

REFORM OF THE ARMED FORCES IN A POST-CASTRO CUBA

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Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Cuba*—FAR) have undergone over the years a dynamic change in their role and doctrine as a defense institution, from their genesis of the Rebel Army who fought the Batista dictatorship. Army General Raúl Castro has called the FAR a “vanguard of the state,”² ready to defend the socialist state and its revolutionary achievements.

The armed forces have achieved a level of professionalism³ and autonomy, e.g., by the training the officer corps received in Soviet military academies that taught them about Soviet military doctrine and their international campaigns in Africa (e.g. Angola and Ethiopia) and in the Middle East (e.g. Iraq and Syria) in the 1970s and 1980s. However, the professionalism and autonomy of the FAR brought concern to the regime's leadership. The leadership perceived the FAR to be a potential rival power whereas their main mission was to defend the state.

As a result of the Soviet Union slashing subsidies to the island, an economic crisis occurred in the early 1990s known as the Special Period (*Período Especial*)

that gave the regime leadership an opportunity to re-adjust the FAR's mission: a new role that emphasized participation in the economic survivability of the communist state. The Cuban Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de Cuba*—PCC) and the population, through a new doctrine called the War of All the People (WAP) (*la guerra de todo el pueblo*), were also included in defending the regime by diversifying the responsibility and not depending on a single institution for the country's defense. WAP was a check and counterbalance to the perceived autonomy of the FAR.

The objective of this essay is to discuss the role and mission that the armed forces will have in post-Castro Cuba, principally in a transition to democracy, not in a succession perpetuating the *status quo*. The essay is composed of four parts: first, a review of civil-military relations in Cuba; second, the theories and trends of civil-military relations in post-communist states; third, the role and mission of the armed forces in a post-Castro Cuba; and finally, a conclusion.

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 57th Annual Conference of the New York State Political Science Association, Wagner College, Staten Island, New York, April 12, 2003.

2. See Juan Carlos Espinosa, “Vanguard of the State: The Cuban Armed Forces in Transition,” *Armed Forces and Society*, 48:6, 2001, 19-30.

3. Civilian control in the objective sense is the maximizing of military professionalism. More precisely, it is that distribution of political power between military and civilian groups which is most conducive to the emergence of professional attitudes and behavior among the members of the officer corps. See Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil Military Relations* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 83; Alfred Stepan, *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 1971).

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN CUBA

The relations between the civil government and of the military in Cuba can be categorized in two historical periods. Frank Mora classifies Cuba's civil-military relations into *Fidelismo* and *Raulismo*.

- *Fidelismo* is the period of civilian control from 1959 to 1979, characterized by a policy or pattern of civilian control similar to what Samuel Huntington described as subjective control of the military.⁴ Huntington writes: "Consequently, the maximizing of civilian power always means the maximizing of the power of some particular civilian group or groups. This is subjective civilian control. The general concept of civilian control is identified with the specific interests of one or more civilian groups. Consequently, subjective civilian control involves the power relations among civilian groups. It is advanced by one civilian group as a means to enhance its power at the expense of other civilian groups."⁵
- *Raulismo* is the period from 1989 to the present, characterized by a new policy of civilian control based on restructuring the FAR and transforming it into an instrument of Raúl Castro's political and economic objectives.⁶

When the Rebel Army was being transformed from a group of rebels into a standing army (the FAR), there was discussion within the leadership as to how the new army would be fashioned. Damián Fernández suggests, "Two options for the army were debated in 1959 and early 1960s: (1) the army would be composed of the armed Cuban people; or (2) a professional army would function as a traditional military establishment. [Che] Guevara favored the former, while Fidel hesitated between the two. For the Castro

brothers the most significant concern was control over the military institution to guarantee their survival in power."⁷ Fidel Castro knew that supreme control of the military establishment would ensure that a vital instrument such as the armed forces would perpetuate his power as the process of consolidating the government and power structures was taking place. Fidel Castro's role both as leader of the Cuban Revolution and virtual founder of the FAR and the ruling Cuban Communist Party (PCC) acted both to maintain control over and insure the loyalty of the armed forces. His ties with many senior officers, dating back in many cases to the insurgent struggle against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in the 1950s, not to mention the role of his brother Raúl as defense minister, provided yet another level of control absent in most Latin American military establishments.⁸

However, Army General Raúl Castro has structured and crafted a doctrine and mission for the armed forces through a process of reorganization that attempts to guarantee a smooth succession of power in the event that his brother, Fidel is no longer the *maximum leader* due to death or incapacitation. Frank Mora further expands on this:

When in 1991 [Fidel] Castro stated that "one of the tasks of the armed forces is to help the economy of the country during the Special Period," it was clear that the future role of the post-Cold War, post-internationalist FAR had been defined. It was Raul Castro, however, who took over the process of reorganizing the FAR. His goals were to enhance the role and contribution of the military to the national economy and to reassert control of the military in the aftermath of the Ochoa case...Raul played a pivotal role in restructuring the economy and military, enhancing his profile and visibility (and that of the FAR) in an effort to

4. Frank Mora, "From Fidelismo to Raulismo: Civilian Control of the Military in Cuba," *Problems of Post-Communism*, 46:2, 1999, p. 25.

5. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, p. 80.

6. Mora, "From Fidelismo to Raulismo," p. 31.

7. Damián J. Fernández, "Historical Background: Achievements, Failures, and Prospects," in Jaime Suchlicki, ed. *The Cuban Military Under Castro*. (Coral Gables: University of Miami, 1989), p. 7.

8. Richard L. Millett, "From Triumph to Survival: Cuban Armed Forces in an Era of Transition," in Richard L. Millett and Michael Gold-Bliss, eds. *Beyond Praetorianism: The Latin American Military in Transition*. (Coral Gables: North-South Center, 1996), p.134.

secure the survival of the regime and his position as Fidel's heir apparent.⁹

While Paul Buchanan suggests,

The FAR leadership under Raúl Castro has been able to do five things simultaneously. First, they have been able to steer the Cuban economy more firmly in the direction of fundamental market-oriented reform, albeit with a heavy state managerial presence. Second, they have now made the FAR a direct source of employment and opportunity for the civilian population, which along with the mass citizen-soldier training provided under the strategic umbrella of the "War of All the People," has expanded the leading mobilizational role it has played since the early days of the revolutionary regime. Third they have reaffirmed the FAR's image as an institution that can get things done at a time when virtually all of Cuba's major institutions—the Communist Party, civilian bureaucracy, Peoples Popular Assemblies, etc.—are viewed with outright skepticism, when not disdain. Forth, they have committed the armed forces to their most far-reaching post-internationalist mission, one whose importance to national survival restores the military's institutionally prestige while simultaneously reaffirming its reason d'être. Finally, by assuming direct control of economic management, the FAR has distanced—and insulated—Fidel Castro and his chosen successors from criticism of the social costs, pace, scope and potential failures of the reform program.¹⁰

Not only has Raúl Castro set an institutional pattern of loyalty, but he has placed several *Raulistas* in key positions within the military and economic institutions to ensure total loyalty from these establishments, e.g. General Abelardo Colomé Ibarra, Ministry of Interior (MININT); General Ulises Rosales del Toro, Ministry of Sugar; and General Luis Pérez Róspide, Gaviota Enterprises, S.A.

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN POST-COMMUNIST STATES

A consensus of research (Espinosa 2001; Latell 2002; Mora 1999 and 2002) views the likelihood of the eventual transition in Cuba to be one of succession (from Fidel to his brother Raúl) rather than a democratic one in the short-term. However, it remains to be seen how the FAR will address the democratic change in a transition. They have the organizational structure to oversee and participate in such transition, but can they reorganize themselves to fit a democratic model?

The FAR have been in the past, are now, and may continue to be for the foreseeable future, the most cohesive, influential, prestigious, and strongest institution of the ruling system in Cuba. One important feature is their proven ability to survive, which gives them the great potential to play a role in any government project involving reforms, changes, or transition processes that may occur.¹¹

Post-totalitarian regimes realize that one of the key components of political democracy is civilian control of the military. Successor regimes, by coincidence or design, appear to rely on Huntington's theory that professionalism, as understood and practiced in Western democratic societies, renders the military politically neutral and an sterile servant of the legitimate state authorities. Toward this goal they emphasize three complementary, interrelated, and even overlapping strategies: depoliticization, departization, and democratization. A cursory review of civil-military relations in former Eastern bloc countries reveals that with the exception of the three Baltic republics, Soviet successor states have yet to achieve de-

9. Frank O. Mora, "A Comparative Study of Civil-Military Relations in Cuba and China: The Effects of Bingshang," *Armed Forces and Society*, 28:2, 2001, p.197.

10. Paul G. Buchanan, "The FAR and Cuban Society," in International Research 2000, Inc. *The Military and Transition in Cuba: Reference for Policy and Crisis Management* (Washington: Report prepared for the Department of Defense. March, 1995), p. III-4-1 and 2.

11. Humberto León, "Impact of the Economic Crisis on the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR)," in International Research 2000, Inc., *The Military and Transition in Cuba: Reference for Policy and Crisis Management* (Washington: Report prepared for the Department of Defense. March, 1995), p. III-6-3.

sirable levels of depoliticization, departization, and democratization in civil-military relations.¹²

It remains to be seen what path Cuba will take in a transition to democracy. James Burk has set out two theories of democracy:

- *liberal theory* argues that the first priority of the democratic state is to protect the rights and liberties of individual citizens; and
- *civic republican theory* contests the liberal notion that the first priority of the democratic state is to protect individual rights and liberties. It argues instead that priority should be placed on engaging citizens in the activity of public life.¹³

Will Cuba model its government based on elements of the 1940 Cuban Constitution as it has been suggested¹⁴ following a progressive view of individual rights?

Douglas Bland stresses, “If civil-military relations in emerging democracies are to be constructed from a western-liberal democratic regime of civil military relations, then this regime must be spelled out in explicit terms. Civil-military relations as practiced in each liberal democracy are based on cardinal principles, norms rules, decision-making procedures; a national regime that has evolved from the cultural, political, political, social, and military history of each state.”¹⁵

Moreover, there will be several transitional issues arising for the regime’s leadership and for the armed forces in a post-Castro Cuba. For example, Juan Car-

los Espinosa sets out four propositions regarding the armed forces in a post-Castro future:

- the FAR will have a central role in regime change or re-equilibration;
- the FAR is not a unitary actor and the Cuban regime is not monolith—factions and interest groups will emerge within the regime and the military;
- the current process of reform, including the (*sistema de perfeccionamiento empresarial—SPE*)¹⁶ has had its winners and losers, generating an undercurrent of jealousy and resentment fueled in part by the internalized values of egalitarianism and by the brazenness of nepotism, *socio-lismo*, and corruption; and
- the military’s involvement in non-traditional economic activities is a stabilizing element in the short-term for the regime, the FAR, and the national economy, but it may become a source of instability in the medium and longer terms.¹⁷

ARMED FORCES’ STRUCTURE, ROLE AND MISSION

As a result of the economic crisis of the early 1990s, the regime’s leadership faced the necessity of reducing and re-adjusting its total armed forces. In 1998, Cuba’s total armed forces were at 60,000, and by 2002 they had fallen to 46,000 (Figure 1). For 1998, the active army was at 38,000, and in 2002 at 35,000. Meanwhile, Cuba’s active navy (charged with the coastal defense of the island) fared worse in terms of personnel reductions: in 1998 it was at 5,000 and in 2002 at 3,000. Surprisingly, the air

12. Costas Danopoulos and Daniel Zirker, “Civil-Military Relations Theory in the Post Communist World,” *Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)*, Working Paper Series No. 38, 2002, p. 12.

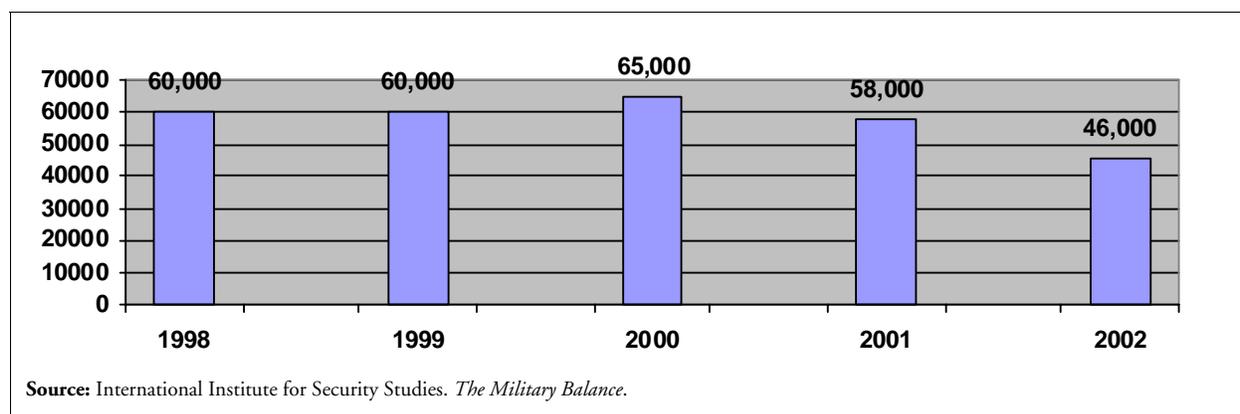
13. James Burk, “Theories of Democratic Civil-Military Relations,” *Armed Forces and Society*, 29:1, 2002, p. 9-10.

14. See Néstor Carbonell Cortina, “La Constitución de 1940: Simbolismo y Vigencia,” in *Cuba in Transition—Volume 7* (Washington: Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, 1987); Jorge A. Sanguinety, “Los nuevos debates sobre la constitución del 40,” *Cuba Futuro*, available at http://www.cubafuturo.org/Temas_Constitucionales/Nuevosdebates.pdf.

15. Douglas L. Bland, “Patterns in Liberal Democratic Civil-Military Relations,” *Armed Forces and Society*, 27: 4, 1999, p. 529.

16. See Armando F. Mastrapa III, “Soldiers and Businessmen: The FAR During the Special Period,” in *Cuba in Transition—Volume 10* (Washington: Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, 2000).

17. Juan Carlos Espinosa, “Vanguard of the State: The Cuban Armed Forces in Transition,” *Armed Forces and Society*, 48:6, 2001, p. 25.

Figure 1. Cuba: Total Armed Forces (1998–2002)

force exceeds the navy in active forces: 10,000 in 1998 and 8,000 by 2002.¹⁸

The navy (coast guard) has a handful of coastal boats to patrol a very vast coastal territory, and in 1998 their Cienfuegos submarine base was converted into a tourist facility.¹⁹ According to Brigadier General Rafael del Pino—the highest-ranking military officer to defect from Cuba—fuel shortages have caused the army to roll their tanks up hills and let gravity start them, and the air force has had to cannibalize its fleet for spare parts due to the engine’s maintenance expiration date.²⁰ The economic crisis has left the armed forces ill equipped and with shortages of their aged Soviet equipment. In a post-Castro Cuba, the armed forces must strengthen their naval forces to meet the challenges of future security concerns.

Will the armed forces role change in a post-Castro Cuba? Claude Welch and Arthur Smith define the role of the military as follows:

Social organizations are made up of structures (or institutions), which are patterns of interacting roles...Thus, for example a military organization is made up of roles and structures of roles...The mili-

tary does not exist in a vacuum...It is a part of the larger social system, and both affects and is affected by the roles and structures of other organizations.²¹

The Cuban armed forces share their role with other institutions. For example, the PCC was also charged with defending the homeland, as was the population through the doctrine of the War of All the People. The sharing aspect of the military’s role is evident in the National Defense Law (*Ley de la Defensa Nacional*):

The national defense corresponds to Cuban military doctrine. It is prepared and executed under the direction of the Cuban Communist Party as a superior guiding force in society and the State; and according to the decisions made within the limits of their respective abilities by the superior organs of Popular Power.²²

By dividing the responsibility of defense among institutions the regime reigned in the professionalism and autonomy of the FAR. The armed forces must take the central role again as the primary defense institution. In a post-Castro Cuba transitioning to a democracy, the FAR must take up its central role as the

18. International Institute for Security Studies. *The Military Balance* (Oxford University Press. 1997-2002).

19. *Cuban Armed Forces Review*, “Navy: Intel,” March 28, 1998, available at http://www.cubapolidata.com/cafr/cafr_navy.html.

20. Brigadier General Rafael Del Pino, Conversation, Winter 2002.

21. Claude E. Welch and Arthur K. Smith, *Military Role and Rule: Perspectives on Civil-Military Relations* (Belmont, California: Duxbury Press, 1974), p. 40.

22. Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular de la República de Cuba, *Ley de la Defensa Nacional*. December 21, 1994, Available at www.uh.cu/infogral/areasub/defensa/ldn.htm.

guardian of the state, constitution, civilian control and the individual rights and freedoms of citizens.

In the span of the Castro regime's existence, the FAR have seen their mission change. The military mission of the Cuban military has been to provide for external defense and to suppress internal challenges to government rule. The military doctrine of the FAR has long insisted that the national defense is, at root, a Cuban responsibility.²³

A mission that could be strengthened is enforcing the prevention of transshipment of narcotics in the Caribbean basin,²⁴ a problem that will pose a threat to a post-Castro Cuba. Apart from trading their own marijuana in the United States, some Caribbean countries have become important transshipment centers for South American cocaine, heroin, and marijuana bound for Europe and North America. Drug operations also have generated increased violence both political and nonpolitical.²⁵ Perhaps Cuba's navy and coast guard (restructured to a larger force), in cooperation with the United States, could address such a security concern and problem be facing both countries.

Another mission for the FAR could be the rapid mobilization and response to natural disasters occurring in Cuba. Hurricane Michelle, the most destructive hurricane in Cuba's history, battered the island in early November 2001, affecting 45 percent of the country's territory (eight provinces) and the homes of 53 percent of the population.²⁶ An expansion in the FAR's role in a civil disaster is possible by creating an air regiment²⁷ that not only would oversee the skies

of Cuba but quickly assist civil defense in an event of a weather disaster.

Finally, as Brian Latell suggests, "personnel at all levels should receive international training in counterterrorism and counter-narcotics missions that ought to be among the principal new preoccupations of the country's post-Castro armed forces."²⁸ The counterterrorism aspect is important in the event that political violence should arise in a transition to a democracy and its aftermath, should rely on such violence to challenge the new government.

CONCLUSION

Cuba's armed forces face many challenges in a post-Castro Cuba. First, their role and mission were changed to counter the professionalism and autonomy they developed through training and internationalist campaigns. To gain greater control of the military institution, the regime leadership under Raúl Castro decided to restructure the role and mission of the armed forces. The *Special Period* brought the armed forces into the economy in order to ensure the survivability of the state. Preparing the transition process, Raúl Castro turned to key loyalists and placed them in important positions within the state's and military's enterprises—enriching them and assuring their loyalty.

The defense role of the FAR was further diluted by adding the PCC and the population at large (through the doctrine of the WAP) as a counter-balance to any potential threat that the FAR may pose as a rival to the regime's leadership. The FAR's post-Castro role should be to take center stage as the primary defense institution. Its missions should also encompass an ar-

23. Jorge Domínguez, "Institutionalization and Civil-Military Relations in Cuba," *Cuban Studies*, 6:1, 1976, p. 42.

24. STRATFOR contends that U.S.-led crackdowns on Pacific coast and Caribbean smuggling routes have changed and Cuba could pose a strategic asset to smugglers exploiting a security vacuum with the genesis of a new government in Havana. See "Colombian Chaos Bridges Geopolitical Divides in South America," May 15, 2003, Available at www.stratfor.com.

25. Ivelaw L. Griffith, *Drugs and Security in the Caribbean: Sovereignty Under Siege* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), p. 8.

26. Orlando Oramas, "Michelle: The most destructive hurricane the island has ever seen," *Granma International Digital*, November 9, 2001, Available at www.granma.cu/ingles/noviem1/46lage-i.html.

27. General Rafael del Pino, Conversation. Winter 2002.

28. Brian Latell, "The Military in Cuba's Transition," *Cuba Transition Project*. University of Miami, August, 2002, p. 38.

ray of new security challenges from counter-narcotics to counter-terrorism.

However, the legacy of Fidel and Raúl Castro's civilian-military relations is the corrupting effect of the military in the economy. By tying the military to economic entrepreneurship, their institutional mission

has become the pursuit of profit, instead of military professionalism and preparedness. A new oligarchy has been created that will play a key role in any transition scenario and may have an effect on the democratic process of transition in the long-term.