

A stylized graphic of the Cuban flag, showing the green, white, and red stripes and the five-pointed star, is positioned on the left side of the title banner.

THE CUBAN MILITARY AND TRANSITION DYNAMICS

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Executive Summary

The Revolutionary Armed Forces (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias — FAR) has long been the most powerful, influential, and competent official institution in Cuba, and top generals will play crucial roles in all conceivable succession scenarios.

The generals will either dominate a new regime after Fidel Castro dies or is incapacitated, or, like the militaries in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, be the willing accomplices in the demise of Marxist rule. The critical variable is likely to be the degree to which institutional unity — military command and control — is preserved as the transition unfolds. Institutional integrity will be determined by the cohesion, singularity of purpose, professionalism, popular support, and morale of uniformed personnel and by the political and other skills of ranking officers.

Military unity is known to have been put under severe stress only twice in the past, though each time the Castro brothers were able to preserve their authority. Two transition scenarios could severely disrupt the chain of command and thus substantially increase the chances of regime-threatening developments, however. If large scale popular violence were to occur, most observers of the FAR believe that many troop commanders would refuse orders to unleash lethal force against civilians. Conflict among rival military commanders and units could ensue.

Second, if Defense Minister Raul Castro were to die before his brother, the country's three most critical lines of succession would be thrown open simultaneously. Transition planning could then become chaotic, the more so if 76-year-old Fidel Castro were seriously impaired at that time. The most likely succession scenario, though, is that Raul Castro will follow his brother in an orderly, dynastic succession with the support of a united military chain of command. He and the top generals would retain prominent civilians in a number of senior Communist Party and government positions, but the regime fundamentally would be a praetorian one.

The younger Castro's claim to the succession is strong, even apart from his hold on the monopoly of coercive power. His record as the world's longest serving defense minister is impressive, and his position

has been strengthened in recent years as the FAR has become the leading force in the economy, managing a large number of military factories and praetorian enterprises that earn hard currency for the regime.

Still, the prospects for such a smooth transition controlled by the military may be steadily eroding. The FAR's changing roles and missions in all likelihood are undermining its internal unity and discipline. At least four cross-cutting fissures are probably weakening command and control and fractionalizing groups of officers vertically and horizontally.

Tensions from the 1989 Ochoa Affair. The general was apparently the highest ranking Cuban admirer of Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union. His trial and execution, orchestrated by the Castro brothers, stirred enduring animosities.

Generational Stresses. As in a number of Eastern European countries during their post-communist transitions, younger officers may emerge as a powerful reformist force. Young Turk officers, dissatisfied with the grip that loyalist generals have exercised for decades, may demand profound changes in the military and the country.

Dueling Generals. The apparent unity and fraternity in the top ranks in all likelihood is an illusion. Traditional troop commanders and staff officers, including praetorian enterprise managers, have probably been progressively alienated from each other as the FAR's missions have changed and as many officers have become beneficiaries of for-profit activities.

Erosion of Professionalism. The praetorian enterprises are breeding grounds of corruption. Politically favored active duty and retired officers are emerging as a new and comparatively wealthy class that is losing the close contact with the populace that traditionally characterized civil-military relations.

Whatever course the transition takes, at least some FAR leaders and components will survive and perform critical roles after one or both Castros have departed. In that new era, powerful forces will demand that the military and its missions be reshaped radically. Generally, three types of changes will seem appropriate:

Reconfiguration of forces and missions. The FAR and its several large auxiliary forces should be substantially downsized, and some entities should be abolished. Military spending, installations, and weapons inventories should be sharply reduced, and FAR industries and enterprises

should be privatized.

Submission of the military to civilian control in a democratic system.

The appointment of a civilian defense minister will be a critical watershed. The roles of the commander in chief, minister, and chief of staff will have to be sorted out constitutionally. The dearth of civilians versed in military issues and qualified to oversee military spending and priorities will be a daunting problem, as it was in most of Eastern Europe after communism.

The internationalization of the military. The FAR has had few international contacts since the demise of the Soviet Union. Ironically, some of the most vigorous are with the United States, including the high level “fence line” talks at the Guantánamo Naval Base. Future Cuban governments might be able to play constructive peacekeeping roles, joining democratic nations in regional and international security efforts.

The Cuban Military and Transition Dynamics

Introduction

Since its inception in 1959 Fidel Castro's military — the Revolutionary Armed Forces (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias — FAR) — has been the one truly indispensable guarantor of his regime as well as the most powerful, influential, and competent official institution in Cuba. Top FAR generals, led by Raul Castro, the longtime defense minister, will play crucial roles in all conceivable succession scenarios. The generals will either dominate a praetorian successor regime after Fidel Castro dies or is incapacitated, or, like the militaries in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, be the willing accomplices in the demise of Marxism. The critical variable will be the degree to which institutional unity — military command and control — is preserved as the transition unfolds.

With Fidel Castro's encouragement, in recent years, top officers have been conspicuously preparing to manage the transition after his death. At least initially, they will likely have the support of most among the country's official elites and will carry over into the new regime a number of civilians now in top Communist Party and government posts. The latter will help to enhance a praetorian government's domestic and international legitimacy, and some of the civilians will exercise considerable influence, especially in economic and financial matters. However, leaders of no other institution, including the party, various state and government entities, or the mass organizations, could rival the military commanders or impose policies that a united and disciplined uniformed leadership opposed. A number of factors account for the military's preeminence.

- The Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (Ministerio de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias — MINFAR) began to function as the regime's most reliable vanguard organization at least five years before the Communist Party was created in 1965. About two-thirds of the members of the party's original Central Committee were military officers or veterans of the guerrilla

struggle. Today, Raul Castro and five other generals serve on the 23 member Politburo. Unlike in most other communist countries, the party grew out of the armed forces and has never rivaled it in influence.

- Since 1989, when the police, intelligence, and security services of the Ministry of Interior (Ministerio del Interior — MININT) came under FAR control, it has held an absolute monopoly of coercive force on the island. With an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 regular military personnel, thousands more in MININT, and an array of other reserve, auxiliary, and militia forces, the number of Cubans who don uniforms totals well over 2 million.
- Civilians and uniformed personnel alike historically have been proud of the country's record of defensive and offensive military victories, beginning at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 and extending into the late 1980s on distant Third World battlefields. A substantial percentage of the population has performed military service.
- The FAR is more representative of the populace than any other major national institution. For more than four decades it has been the favorite vehicle of poor and rural youths for achieving upward mobility. A number of senior officers are known to have risen from humble origins and, traditionally, most lived modestly with close ties to the people.
- Unlike any other institution on the island, the armed forces have operated for over four decades with a high degree of continuity, fraternity, and institutional integrity. There have been few purges, defections, or internal upheavals like those that have frequently undermined civilian institutions.
- Since the mid-1990s, the FAR has been tasked by Fidel Castro with managing critical sectors of the economy, and as a result, its influence over broad areas of policy has grown dramatically. One knowledgeable source, a former Cuban intelligence and foreign affairs official, has emphasized that it exercises “overwhelming centrality in every single area of policymaking.”¹
- Similarly, a former Soviet official familiar with the FAR observed in the mid-1990s that it had continued after the demise of the Soviet Union to enjoy “a special status in Cuba.”² He said

that the armed forces were “still perceived by the majority of Cubans as the defenders of national interests and a pillar of stability.”

Historically, it is true that no other major government organization enjoyed the respect that the FAR accrued with the Cuban people. However, fundamental changes in its missions, structure, and operations in recent years appear to have undermined its previously positive image.³ In the past, the FAR was the public institution least sullied by corruption and venality, the one most committed to advancement by merit alone, and also the best managed large organization on the island. Yet, for many Cubans — intellectuals, the growing dissident community, other nonconformists, and apolitical youths — respect for the armed forces is tinged with genuine fear based on the universally understood reality that Fidel Castro considers the military his ultimate defense against any opposition or enemies, including Cuban civilians.

Fears that military power might be deployed violently to suppress regime opponents were heightened during the summer of 1994. That August, following major outbreaks of anti-regime rioting in Havana in which one or two policeman were killed and a number of others injured, the government publicly threatened to use whatever force was necessary to maintain order. Raul Castro was quoted widely in the Cuban media warning “the revolution’s enemies” not to “miscalculate.” He said, “We have more than enough cannons and other things to defend this land.”⁴ If his remarks were not specifically directed at Cuban dissidents, his intent was clarified a few days later. In a broadcast speech at the funeral of a policeman, Ulises Rosales del Toro, then the FAR chief of staff, said, “We warn (the) internal fifth column... we will act with firmness.”⁵ Ministry of Interior uniformed and undercover forces were deployed in large numbers in the Havana neighborhoods where the rioting had occurred,⁶ and for the first time in the history of Castro’s revolution, his regular armed forces were directly linked in the public’s eye with the feared security services and the possibility of brutal repression.

Key Characteristics of the FAR

The FAR has always been the most important institution in revolutionary Cuba. It was forged out of Fidel Castro’s victorious guerrilla force

and many of its top officers are veterans of that struggle. They, and the common foot soldiers as well, have been upheld as heroic embodiments of the revolution's most glorified feats, the "civic-soldiers" who are Cuba's "bearers of revolutionary tradition and ideology."⁷ From the earliest days of Castro's regime, civil-military relations have therefore been more seamless than in any of the other Latin American countries. Unlike nearly all of them, in Cuba for more than 43 years, there has never been even a hint of military coup plotting or conspiracy against Castro, who has always managed to portray himself simultaneously as both a civilian and military leader.

Similarly, the FAR differs in critical respects from the militaries in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe. Most of them were feared and distrusted by the populace and often by the civilian Communist Party leadership as well. One expert in communist systems has observed that "the popular legitimacy of those armed forces was limited at best," and they were "daily reminded that that they were not completely trusted."⁸ Popular perceptions were also shaped by the reality that those dependent militaries were the pawns of Soviet policy and strategy. In contrast, during the approximately 30 years that the FAR received massive Soviet material support, its commanders retained complete operational and internal autonomy. Cuba was never a participant in the Warsaw Pact nor strategically subordinated to the General Staff of the Soviet military. The Eastern European forces, in contrast, did not have strategic planning departments, and after communism, they were poorly prepared to carry out independent defense planning or even to devise their own budgets.⁹ In Cuba, in contrast, the Castro brothers alone have planned and executed military strategy and tactics without outside interference.

Perhaps most importantly, unlike some of the Eastern European militaries, the FAR has never been deployed to suppress civilian protesters. Even in Poland, where the army was the most popular institution after the collapse of communism — with approval ratings in excess of 75 percent — Poles remembered how it had been used by communist rulers and their masters in the Kremlin to suppress civilians violently.¹⁰ The Romanian military, the only one to join in revolt against a communist regime, acquired new legitimacy and popularity as a result.¹¹ Because they enjoyed popular support, the Polish and Romanian armed forces were politically influential in the years immediately

following the collapse of communism, whereas the militaries elsewhere in Eastern Europe were not.

Military Command and Control: Key Transition Variable

The FAR's continued preeminence after Fidel Castro's demise will be contingent, however, on the ability of its commanders to maintain unity and discipline in a rapidly evolving and possibly volatile situation. Therefore, the single most critical transition variable, regardless of the specific circumstances associated with Fidel Castro's departure, will be the cohesion and reliability of military command and control. Institutional integrity, in turn, will be determined by the professionalism, popular support, discipline, morale, and singularity of purpose among uniformed personnel as well as by the leadership and political skills of its ranking officers. As long as top officers retain a strong sense of corporate identity, and the chain of command is not seriously disrupted, the military will remain the dominant institution in Cuba after Fidel Castro. There are many reasons to believe that military cohesiveness has been substantially degraded in recent years, however.

Its unity is known to have been put under severe stress only twice in the past. In each instance, the Castro brothers were able to preserve command and control along with their own authority. During the late 1959 trial of popular troop commander Huber Matos, and 30 years later when highly decorated general Arnaldo Ochoa (with others) was tried and executed, the Castro brothers acted decisively to root out looming political challenges to their authority. In both instances, command and control was preserved even as new animosities in the officer corps and elsewhere among governing elites were provoked. Lingering tensions dating from the Ochoa affair probably still affect morale and professionalism. Over the last decade or so, other serious, and likely worsening, fault lines (discussed below) probably also have been undermining institutional integrity.

Furthermore, either of the following two transition scenarios would likely impact calamitously on the FAR. If either were to occur, the chances of widespread instability on the island would greatly increase and possibly lead to the collapse of the communist regime.

Popular Upheaval

In the event that regime-threatening popular violence broke out, many observers of the FAR believe that at least some top commanders — like their counterparts in the Eastern European militaries as the communist regimes there were collapsing — would refuse to use lethal force to restore order.¹² Recalcitrant officers would therefore become willing accomplices in the possible extinction of Fidel Castro’s revolution. His military is not known ever to have opened fire on unarmed civilians, and with the probable exception of some special units, notably Castro’s High Command Reserve, personnel apparently have not been trained to do so.

Most among both the small number of FAR and intelligence officers who have defected and the scholars who have studied the military believe the institution would begin to rupture if regular troops were ordered to use lethal force on a large scale against civilians. One result could be conflict among rival military units and their commanders, and in the worst case, widespread violence provoking calls for an international intervention or peacekeeping mission on the island. The former Cuban intelligence and foreign affairs officer cited above, who is familiar with top military officers, believes that “a policy of all-out repression would be...the breaking point of internal unity, cohesion, and stability, leading directly to civil war.”¹³

Raul Castro Dies Before his Brother

A second development — one that is currently impossible to predict — could also pit top officers against each other. Raul Castro serves concurrently as Cuba’s only four star general, Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, First Vice President of the Council of State, and Second Secretary of the Communist Party. At 71 years of age, he is widely believed to drink excessively and is rumored to suffer from serious health problems. If he were to predecease his brother, all three of the country’s most critical lines of succession would be thrown open simultaneously. The ailing and (as of mid August 2002) 76-year-old Fidel Castro alone would decide how to fill the vacancies. He would be under enormous pressure, however, because he has never considered any successor other than his brother. It is unlikely he would choose the same person to serve as defense minister and also to be next in line in the party and government

successions. Rivals anxious to move up in these lines of succession would contend for his favor and probably clash with each other. Castro could, of course, let one or both of the party and government positions remain vacant, leaving the civilian succession unresolved, but he would need to choose a new defense minister promptly in order to preserve a clear military line of command. That would not be an easy decision either. Raul Castro has no obvious successor among the two star (Division) and three star (Corps) generals, so the choice of the next defense minister would probably be divisive.

A foreign observer who interviewed officials on the island in the mid-1990s about the military found “no unanimity as to who is the most outstanding” general.¹⁴ Corps General Abelardo Colome Ibarra is the longest serving three star and Raul Castro’s closest associate since the late 1950s. He has been Minister of Interior since 1989, but his critics believe the tough and taciturn Colome, while perfectly suited to his present position, would be lacking in the public and political skills necessary to manage the military or command the transition in the absence of the Castro brothers. The promotions of five other generals to three star rank were announced in early 2001: Julio Casas Regueiro, MINFAR First Vice Minister; Alvaro Lopez Miera, Chief of Staff; and the commanders of the three regional armies. Two others are variously reported to hold three star rank as well: Ulises Rosales del Toro, former Chief of Staff and now in charge of the sugar industry; and Rigoberto Garcia Fernandez, head of the Youth Labor Army.

Little is known about these men, and it is thus impossible to estimate which of them might be the most likely to succeed Raul Castro. (Likely tensions and divisions among them are discussed below.) If the younger Castro were to die before his brother, transition planning in all likelihood would become chaotic, all the more so if Fidel Castro’s health and vitality were even further impaired at that time.

The Most Likely Succession Scenario

The seemingly most likely transition scenario, however, is that Raul Castro will follow his brother in an orderly dynastic succession with the support of a united military chain of command. With Fidel Castro’s encouragement, his brother and senior officers long close to him have

been preparing themselves to govern in their own right. The younger Castro's claim to the succession is a strong one, even when considered independent of the military's hold on the monopoly of coercive power on the island. His position as heir is based on two broad types of legitimacy that can be described as "bestowed" and "earned." Both have been enhanced since the mid-1970s.

Raul Castro's bestowed legitimacy derives entirely from his brother's repeated pronouncements about the succession over the years. He was first designated as next in line in January 1959, only weeks after the guerrilla victory, and he has been the sole focus of transition planning ever since. His place in the succession has been reiterated repeatedly during the intervening years and ratified periodically at Communist Party congresses and top conclaves of state power. The line of succession is also codified explicitly in Article 94 of Cuba's constitution.¹⁵ No other pretender has ever been known to challenge Raul Castro's place in the hierarchy or even to be perceived as a potential rival. Additionally, several prominent leaders believed to have vied with him in the past over policy or doctrine lost out when they were removed from their positions by Fidel Castro.

This dynastic succession by fiat has always invited criticism abroad and covertly within Cuba as well. Only monarchies and some of the world's most brutal and closed political systems have arranged their successions this way. From Fidel Castro's point of view, though, the advantages greatly outweigh the disadvantages. With his brother securely behind him in the line of succession, he has not had to worry about maneuverings by other pretenders, has been assured the absolute loyalty of his choice, and can have the maximum hope possible that his life's work will not be totally discarded after his death. During the early years of the revolution, Raul Castro's claim eventually to exercise power in his own right derived almost entirely from his brother's mandate. Gradually, by virtue of his own efforts and accomplishments, the younger Castro has strengthened his stake in a multitude of ways.

He began to "earn" legitimacy in his own right when still in his twenties as the especially effective commander of his own guerrilla column in 1958. The following year he began constructing the armed forces from the rag-tag guerrilla units he and his brother commanded in which the majority of troops were illiterate.¹⁶ A number of his closest collaborators

— the so-called *raulistas* — were his subordinates then and have remained close to him personally and professionally ever since.¹⁷ His influence in the Communist Party was greatly strengthened in the mid-1980s following the Third Communist Party Congress. A number of *raulistas* (including his wife, Vilma Espin) were promoted to the Politburo and Central Committee membership.¹⁸ Most of them continue to exercise substantial influence in the party and government as well as the armed forces, and at least two of Raul Castro's male relatives have risen to high offices. The *raulistas'* power was further enhanced in the aftermath of the 1989 Ochoa affair when MININT was placed under military control.

Raul Castro's claims as heir rest squarely on his impressive record as the world's longest serving defense minister. With few known exceptions, he has earned the respect and loyalty of subordinates and is evidently much more inclined than his brother to delegate authority and maintain genuinely collaborative working relationships with his senior staff. Similarly, he has earned the respect of counterparts with whom he worked closely in former communist and Third World countries. His plodding style, usually reticent manner, mastery of military detail, and organizational and managerial skills have even caused some to refer to him as "the Prussian."¹⁹ A former Soviet official who worked closely with Cuban counterparts has described his "iron will" and "ability to establish and maintain rigid discipline."²⁰

It is consistent with that image that he is also known for his utter lack of charisma, minimal ability to relate to the populace, and reputation for ruthlessness. A survey of more than 1,000 recently arrived Cuban émigrés conducted in 1998 and 1999 found that Raul Castro was the least respected among 12 top Cuban leaders named. Only 2 percent of the respondents cited him as a respected national figure, and he even ranked 1 percentage point below General Colome, his trusted subordinate who heads the Ministry of Interior.²¹ Considerable anecdotal evidence related by travelers to the island and by defectors and refugees generally confirms this view of the younger Castro.²²

Nonetheless, under his command, the FAR has been Cuba's most stable and best managed official institution. It alone has experienced a high degree of leadership continuity, strong morale, and professionalism. Through the decades there have only been a few defections of top offi-

cers²³ and no indications of coup plotting, organized unrest, or junior officer rebellion. The FAR has probably the nearest thing to a true meritocracy among Cuba's revolutionary institutions and organizations. Promotions and assignments in the lower and middle ranks of the officer corps historically have been overwhelmingly based on competence and achievement rather than political merits. Although no doubt there are major exceptions to this rule — and in the highest ranks absolute loyalty to the Castros is essential — no other official institution has been as insulated from Fidel Castro's whims and acknowledged compulsion to micro-manage as the FAR. Raul Castro has been the only senior official, military or civilian, who has been allowed a relatively free hand. Thus, the credit for the FAR's achievements is substantially due to his leadership and management skills. His record is unparalleled by defense chiefs anywhere else in modern Latin America.

The Evolution of Military Missions and Doctrines

Raul Castro's success is also evident in the skill with which he has guided the FAR through a number of major reorganizations and revisions of operating doctrine.²⁴ Originally structured almost exclusively as a homeland defense force, the military was transformed in the 1970s. Cuban officers, Raul Castro included, received extended military training in the Soviet Union, becoming highly proficient in the use of Soviet weapons systems including MIG fighters, submarines, and all manner of sophisticated artillery and other ground and air defense equipment. For most of the 30 years of the Cuban-Soviet relationship Moscow provided the FAR — virtually free of charge — nearly all of its equipment, training, and supplies, worth approximately \$1 billion annually. Long among the most ardently pro-Soviet leaders in the hierarchy, Raul Castro was also Moscow's favorite in Havana.

By the late 1970s, the regular and ready reserve army, navy, and air forces had expanded to between 197,000 and 210,000 personnel; other reservists numbered between 175,000 to 200,000.²⁵ The Youth Labor Army, founded in 1973 to function mostly as an agricultural work force under military command, numbered another 100,000. It continues operating today with an estimated 50,000 to 70,000 personnel, depending on the season.²⁶ In recent years, this force has operated over 100 farms, man-

aged citrus groves (more recently returned to civilian management), and continues to produce large quantities of food.

By the end of the 1970s, uniformed FAR personnel in all categories totaled between 472,000 to 510,000. At its peak, it was the largest military force in Latin America and vastly bigger than those of countries Cuba's size anywhere in the world. Furthermore, man for man during the 1970s and 1980s, it may have been the best and most experienced fighting force of any small nation, with the single exception of Israel.

During the second half of the 1970s, military doctrine evolved from a focus on defense to one that strongly emphasized revolutionary internationalist interventions in Third World nations. Initially without any direct Soviet support, Cuba developed a flimsy transcontinental power projection capability, boldly dispatching tens of thousands of troops to Angola where they performed decisively in consolidating a revolutionary Marxist regime in Luanda. A few years later, Fidel Castro persuaded the Kremlin to join Cuba in a large military intervention in support of the Marxist revolutionary leaders of Ethiopia then at war with neighboring Somalia. Again, the large Cuban expeditionary force played the decisive military role. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Cuban military and security personnel performed strong supporting parts in Nicaragua. Internationalist advisory missions assisted sympathetic regimes and revolutionary groups in a score of other Third World countries. Notable among them was the small West African country of Guinea-Bissau, a Portuguese colony until 1974, where Cuban commandos fought with nationalist insurgents until their victory.²⁷

Military strategy once again dramatically changed in 1980. Internationalism was not abandoned — there were major battles in Angola even in the late 1980s — but no significant new interventions took place. The critical change occurred after Raul Castro was informed by Soviet General Secretary Andropov that the USSR would not protect Cuba in the event of hostilities with the United States. “We cannot fight in Cuba...Are we going to go there and get our face broken?,” Raul Castro was told.²⁸ Havana responded in May 1980 by creating a large new defense force, the Territorial Troop Militia, under the new doctrine of the “War of All the People.” Although the impetus for this shift occurred when Jimmy Carter was still in the White House, Cuban leaders have endeavored to put the onus for their decision on the Reagan administra-

tion. Raul Castro, for example, incorrectly intimated that the Militia were created during “the most virulent period of the Reagan administration.”²⁹

By 1993, the Militia had grown into an irregular, intermittently trained force of 2 million.³⁰ Under the FAR’s command, their mission has been consistent: to provide regular and reserve FAR units with a huge, nationwide capability to revert to guerrilla warfare in the event of major military hostilities. They are meant to provide “tactical and logistical support for the regular military...and to act as a deterrent to potential aggression.”³¹ Personnel are trained and participate in exercises that emphasize guerrilla defense. A key, and highly costly, element of the “War of All the People” strategy was the construction of large, fortified underground tunnel and bunker complexes. A retired American army general visited one in 1995. He wrote that “almost a quarter of Cuba’s annual concrete production and 20,000 man-years of effort were being poured into holes in the ground.”³² This emphasis on military self-sufficiency, personal sacrifice, and mass mobilization to form large, irregular defensive forces has remained the country’s core defense doctrine in the years since the demise of the Soviet Union.

The FAR and Enterprise Perfection

Worsening relations with the USSR also caused Raul Castro to introduce new, Western-inspired management and accounting techniques in Cuba’s numerous military enterprises. In the mid-1980s, the so-called System of Enterprise Perfection (Sistema de Perfeccionamiento Empresarial — SPE) superseded a planning and control system that had been in use since being introduced under Soviet pressure in the 1970s. By 1986, however, when Mikhail Gorbachev was in his second year in office, the old system “was nothing but a corpse,” according to a knowledgeable source who was then a Cuban government official.³³ Its replacement, the SPE, had three main objectives:

- 1) to promote greater self-sufficiency in the FAR and reduce its dependency on the USSR;
 - 2) to increase efficiency and productivity in military factories producing uniforms, small arms, and consumer goods (the Union of Military Enterprises [Union de Empresas Militares — UEM]);
- and

3) to provide a model that could be adopted elsewhere in the economy.

A large military factory was the SPE's pilot project and a team of senior officers close to Raul Castro — led by then Division General Julio Casas Regueiro — was put in charge of the new effort. More than 230 military factories and enterprises were later incorporated into the SPE system.³⁴ Large numbers of officers received training abroad, enterprises adopted new accounting procedures, decentralization and greater competitiveness were encouraged, and some factories were downsized. Cuban officials emphasized at the time that SPE was not the first step toward a capitalist economy but a “management method” intended to make state enterprises more efficient and productive.³⁵

The SPE was not the first time the Castro regime assigned the military a central and exemplary role in economic production. For a decade beginning in the early 1960s, and continuing through the 1970 effort to produce 10 million tons of sugar, FAR personnel had been deployed on a large scale to assist in agricultural labor. Soldiers played a vanguard role in the spirit of the “civic-soldier” with both civilian and military responsibilities. The FAR was subsequently largely withdrawn from those missions, and as the SPE replaced the older Soviet-imposed system, internal FAR dynamics became vastly more complicated. The venerated civic-soldier now had a new companion: the “technocrat soldier.”³⁶ Trained in capitalist business methods in Europe and Latin America to squeeze greater productivity and efficiencies out of the economy, their commitments to the egalitarian social priorities of the revolution have no doubt been compromised.

Both the SPE and the Territorial Troop Militia initiatives helped to soften the blow when the Soviet bloc collapsed and the FAR's budget was slashed by nearly half.³⁷ Neither provided any real insulation from the sudden loss of subsidies, but they probably helped to uphold military unity and bolster a spirit of nationalist separatism during the menacing years of the Gorbachev era. Fidel Castro never had any doubts that *glasnost* and *perestroika* would undermine the stability of the Soviet Union and its Marxist allies. It may have been critical for Cuba that as tensions with Moscow soared, FAR officers had already been persuaded that Castro's assertions of greater independence from the Soviet Union were appropriate. By the mid-1980s, if not earlier, even Raul Castro had

become disenchanted with the Soviets.³⁸

Not surprisingly, yet another major reorganization and adaptation of FAR missions was required after 1990 when nearly all Soviet personnel were withdrawn. Cuba's internationalist mission was all but abandoned, its end marked by the negotiated withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola in 1991. Under the war-footing of the Special Period in Peacetime, military budgets, equipment, and manpower had to be radically reduced. By 1996, core FAR personnel had been cut by about 100,000,³⁹ and troop strength has declined further since. Most military capabilities, especially air and naval, were seriously degraded. The retired American army general who visited Cuba in 1995 observed, for example, that "it is doubtful that more than 20 percent of Cuba's 150 combat aircraft" were operational.⁴⁰ He was nevertheless impressed with the high morale of the military personnel he met, although he emphasizes that he observed no combat units.

The FAR's Praetorian Enterprises

Already disenthralled with the Soviet Union, Raul Castro appears to have been traumatized following the collapse of the Eastern European communist regimes and the events in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989. Those transforming developments provided only deplorable precedents for Cuba and the FAR. They were, in the view of Raul Castro and his generals, experiences that at all costs must be avoided. In Eastern Europe, the militaries did nothing to save the communist regimes, and in Romania, the armed forces actually helped topple the government. The opposite extreme was arguably no better, however. The brutal role China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) played when it slaughtered large numbers of civilian, pro-democracy protesters was anathema to the traditions and doctrines infused in Cuba's military commanders. From the perspective of some at least, the bloody Chinese model must never be duplicated in Cuba, not even if the survival of the regime was at stake.

The events of Tiananmen Square, therefore, became "a haunting ghost for each and every debate within the Cuban political class."⁴¹ Raul Castro reportedly believed any such crisis should be averted by assuaging discontent through improved economic performance.⁴² He reportedly stat-

ed privately that he would not be responsible for “bringing the tanks into the streets” and instead was determined to find peaceful ways for the military to strengthen and secure the revolution during its worsening crisis.⁴³ He wanted the FAR to assume a larger role in the economy by providing most of the sustenance of its own personnel and also by earning desperately needed hard currency for the regime. Dogmatists in the leadership apparently took a hard line position, and at first Fidel Castro either supported them or remained neutral in the ongoing debate. As the issue festered, acute tensions and severe clashes occurred between the Castro brothers, according to at least two sources.⁴⁴

Raul Castro’s worst fears were soon realized. As the economy plunged between 35 and 50 percent following the dissolution of the USSR, the worst civil unrest in the history of Castro’s government erupted. Severe rioting broke out, first in the Havana suburb of Cojimar in July 1993, a few months later in the town of Regla, and finally in downtown Havana in August 1994. These “little Tiananmens” caused Fidel Castro to side with his brother in the debate over how to deal with soaring popular unrest. Castro had personally surveyed the riot scene in Havana and tried to calm the protesters as police and security forces used non-lethal means to contain the outburst. Then, he granted his brother and the FAR considerable authority to begin extending the SPE experiments beyond the military’s own industries.

Western management and free market concepts had been the core elements of the SPE, but, by the early 1990s, Raul Castro was reportedly even more attracted to Chinese models. In particular, it was the PLA’s success in starting and running its own large for-profit enterprises that he believed would also work well in Cuba. In the end, that was acceptable to Fidel Castro, although he remains adamantly opposed to almost everything else in the freewheeling, dynamically entrepreneurial Chinese economic model. Despite the grave risks to military unity and professionalism these new responsibilities posed, Castro let the FAR take them on.

- He realized that by granting officers access to higher incomes and living standards, they would be more likely to remain loyal to him and, later, to have a bigger stake in his brother’s regime.
- Unlike civilian officials, officers are subject to the rigors of military discipline, bureaucratically must answer to the high com-

mand, and have demonstrated their loyalty through years of service and often hardship.

- Retired and retiring officers can be provided with well paying sinecures that help assure their loyalty to the regime while possibly also reducing the costs of government pension payments.
- Castro feared that, if managed by civilians, even limited decentralizing reforms would quickly exceed his ability to control them while also arousing popular expectations for greater change.
- He is loath to permit civilian officials to lead economic reform efforts because they could emerge as focal points for popular and even organized opposition to his regime, and later as rivals to his brother in the succession.⁴⁵
- *Raulista* officers could better be depended on to eschew capitalist values and temptations even as they adapted some market mechanisms in management.
- They would be less likely, he thought, to succumb to corruption or to defect.

At the Fifth Congress of the Communist Party in October 1997, the SPE was sanctified for adoption by the military throughout the economy. Within two years, approximately 900 enterprises (close to 30 percent of the national total) are said to have been implementing SPE programs.⁴⁶ Trusted FAR officers now reportedly manage “the lion’s share” of the economy.⁴⁷

- More than 230 factories and firms are included in the Union of Military Enterprises.
- The sugar industry, historically the principal source of foreign exchange, was turned over to one of Raul Castro’s closest confidantes. General Ulises Rosales del Toro, former FAR chief of staff and longtime Politburo member, was named sugar czar in 1997 as Minister of the Sugar Industry. He is perhaps the highest ranking and most prestigious of the many officers who have studied large private enterprise management in Europe.⁴⁸
- Other ministries — Transport and Ports and Information, Technology, and Communications; both critical for economic

performance — are commanded by top officers.

- The Gaviota group of enterprises has grown into a large, vertically integrated tourism conglomerate that runs hotels, small airlines, helicopter services, tourist shops, and car rental agencies among other businesses. Together, they are said to earn about a quarter of Cuba's tourism income.⁴⁹ Gaviota is run by General Luis Perez Rispide, formerly head of the UEM military-industrial complex.
- Another military-run enterprise, CUBANACAN, operates at least 10 other tourist-oriented activities.
- Two star general and party Central Committee member Rogelio Acevedo is in charge of civil aviation.
- A colonel runs Habaneros, S.A., the enterprise responsible for international marketing of cigars and other tobacco products.
- Active or retired officers also manage a bank, the National Institute of State Reserves, the state electronics monopoly, export processing zones, an entity that grants land concessions and leases, and other key sectors of the economy.

As colonels and generals took over the leadership of these diverse activities, it became clear that yet a third type of officer had emerged: the “entrepreneur-soldier.”⁵⁰ Unlike the classic civic-soldier and the SPE spawned “technocrat-soldier” who applied Western management techniques in military enterprises, entrepreneurial soldiers are involved in for-profit activities that earn hard currency for the regime. They work in privately run state-owned corporations, mixed enterprises, and new ventures that do business with foreign investors and deal with the capitalist world.⁵¹

Reliable data about these officers and the praetorian enterprises they run have not been made available by the Cuban government. One academic study, citing Cuban media reports, indicates that these enterprises account for “89 percent of exports, 59 percent of tourism revenues, 24 percent of productive service income, 60 percent of hard currency wholesale transactions, 66 percent of hard currency retail sales, and employ 20 percent of state workers.”⁵² It is not clear if these figures include the agricultural work of the Youth Labor Army and of regular troops also put to

work in the fields, but whatever the precise figures, there is no doubt that the FAR generates a substantial and apparently growing portion of national economic output.

Raul Castro's deputy, MINFAR First Vice Minister (Corps General and Politburo member) Julio Casas Regueiro heads the large Business Administration Group (Grupo de Administración Empresarial — GAESA), which has overall responsibility for these activities. Major Luis Alberto Rodriguez, a son-in-law of Raul Castro is its executive director.⁵³ They lead a staff of officers, many apparently trained in Europe and Latin America, but if Casas himself studied Western management methods abroad, there is no evidence of it. In any event, his selection to oversee these programs seems to be related more to his political credentials than his management qualifications. He was 22 years old when he joined Raul Castro's guerrilla force in 1958, and he has been a close associate and one of the regime's most powerful *raulistas* for decades.

Like Raul Castro and nearly all of the young men who joined him at that stage, he has been in uniform for more than 43 years. He has had extensive experience as a staff officer, including service beginning in 1969 as a FAR vice minister of defense and as head of the air and air defense forces. He makes few public appearances and rarely is known to meet with foreign visitors in Cuba. Clearly, he enjoys the absolute trust of his mentor, but he apparently is not widely admired, even in the military.

Scarcely any reliable information or analysis about the praetorian enterprises is available. Little is known about how they operate, how qualified and successful officers may really be as managers and technocrats, how they are rewarded for their efforts, or to what extent genuinely free market principles are in effect. Reliable data concerning the number of personnel — civilian as well as military — trained in democratic, free market countries are unavailable. Even rough estimates of the number of active and retired military personnel involved with the enterprises cannot be found.

Are middle and junior officers also given access to the perquisites of enterprise management? What criteria are used in granting sinecures to retired and retiring officers? What kinds of political and loyalty tests are required to get such assignments? Are they permanent sinecures, or are officers regularly rotated in and out of management positions based on their abilities and accomplishments? Are poor performers fired?

Furthermore, it is not clear to what extent officers collaborate with civilian technocrats who have responsibilities in finance, management, and production. All of this, of course, is in keeping with the secrecy that has always surrounded nearly everything to do with the military. That secrecy hardly suggests, however, that a new economic model is evolving toward genuine free market entrepreneurship or meritocratic competition.

Praetorian Enterprises and Transition Dynamics

One knowledgeable source frequently quoted here is more optimistic. He asserts that praetorian enterprise management bears no resemblance to the FAR's militarized "command economy" approach of the 1960s or to Prussian-style management.⁵⁴ He also contends that the new military entrepreneurs are accomplishing "transparent accountability" while meeting "the demands of markets and clients."

The evidence for such an assessment is thin, however. In fact, the praetorian enterprises appear more than anything to function as protected monopolies granted to regime favorites for political as well as economic purposes. Loyal *raulistas* alone, it seems, are sufficiently trusted by the Castros to get access to entrepreneurial activities dependent on foreign capital. The regime no doubt accepts as part of the bargain that most of these officers will engage at least in low level, inconspicuous forms of malfeasance to improve their own standards of living. Perhaps there is even an understanding of sorts that they may sequester nest eggs as personal insurance against the uncertainties of the post-Castro era. Such a Faustian bargain by the regime may provide important benefits in the short term, but over time, it will probably undermine unity and professionalism in the military and therefore cloud the prospects for a bloodless transition.

In fact, scattered evidence indicates that the praetorian enterprises are breeding grounds for corruption. General Casas Regueiro, the first vice minister of defense in charge of these activities, is widely rumored to be corrupt himself. One source has noted that he is suspected of "large scale corruption" and is perceived in Cuba as "despotic."⁵⁵ Another asserts that his is "the most obvious case of blatant corruption within the military."⁵⁶ So far, this 66-year-old intimate ally of Raul Castro has enjoyed

immunity. Other top officers have not. General Tomás Benítez, the former head of Gaviota, was fired “for receiving commissions from foreign clients,” and two colonels — the minister and vice minister of domestic trade — were deposed in 1995 for financial fraud.⁵⁷ The regime has not chosen to elevate any of these irregularities into notorious public causes such as the Ochoa prosecution or to use them to launch publicized crusades against corruption in the military. To do either might well upset the delicate balance between how much corruption is acceptable and what kind of behavior is not.

In addition, there is no clear evidence that military managers have succeeded in bringing significant new efficiencies or productivity into troubled sectors of the economy. Raul Castro admitted in May 2001 that “the process of enterprise improvement in the FAR had not advanced with the dynamism hoped for.”⁵⁸ The critical sugar sector, for example, has continued to languish under the management of General Rosales del Toro, one of the FAR’s most respected officers and perhaps the leading exemplar of the new entrepreneur-soldier. Since he became czar, sugar harvests have consistently remained among the smallest in modern times.

This year, General Rosales finally announced that he would close a number of sugar mills — throwing many workers into unemployment — and greatly reduce sugar cane lands in order to promote greater efficiency and alternative development. That decision came belatedly, however, probably because he had great difficulty persuading Fidel Castro and other hard-line leaders that such harsh capitalist-style cost-cutting could be justified. Enterprise managers in other sectors probably face similar constraints in trying to introduce free market type efficiencies in Cuba’s command economy, although there is really no evidence that others are energetically endeavoring to do so.

On balance, therefore, the politically safe decision to put trusted *raulista* officers in charge of for-profit enterprises may make little economic sense. Career military men, many with combat decorations and limited previous contact with civilian professionals, cannot be expected easily to transcend the rigidities and biases of their bureaucratic culture. It seems that this would be especially true in Cuba because of Fidel Castro’s well-known aversion to any economic decentralization or political decompression that might resemble the hated *glasnost* and *perestroika* he believes destroyed the Soviet Union.

Therefore, most officers including those close to Raul Castro and trained abroad, will be wary of running afoul of Fidel Castro. They remember all too well the fate of General Ochoa. In the end, moreover, they understand that as long as Castro remains in charge, they must operate in a regimented, centrally controlled economy where real innovation is carried forth only at considerable risk. They know too, that in the extreme, even Raul Castro could not protect them against his brother's wrath.

The contradictions and dangers for them individually, and for the professionalism of the FAR, are therefore daunting and probably steadily increasing as well. If officers in charge of praetorian enterprises fail to generate significant economic gains, or if they somehow overstep the shifting limits of what is permissible, they can be held accountable. Conversely, if they are too obviously successful or appear to be living too extravagantly they may antagonize Fidel Castro. They would also invite a backlash from military colleagues and civilians who do not have similar access to large scale hard currency dealings. Already disturbed civilian bureaucrats and other professionals, many of whom probably believe they could run enterprises more productively and efficiently, will be even more alienated from the FAR.

Finally, and of great importance for the transition, the praetorian enterprises probably are breeding bitter new divisions within the FAR itself. *Raulista* officers, who increasingly constitute a privileged new class in Cuba, may be increasingly despised by less political, more traditional, and professional officers, especially those with important troop commands. The unity, discipline, and professionalism of the FAR appears therefore to be increasingly at risk.

How Fault Lines in the FAR Could Impact the Transition

Uncorrected, these and a number of other potentially destabilizing fault lines in the FAR will progressively erode institutional integrity and therefore the prospects for a peaceful transition. From its inception, the military has appeared to be a monolithic organization, but in reality, at least four major types of cross-cutting fissures appear to be weakening command and control and fractionalizing groups of officers both vertically and horizontally.⁵⁹ Most of the divisions have developed since

1989 and the crises of international communism. They will likely open wider during the post Fidel Castro transition.

The Ochoa Affair

Two star general Arnaldo Ochoa was one of the most decorated, popular, and respected officers the FAR has ever produced. In the late 1950s, he joined Fidel Castro's guerrilla forces as a teenager and was then involved in nearly every important military campaign until his execution in the summer of 1989. He was charged with drug trafficking. However, the consensus among scholars today is that the Castro brothers concluded he posed a grave political threat to their political hegemony because he was attracted to the liberalizing reforms then sweeping the communist nations. It was no coincidence that his public indictment in a speech by Raul Castro occurred just days after the slaughter in Tiananmen Square and as Eastern European communist regimes were beginning to hemorrhage. Raul Castro accused him of disloyalty and of contemplating defection, but the drug trafficking allegations were not added until later. In reality, Ochoa had probably emerged as the most influential and highest ranking admirer of Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union. The Castro brothers feared a "*perestroika* generation" was forming in the FAR.⁶⁰

Ochoa's protracted trial and sentencing were brutal warnings to any others who might be tempted to question the Castros' authority. His execution, along with a few others, was approved by a military honors tribunal of more than 40 ranking generals — in effect implicating all of them in his fate. Several defectors who subsequently left Cuba, including mid-ranking FAR officers, have observed that they were unalterably alienated from the regime because of its machiavellian treatment of the general. Many others still in active duty undoubtedly share those feelings. These antagonisms could erupt during the transition with admirers of Ochoa seeking revenge on those officers they blame for most flagrantly betraying him. Raul Castro would be a likely target. His alternatively inept and ruthless handling of the crisis may have cemented the opposition of still powerful officers who are only waiting for their chance to get even once Fidel Castro is gone.

Raul Castro also used the Ochoa affair to purge the entire Ministry of Interior leadership and convert it into a branch of the MINFAR. General

Colome was appointed minister as perhaps hundreds of career officials were dismissed. Some foreign observers have concluded that in the dozen years since Ochoa's execution, the destabilizing tensions it provoked have abated as members of the "*perestroika* generation" recognized that Gorbachev's reforms in the end only brought calamity.⁶¹ Others believe the grafting of MININT's internal security and police functions onto the military presage "potentially deadly consequences for the regime."⁶² In a number of the Eastern European transitions, the interior ministries were the first institutions of the communist past to be reformed or disbanded, usually under intense popular pressures. Thus, Raul Castro's decision in 1989 to link MINFAR and MININT could put both of their futures in doubt.

Generational Stresses

Little is known outside of Cuba about the internal workings of the FAR and the attitudes of its personnel. Information about promotions, reassignments, and retirements of ranking officers is rarely revealed in the Cuban media. Official web sites provide only superficial data about personnel matters. Nonetheless, there are good reasons to surmise that generational tensions have worsened over the last dozen years. The recent promotion of Alvaro Lopez Miera — believed to be in his mid to late fifties — to three star rank and to serve as chief of staff perhaps reflected Raul Castro's recognition that trusted younger officers needed to be advanced. At least one knowledgeable source indicates, in addition, that a number of relatively young colonels have been promoted to one star rank.⁶³

Yet, many top officers, including nearly all the ranking generals, are men well beyond the retirement ages common in other countries. Corps General Rigoberto Garcia, head of the Youth Labor Army, is in his mid-seventies. Sugar czar Rosales del Toro, Julio Casas, Abelardo Colome, and the commanders of the three regional armies range in age from 61 to 66. The latter four have been in the same positions since 1989 or 1990. All are stalwarts of the revolutionary generation forged in the guerrilla campaigns of the late 1950s. Many others of their generation also hold high ranks and offices where they have blocked the progression of younger officers. Following their defections, several younger officers

have described the many sources of their alienation, including the FAR's humiliating new agricultural missions, a top-heavy command structure, the lack of promotion headroom and interesting assignments, the radical downsizing of the armed forces, and worsening corruption in the institution.

Younger officers could emerge as a powerful political wild card once the transition begins, just as they did in several Eastern European countries. Young Turk dissatisfaction with the pace of reforms in those countries "led to the spontaneous rise of organizations, usually made up of junior officers, that aimed to act as pressure groups in favor of faster reforms."⁶⁴ Such organizations in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria pursued reform agendas and in the process undermined military cohesion. They had different trajectories and degrees of influence, but their emergence pointed to "problems of cohesion and indicate(d) deep division between the junior and more senior officers."⁶⁵ In Bulgaria, for example, after considerable opposition, the military high command approved the creation of an independent officers organization — the Rakovski Officers Legion — made up largely of younger officers.⁶⁶ In Romania, "a large number of junior and mid-level...officers demanded a purge of most of the country's senior military officers."⁶⁷ These last two experiences could easily be repeated in Cuba after Fidel Castro's demise.

Senior Officer Rivalries and Tensions

The apparent unity and fraternity in the top ranks of the officer corps in all likelihood is an illusion that conceals deep and growing divisions. There is almost no empirical evidence regarding their attitudes and aspirations for Cuba after Fidel Castro, but his infirmities and the regime's undisguised transition planning have surely caused them to ponder their fates and Cuba's. Inevitably, they have differing views and priorities that have been shaped by their experiences, especially during the institutional tumult of the last dozen years, and these will reduce their ability to work together during the transition. Certainly there are many personal animosities, festering for years, that could erupt during the transition, and, based on an inductive analysis of the FAR, it is reasonable to speculate that intense group rivalries and animosities have also arisen.

Traditional troop commanders have probably been alienated progres-

sively from *raulista* staff officers (including the praetorian enterprise managers). One academic specialist cites anecdotal evidence to conclude that “there is much rancor, suspicion, and jealousy between MINFAR bureaucrats (*raulistas*) and commanders in the field.”⁶⁸ He argues that the three regional army commanders — all corps generals — owe their allegiance mainly to Fidel Castro rather than his brother. By dint of the large numbers of troops and weapons at their disposal, Leopoldo Cintra Frias (Western Army), Joaquin Quinta Solas (Central Army), and Ramon Espinosa Martin (Eastern Army) wield the greatest raw power. In their posts since the 1989-90 period, they are not believed to have studied management abroad, to be involved in directing industries or enterprises, or to have ready access to dollar accounts. They, their staff officers, and many others under their command probably hold more traditional views about the role of the FAR while deeply resenting the *raulista* technocrats and dollarized entrepreneurs. These troop commanders, especially Cintra Frias, who is based in the Havana area, would have sufficient raw power at their disposal to make demands during the transition that even Raul Castro would have difficulty resisting.

Erosion of Professionalism

A variety of other developments have been eroding the traditional professionalism of the FAR since 1989. An astute Russian observer commented in 1995 that Russian experts in general have a “high regard for the dedication and professionalism of the...officer corps and military leadership,”⁶⁹ but he added that a minority view held that, as a result of its new economic roles, the military “may be on their way to moral degradation.” All the evidence since then suggests the latter has been the principal trend. The praetorian enterprises have become breeding grounds for corruption that inevitably undermines military unity and professionalism. An academic expert noted recently, for example, that selected managers in the enterprises “have access to dollar accounts, make high salaries, and receive perks.”⁷⁰ Others have noted that large tracts of agricultural lands have been turned over to military personnel who apparently operate as virtual homesteaders. In addition, the frequent changes of military missions and operating doctrine since 1980 have certainly affected morale

and discipline. Most damaging no doubt have been the changes since the collapse of the USSR, as budgets, manpower, readiness, and capabilities have sharply deteriorated and troops have been put to work in the fields.

Finally, FAR professionalism traditionally was characterized by a closeness to the civilian population that was reciprocated with strong respect and admiration for military personnel. In this regard, civil-military relations in Cuba differed from those in nearly all of the Eastern European communist countries, where the armed forces enjoyed little if any respect. After the communist regimes collapsed, the militaries were targeted by the successor governments for radical restructuring and subordination. In the Czech Republic, anti-military sentiment was so strong that a pacifist movement coalesced and pressed for the abolition of the armed forces.⁷¹

It is unlikely Cuban civilians will develop such aggressively negative views about the FAR any time soon, but a variety of evidence suggests the trend is moving in that direction. Many in the party, government bureaucracy, and political class generally have been discreetly expressing dissatisfaction with the FAR's central policymaking roles. Mostly anecdotal evidence indicates that top officers have become manifestly arrogant in dealing with civilians. For example, a now deceased senior general was quoted in the Cuban media in 1994 warning that "civilian life will certainly have to move step by step toward what is done in the armed forces."⁷² A militarized society guided by a praetorian elite was not the ideal long embodied in the civic-soldier who historically was one with the civilian population.

Short-Term Outlook for a *Raulista* Regime

Once in power in his own right, Raul Castro is likely to emphasize continuity in leadership and policy, while charting new courses. He is certain to profusely honor the memory of his brother by institutionalizing a posthumous cult of personality and insisting, at least rhetorically, that *fidelista* principles of revolutionary stoicism and heroism guide the new regime. However, Marxist ideology will probably be relegated, as in China, to periodic ritualistic observance. Lacking any elements of his brother's charisma, Raul Castro will also largely abandon the mass mobi-

lizational methods of the last four decades. The new regime will be realistic about the need to assuage public opinion and will probably almost immediately begin loosening the most restrictive economic policies Fidel Castro has stubbornly upheld. It will probably allow an expansion of Cuba's small and marginal private sector. Raul Castro may also decide, for reasons of political expediency, to permit civilians to join his generals and colonels in enterprise management involving large dollar transactions.

He and the generals no doubt recognize that popular expectations for broad economic and political change have been steadily swelling just below the surface, but a *raulista* regime, at least initially, will probably refuse to soften current prohibitions on independent political expression. The generals are likely to agree that any sudden, uncontrolled political opening would cause expectations for fundamental structural changes to soar and thus ignite significant instability. At least initially, Cuban *glasnost* or *perestroika* will not be likely.

A *raulista* regime may, however, be more amenable to improving relations with the United States than Fidel Castro has ever been. Its survival for any length of time might well depend on the benefits of improved relations. One astute observer of the Cuban military has speculated, for example, that Raul Castro will take a "more pragmatic approach" with the hope of normalizing bilateral relations because that could significantly help him to consolidate his government.⁷³

Still, the hurdles to improving relations would be formidable. Under the terms of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996 (Helms-Burton) a successor regime that included Raul Castro would not qualify for any relaxation of the U.S. embargo and related restrictions or for bilateral assistance. Other requirements of the law will also be difficult for a *raulista* regime to meet, even if the leadership were to begin a process of political liberalization.⁷⁴ The law requires, for example, that "all political activity" be legalized, that "free and fair elections for a new government" be scheduled, that "all political prisoners be freed," and that certain state institutions of coercion be dissolved. In the absence of new legislation superseding the Helms-Burton definition of what constitutes a "transition government," Cuba-U.S. relations would continue to be frozen.

Beyond its first year or even months in power, however, the prospects

for a *raulista* regime will be uncertain at best. After Fidel Castro's demise, popular expectations for real change will likely be intense and could even result in large demonstrations for rapid and broad liberalization. The authors and many signatories of the Varela Project petition will no doubt greatly intensify their lobbying and organizing activities and a large number of other Cubans who have been politically apathetic or cowed by the security forces will also seek fundamental political and economic change. They will probably enjoy at least the tacit support of many in the civilian leadership and at least some ranking military officers as well. The resulting tensions will confront the FAR leadership with tough choices that will severely threaten its command and control.

Reforming the FAR during the Transition

While the *raulista* succession now appears to be the most likely of the three scenarios described in this study, it is impossible to predict when that might occur. Fidel Castro's health has conspicuously deteriorated, yet he is not known to suffer from any life-threatening ailments. He continues to function in public and private with energy and the clear determination to continue in charge as long as he can. If he lives as long as his father, he could hold on to power for another six years or more.

The longer present trends — mostly negative for the regime — continue, the greater the chances will be that one of the turbulent succession scenarios will occur. Even less is known about Raul Castro's health, and when periodically he has disappeared from public view for lengths of time, speculation about his physical fitness to succeed his brother has intensified. In addition, he has accumulated many enemies, and unlike Fidel Castro, who is always at the center of massive and sophisticated personal security, Raul Castro may be more vulnerable to assassination attempts. If he dies before his brother, the prospects for a smooth and peaceful transition after Fidel Castro's demise will be uncertain.

A number of developments also now operate steadily to increase the chances that the populace will be unwilling to accept a *raulista* regime unless it is committed, almost from the start, to sweeping political change. The remarkable challenge posed by the Varela Project, the emergence of a few dissident and opposition figures who could potentially attract significant followings, the more influential role of the Catholic Church, and

the development of social and economic groups with a high degree of autonomy from the regime all suggest that some fundamentals of the political dynamic on the island are shifting. If regime-threatening protests were to develop after Fidel Castro's death, command and control in the FAR (and possibly in MININT as well)⁷⁵ could break down if regular units were ordered to employ violence on a large scale against civilians.

Whatever course the transition may take, at least some FAR leaders and components will survive and perform critical roles after one or both Castros have departed. In that new Cuban era, it will be essential that the military and its missions be radically altered. Thus, regardless of which succession scenario occurs or when it begins to unfold, reforming the military will be one of the highest priorities in the post-revolutionary period. Changes large and small, superficial and of enormous impact, will be necessary. Some of the more important of those necessary changes are discussed below in the following three broad categories: 1) reconfigure military forces and missions; 2) submit to civilian control in a liberal democratic political system; and 3) enter into extensive new international relationships.

Reconfigure Forces and Missions

Much smaller, poorer, and weaker than in its heyday, the FAR and its auxiliary forces should be reduced further. With a population of approximately 11 million, Cuba maintains a regular military of between 50,000 and 60,000 personnel. Guatemala, with a population somewhat larger, has about 30,000 in uniform.⁷⁶ The FAR also maintains a large ready reserve force and the Youth Labor Army, and it can also call up the approximately 2 million members of the Territorial Troop Militia. Cuban leaders have increasingly acknowledged, moreover, that they face virtually no danger of conventional military conflict.

With no land borders to defend, no historic enemies, and no bilateral or collective security commitments to other nations, Cuba's regular armed forces should be downsized substantially and the large auxiliaries abolished. The three large regional armies are obsolete and unnecessary for Cuba's contemporary defense needs. They should be disbanded and perhaps replaced by air mobile regiments that could quickly be moved around the island if needed. Several specialized units — the commando Special Troops and the High Command Reserve, for example — will be

superfluous in the post-Castro era. Leadership protection should become a civilian responsibility.

Considerable attention would have to be paid to providing retirement benefits to personnel who served honorably.⁷⁷ Obligatory military service should be replaced by a professional but voluntary force. Several MININT elements and functions, particularly those involved in monitoring, intimidating, and brutalizing dissidents, should be eliminated. Other security forces will have to be fundamentally restructured, placed under new leadership, and subjected to intensive reviews of their human rights performances.

The defense budget, arms and munitions inventories, and the number and size of military installations should be reduced in the post-revolutionary era. One or more military bases have already been converted to civilian and educational uses, and others should be privatized. The elaborate networks of tunnels and underground fortifications constructed as part of the “War of All the People” defense strategy will be superfluous. In fact, the large quantities of weapons stored in these facilities could prove to be an enormous danger if they were to be plundered. Whatever biological weapons programs or capabilities the FAR may have must be abandoned, ideally under international supervision. All or virtually all of the FAR’s industries and enterprises should be privatized.

Submit to Civilian Control

Experiences in Russia and the Eastern European countries after the fall of communism demonstrate that transitions to democratic governance and civilian control of the armed forces will be slow and difficult in Cuba as well. A substantial academic literature on those transitions illuminates the many problems that will probably be encountered assuming, as is most likely, that substantial elements of the FAR will continue to operate during the transition. Appointing a civilian defense minister will be a critical watershed. Distinguishing (ideally through new constitutional and legal provisions) the roles and responsibilities of the commander in chief, the defense minister, and the military chief of staff may also prove daunting, as it did in some of the Eastern European nations. As in those countries, moreover, there will be a dearth of Cuban civilians who will be versed in military affairs, qualified, that is, to oversee and monitor national level decision making on the spectrum of military matters.

There are no civilian think tanks or university centers that have any capability on military issues. Thus, well-informed civilian oversight will be extremely difficult to achieve. Traditional military secrecy, mutual distrust between civilians and officers, and the lack of any experience in negotiating over military spending and priorities will greatly complicate civil-military relations.

Internationalize

Since the demise of the Soviet Union and Cuba's withdrawal from revolutionary internationalism abroad, the FAR has had little contact with the international community. Following the evacuation of the Russian Lourdes intelligence collection facility in late 2001, only a few if any Russian military personnel are believed to remain on the island. There are perhaps only a dozen or so Cuban military attaches serving in foreign capitals and probably even fewer foreign military representatives in Havana. Military cooperation or exchanges with other countries are now the exception.

Ironically, one of the most notable examples is the ongoing exchange that occurs at "the fence line" at the US Naval Base at Guantánamo.⁷⁸ These talks began in the mid-1990s and were conducted initially between the U.S. base commander (a Navy captain) and a Cuban brigadier general who headed the FAR Guantánamo area division. In 1999, the Cuban side upgraded its representation. Brigadier General Jose Solar Hernandez, deputy chief of the Eastern Army and a Communist Party Central Committee member, has been meeting with the U.S. base commander. They discuss local issues with the objective of minimizing the possibility of incidents and reducing tensions between the military forces located at close proximity. In this seasonally arid region of Cuba, an informal fire warning agreement is in effect. "Coincident firefighting maneuvers" have been conducted by both sides, involving helicopters carrying water bags. Each side is reportedly prepared to provide medical support to the other in emergencies, for example, by evacuating burn victims to the closest hospital.

"Fence line" talks reached a higher plateau in early 2002, when the U.S. base was being prepared to incarcerate suspected Al Qaeda terrorists. The Cuban government was informed in advance of the decision to use the base, and General Solar was advised about the U.S. plan and what

his troops should expect to observe so that the Cuban government would not be surprised. A few days later, Havana issued a favorable statement and not long after, Raul Castro told journalists that if any Al Qaeda suspects were to escape and reach Cuban territory, they would be returned to Guantánamo. With the exception of semi-annual migration review sessions between the two governments, these talks are the highest level regular meetings between U.S. and Cuban officials. They apparently are conducted without acrimony and with only a minimum of political posturing by the Cuban side. They provide an excellent foundation for an expanded military-to-military dialogue some time in the future.

In addition, since late 2000, MININT's Border Guard Troops have institutionalized regular contact with a U.S. Coast Guard officer stationed in Havana. Other contacts between high level FAR personnel and retired U.S. senior officers have been sponsored by the Washington-based Center for Defense Information. Since 1987, seven or eight U.S. delegations have visited Cuba, and on at least two occasions, members met with one or both Castro brothers. Until the last year or two, the initiative for these contacts was entirely on the American side, but since then, Cuban counterparts have appeared to be more interested in upgrading and intensifying the exchanges. A counterpart Cuban defense research center has been more assertive, for example, in proposing ideas for joint research.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, all of the contact has been in Cuba; no MINFAR officers have been allowed by their government to travel to the United States.

These limited contacts will provide useful launching points once the political transition begins. The post-Castro military will need to be reintegrated into regional and international security arrangements. Cuban personnel would probably be welcome and effective participants in international peacekeeping missions, perhaps especially in African countries where they have had extensive experience. Cuban military academies and schools should be opened to foreign faculty and students. Cuban officers and non-commissioned personnel should receive training in nearby countries and in Europe. Finally, personnel at all levels should receive international training in counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics missions that ought to be among the principal new preoccupations of the country's post-Castro armed forces.

End Notes

¹ Domingo Amuchastegui, 1999, "Cuba's Armed Forces: Power and Reforms," in *Cuba in Transition* (Washington, D.C.: Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy), 111.

² Andrei Shoumikhin, 1995, "Russian Vicissitudes and Cuban 'Scenarios': Evolving Paradigm of Interrelationship." *International Research 2000* (March), 13.

³ An opinion survey of 1,023 recently arrived Cuban émigrés conducted in 1998 and 1999 indicated that more than two thirds of the respondents cited the FAR as one of the official organizations they hated the most. Only one individual cited the FAR as the institution "most loved." Those surveyed obviously were alienated from the regime and not representative of the Cuban population at large, but their negative views of the military might nonetheless be indicative of attitudes that would openly contend and perhaps become organized during the post Castro transition. See US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the University of Florida (UF), 1999, "Measuring Cuban Public Opinion: Project Report," USAID-UF, September.

⁴ FBIS-LAT-94-151, August 5, 1994, 5.

⁵ FBIS-LAT-94-152, August 8, 1994, 35.

⁶ FBIS-LAT-94-151, 32.

⁷ Jorge Domínguez, 1978, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 342 described the "civic-soldier" in revolutionary Cuba in whom "civilian and military lives are fused."

⁸ Michael Radu, 1996, *Collapse or Decay? Cuba and the East European Transitions from Communism* (Miami: Cuban American National Foundation), 28-29.

⁹ Thomas S. Szayna & F. Stephen Larrabee, 1994, *East European Military Reform After the Cold War: Implications for the United States* (Santa Monica, CA: National Defense Research Institute, RAND), 19.

¹⁰ Mark Kramer, 1998, "The Restructuring of Civil-Military Relations in Poland Since 1989," in *Civil-Military Relations: Building Democratic and Regional Security in Latin America, South Asia, and Central Europe*, ed. David R. Mares (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press).

¹¹ Larry L. Watts, 2001, "The Crisis in Romanian Civil-Military Relations," *Problems of Post-Communism* (July/August).

¹² Irving Louis Horowitz, 1995, "Military Autonomy and Dependency," *International Research 2000* (March), 5, says "My own surmise is that the armed forces would serve as a passive rather than active agent in any concerted uprising."

¹³ Amuchastegui 1999, 113.

¹⁴ Henry W. Goethals, 1995, "A Visit to Cuba 1995: Interviews with Cuban Government Officials," *International Research 2000* (March), 4.

¹⁵ The constitution states: "In the event of the absence, illness, or death of the President of the Council of State, the First Vice President replaces him in his functions."

- ¹⁶ Louis Perez, 1976, "Army Politics in Socialist Cuba," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 8:2 (November), 259.
- ¹⁷ The term and the concept of an elite group in the leadership particularly close to Raul Castro were developed by Edward Gonzalez, 1979, "Institutionalization, Political Elites, and Foreign Policies," in *Cuba in the World*, eds. Cole Blasier and Carmelo Mesa-Lago (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press) and other works.
- ¹⁸ Brian Latell, 1986, "Cuba after the Third Party Congress," *Current History*, December.
- ¹⁹ The long time head of communist East German foreign intelligence has written that "Raul's friends teased him for his punctuality and called him 'the Prussian.'" Markus Wolf, 1997, *Man Without a Face: The Autobiography of Communism's Greatest Spymaster* (New York: Random House), 311.
- ²⁰ Mikhail Zubatkin, 1995, "Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba: Role and Position, Today and Tomorrow," *International Research 2000* (March), 2.
- ²¹ USAID-UF 1999, 100.
- ²² A former FAR army major, interviewed in Miami in September 2002 expressed harsh views of Raul Castro. He described him as "dictatorial" and one who inspires fear but not admiration.
- ²³ No general officer is known to have defected since May 1987 when Air Force ace General Rafael del Pino flew to Miami.
- ²⁴ For comprehensive analyses of the military during the decades of the 1960s through the 1980s see: Jaime Suchlicki ed., 1989, *The Cuban Military Under Castro* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami).
- ²⁵ Defense Intelligence Agency, 1979, *Handbook of the Cuban Armed Forces* (Washington, D.C.: Defense Intelligence Agency), 1-12.
- ²⁶ Maj.Gen. Edward B. Atkeson (ret. USA), 1996, "A Glimpse of the Cuban Military in 1996," Landpower Essay Series, AUSA Institute of Land Warfare, No. 96-4 (May), 352.
- ²⁷ Piero Gleijeses, 2002, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press), 212.
- ²⁸ Mario Vazquez Rana, 1993, "Interview with Raul Castro," *El Sol de Mexico*, April 21.
- ²⁹ Vazquez Rana 1993.
- ³⁰ Phyllis Greene Walker, 1995, "The Missions and Doctrine of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces," *International Research 200*, (March), 6.
- ³¹ Phyllis Greene Walker, 1996, *Challenges Facing the Cuban Military*, Cuba Briefing Paper Series, Number 12, Washington, D.C., Georgetown University (October), 2.
- ³² Maj. Gen. Edward B. Atkeson, (ret. USA), 1995, "Castro and Cuba — Dug in and Dangerous," *Army* (June), 313.
- ³³ Domingo Amuchastegui, "The Military in Cuba," unpublished manuscript, 4.
- ³⁴ Amuchastegui *IBID*, 9.
- ³⁵ Juan Carlos Espinosa, 2001, "Vanguard of the State, The Cuban Armed Forces in

- the Transition,” *Problems of Post Communism* 48:6 (November/December), 23, cites a Cuban government source.
- ³⁶ Frank O. Mora, whose several works on the Cuban military have added significantly to the literature, coined this useful term.
- ³⁷ Frank O. Mora, 2002, “Raul Castro and the FAR: Potential Future Roles in a Post-Fidel Cuba,” unpublished manuscript, 4.
- ³⁸ Domingo Amuchastegui, 2002, Interview by the author, Miami, January 29.
- ³⁹ Greene Walker 1996, 2.
- ⁴⁰ Atkeson 1995, 313.
- ⁴¹ Amuchastegui 1999, 113.
- ⁴² Later, in August 1994 at the height of anti-regime violence, he stated publicly that “beans are worth more than cannons.” FBIS-LAT-94-151, p. 5.
- ⁴³ Amuchastegui 1999, 113.
- ⁴⁴ Amuchastegui 1999, 114 and Humberto Leon, 1995, “The Military Chiefs – Biographic Information,” *International Research 2000* (March), 5.
- ⁴⁵ Shoumikhin 1995, 11. Shoumikhin, a long time close observer of the Cuban Revolution, was President of the Center for Conflict Resolution in Moscow in 1995. He emphasizes that Castro will not allow civilians to “obtain real national prominence, especially if that fame were to result from successful economic reforms...”
- ⁴⁶ Domingo Amuchastegui, “FAR: Mastering Reforms,” Cuba in Transition, Volume 10, 2000, p. 436.
- ⁴⁷ Amuchastegui 2000, 438.
- ⁴⁸ Maj.Gen. Edward Atkeson (ret. USA), 2002, Interview by Author, April 23, Arlington, Virginia.
- ⁴⁹ Mora 2002, 9.
- ⁵⁰ Juan Carlos Espinosa describes this new FAR model as “a technocrat-soldier” with greater autonomy and greater access to the international dollar economy.
- ⁵¹ Espinosa 2001, 24.
- ⁵² Juan Carlos Espinosa and Robert C. Harding III. “Olive Green Parachutes and Slow Motion Pinatas: The Cuban Armed Forces in the Economy and in Transition,” unpublished manuscript.
- ⁵³ Mora 2002, 12.
- ⁵⁴ Amuchastegui 1999, 14 and Amuchastegui 2000, 439.
- ⁵⁵ Humberto Leon, 1995, “Impact of the Economic Crisis in the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR),” *International Research 2000* (March),7.
- ⁵⁶ Mora 2002, 13.
- ⁵⁷ Mora 2002, 13.
- ⁵⁸ *Granma*, May 18, 2001, cited by Juan Carlos Espinosa 2001, 23.
- ⁵⁹ Several other sources of tension within the FAR that may be of less critical impor-

tance to transition dynamics include: 1) the new agricultural missions that have reduced soldiers to lives of rural peonage; 2) resentments lingering since Cuba's long and bloody intervention in Angola as well as lesser involvements, including the one in Grenada that resulted in October 1983 in numerous Cuban deaths and casualties; and 3) opposition to the "War of All the People" doctrine introduced in 1980, the mobilization of the MTTs, and the enormous, wasteful spending on tunnels and other fortifications.

⁶⁰ Evidence of the influence of *glasnost* and *perestroika* on FAR officers is scattered and mostly anecdotal. Richard Millett, 1993, "Cuba's Armed Forces: From Triumph to Survival," Cuba Briefing Series, Number 4, (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University), September, among others, has used the term. Also see, Leon 1995, 3; and Goethals 1995, 2.

⁶¹ Goethals 1995, 2.

⁶² Radu 1996, 35.

⁶³ Domingo Amuchastegui, 2002, E-mail correspondence with the author, October.

⁶⁴ Szayna and Larrabee 1995, 33.

⁶⁵ Szayna and Larrabee 1995, 34.

⁶⁶ Dale R Herspring, 1992, "Civil-Military Relations in Post-Communist Eastern Europe: The Potential for Praetorianism," *Studies in Comparative Communism* 25: 2 (June), 106-7.

⁶⁷ Herspring 1992, 117.

⁶⁸ Mora 2002, 13.

⁶⁹ Shoumikhin 1995, 14.

⁷⁰ Juan del Aguila, 1998, "The Cuban Armed Forces: Changing Roles, Continued Loyalties," in *Cuban Communism*, eds. Irving L. Horowitz and Jaime Suchlicki (Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ), 518.

⁷¹ Kramer 1998, 104-106.

⁷² *Juventud Rebelde*, October 16, 1994.

⁷³ Mora 2002, 16.

⁷⁴ See Title II, Section 205 (a) of Helms-Burton.

⁷⁵ Leon 1995, 8 argues that it would.

⁷⁶ These and other figures are from World Bank, 2002, *World Development Indicators 2001*, (Washington, D.C.: World Bank).

⁷⁷ Ricardo Donate-Armada, 1995, "Preliminary Analysis of Retirement Programs for Personnel in the Ministry of the Armed Forces and Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Cuba," *Cuba in Transition*, 5.

⁷⁸ This section is derived in part from discussions with knowledgeable officials of the Office of Cuban Affairs, US Department of State in May 2002.

⁷⁹ Bruce Blair, Director, Center for Defense Information, 2002, Interview by Author, Washington, D.C., May 17.

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