arsenal north of Bogata where over 5,000 weapons were seized.

Several of those involved in the Embassy takeover participated in a joint Cuban/M-19 operation to infiltrate Colombia via Panama and create a "people's army." In February 1981, between 100 to 200 Cuban trained and armed M-19 guerrillas unsuccessfully attempted that operation, precipitating Colombia's suspension of relations with Cuba on March 23. Diplomatic relations remain suspended.

CARIBBEAN OPERATIONS¹¹

Grenada

In March 1979, a political coup brought to power the New Jewel Movement (NJM--Joint Endeavour for Welfare, Education and Liberation). Like Nicaragua's FSLN, the NJM was an umbrella opposition group directed by a cadre of hard core Marxists. The new Prime Minister, Maurice Bishop, has adopted a full pro-Soviet line and has sought and received Cuban and Soviet aid.¹²

Grenada's 250-man militia has been disbanded and replaced by a 1,000-man People's Revolutionary Army--the recipient of Cuban arms and training. Cuban and Soviet assistance has been chiefly directed towards the construction of an "International Airport" with an approximately 4,800 foot airstrip in Point Salines on the southern tip of the island. The facility supposedly is designed for tourism. Grenada, however, has fewer than 300 hotel rooms.

Evidence of Grenada's new role in promoting regional insurgency is confirmed by revelations that elements of the Grenadian People's Revolutionary Army armed and supported a group of militant Rastafarians in a December 1979 revolt on nearby Union Island.

¹¹ See Edward Lynch, "Moscow Eyes the Caribbean," Heritage Foundation Background No. 284, August 17, 1983.

¹² On events in Grenada see Richard Buel "Cold War in a Hot Country," National Review, November 14, 1980, and, "The Castroization of Grenada," National Review, September 17, 1982; and, Richard Sim and James Anderson, "The Caribbean Strategic Vacuum," The Institute for the Study of Conflict, Conflict Studies, No. 121, August 1980.

Jamaica¹³

During the 1972 to 1980 rule of Michael Manley's People's National Party, 500 Cuban and Soviet advisers arrived in Jamaica to train the police force and oversee the formation of a communist "internationalist brigade." For several years Cuba stockpiled arms in Jamaica or transshipped them through a front corporation--Moonex International--identified in May 1980 as the recipient of a shipment of 200,000 shotgun shells and .38 caliber pistol ammunition shipped from Miami. After Manley's government was decisively defeated at the polls, new Prime Minister Edward Seaga, broke relations with Cuba in October 1981, after repeatedly warning Havana to stop interfering in Jamaica's internal affairs.¹⁴ Relations have not been reestablished.

Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic, like many of its neighbors, has been a target of Cuba in the wake of the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua. The Dominican Communist Party (PCD) and the Dominican Liberation Party, which both receive funds from the Soviet Union and Cuba, have been pressured to form a united opposition front. According to the U.S. State Department, Cuban intelligence officials such as Omas Cordoba Rivas, chief of the Dominican Republic desk of the Departamento de America, have made frequent visits to that country since early 1980. Soviet and Cuban "seed money" is also responsible for a "scholarship program" that trains some 700 Dominican students at institutes such as Moscow's Patrice Lumumba University.

Guyana

In Guyana, Cuba has worked through the official government and radical opposition forces. The People's National Congress (PNC), led by Forbes Burnham, has permitted as many as 200 Cuban technicians, advisers and medical personnel to be stationed there. At the same time, Cuba was aiding the Working Peoples' Alliance (WPA) designed to foment strikes in the sugar industry, street demonstrations and incidents of violence. So blatant was Cuba's role that five Cuban diplomats were expelled in August 1978. The Cuban threat in Guyana reportedly has led Brazilian President Joao Baptista de Figueiredo to establish air bases close to Surinam and to deploy jungle-trained infantrymen there.¹⁵

¹³ See Jeffrey Gayner, "The Marxist Threat to Jamaica," Heritage Foundation Background No. 9, May 20, 1977.

¹⁴ See Alexander Kruger, "Jamaica After the Elections: Opportunity for Economic Recovery," Heritage Foundation, Background, No. 131, January 26, 1981.

¹⁵ "Brazil Fears Creeping Influence of Cuba," London Times, May 11, 1983, p.7.

CONCLUSION

Since 1959 Cuban foreign policy has been guided by the Castro Doctrine--a hemispheric agenda aimed at the overthrow of Latin America's "old guard" and its replacement by Marxist-Leninist regimes. The obliteration of this old guard requires the disruption of societies to the extent that either a government must become increasingly repressive or lose public confidence in its authority. Either of these alternatives affects the extent to which Washington can, with U.S. public support, continue assistance. Once U.S. backing becomes questionable, it is easier for Cuba to unify opposition groups into political-military fronts which have as their "vanguard" a trusted, Cuban-trained and armed "revolutionary cadre." This was the case in Nicaragua, and threatens to be so in El Salvador.

While change in Latin America is inevitable, it is not inevitable that it be Marxist-Leninist and anti-American. It is primarily Cuban and Soviet bloc involvement that cause the imposition of totalitarian orientations on Latin American political dynamism. U.S. policymakers and the American public should recognize that the triumph of Cuban allies in Latin America will lead to the installation of totalitarian regimes and a permanent state of hostility to the United States.

Rather than simply respond to Soviet and Cuban revolutionary initiatives in Latin America, the U.S. can promote democratic processes in the region. But fledgling democratic governments, such as El Salvador, Honduras and Peru, can only survive if the subversive actions of Cuba are decisively met. Given the largely military character of the Cuban-supported revolutionary movements, no simple program of social reform or economic aid can avert the Marxist threat. The broad, expensive program of Cuban intervention in Latin America must be exposed and then met.

Prepared for The Heritage Foundation
By Eileen Scully
Washington, D.C.