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TWELVE MONKEYS: CUBAN NATIONAL DEFENSE AND THE MILITARY

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Cuban National Defense 
and the Military

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Introduction

There is little that may be written about the Cuban regime, other than about its very nature, that is not quickly contradicted by reality. At the same time, the Cuban leadership’s approach to the Lampedusa riddle is a lot of running in place and no real discontinuity. Which is actually more relevant? Is it possible to come to some sensible conclusions about contemporary Cuba? But readers beware: in Cuban politics anecdotes and events always suggest contradictory patterns. Discussion of matters present and future requires that these contradictions be considered jointly. This is what a brilliant essay of Antonio Benítez-Rojo alerts us to when he dwells on “a country that repeats itself.”

Taking this warning to heart, this essay has a very modest aspiration: to describe how some strategic principles that are central in the thinking of Cuban leaders create contradictions affecting national defense policy and civil-military relations in Cuba. Implicit is the desire that the exercise may be helpful to anyone forced to speculate about this topic and/to a more general audience interested in a deeper and more informed understanding of Cuban national security and of the defense doctrine that serves its basic purposes. The objective is a clear statement identifying the principal features of national defense and civil-military relations in Cuba, and of how they relate to one another.
Characteristics of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR)

We are certain of a number of things concerning the Cuban military. Perhaps most fundamental among these is that the cyclical evolution of the Cuban defense posture is a direct result of the national security of the Cuban regime having been conceived to maximize the likelihood of the continuation in power of the ruling group. This is not just a matter of the perpetuation of a Party-State that has somehow managed to survive the collapse of Leninism. There was a revolutionary army before there was a party of the revolution and the main mission of that army, or armies as we shall see below, is to guarantee the survival of the revolution, not the Party. In Mao's thinking "the Party controls the gun." In the practice of the Cuban leadership, everything is controlled by everything else.

As for the cyclical or involutional dynamics of Cuban defense policy and strategic thinking, the metaphor insinuated by the title refers to the dilemmas confronting any analyst imprisoned by my topic. Basically, you resolve one riddle and are able to clarify a grid of forces, calculating internal and external balances, only to see this dissolve in front of you. Then, in a new effort, you try to configure a substitute grid, with a new correlation of forces, only to see it slip through your fingers once again, and be substituted by a new version of a configuration that you had thought obsolete. This is tedious and often frustrating work, not likely to be lightened up by the music of Astor Piazzola.

From Rebel to Revolutionary. Although at best inaccurate, the official Cuban interpretation of an insurrection that became a revolution has always been predicated on the triumph of a peasant army. What is important about this is that, since it was present at the creation, the Rebel Army became the prime beneficiary of the official Cuban Revolutionary myth and, by the will of the founders of the new regime,
received a political education based on that myth (Judson 1984: 18-19, 149-150, 177-183, 210-219, chapter 9). Along the way, the supposedly peasant Rebel Army became a revolutionary army of people of humble origins.

Some basic tenets of Cuban military thinking are at the core of that myth. One is that the Cuban armed forces are the heirs of a revolutionary tradition going back to the independence struggles of 1868 and 1895. Another is that the moral strength of those armed forces is a spirit of uncompromised principled action that is the key to victory. According to the chief of the Cuban Navy,

"It was this strength that gave us victory, that enabled us to defend it, that brought an entire people into the ranks of the revolution ... born from the very roots of our history ... [even] amid the difficult circumstances of which we are all aware, and I say this alongside all of my comrades: We will never stray a single millimeter from this line and this revolutionary tradition!"¹

A doctrine based on defense of national interest at any cost implies that the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) are practically inseparable from the contemporary Cuban state. In addition, one vital element in the recruitment of officers and military leaders is that loyalty and revolutionary commitment count more than other individual qualities. This doctrine says that, as suggested by the late Camilo Cienfuegos, "[the] FAR are the Cuban people in uniform," which implies that the rank and file of the FAR cannot very easily think of themselves as anything but the army of a revolutionary state. This is what the historic leadership of the revolutionary regime has trumpeted all along and what is taught in Cuban military academies (Domínguez 1986: 272-275; Judson 1984; Vellinga 1976: 252-253).

But the disposition and availability of organized force in Cuba is not completely square with this interpretation. The profile of Cuba's armed forces, their actual tactical disposition, and order of battle appear to have been designed to serve

¹ Speech by Rear Admiral Pedro M. Pérez Betancourt at the Armed Forces Military Academy on the 33rd anniversary of the landing of the Granma, 2 December 1989 (FBIS-LAT, 90-004: 16-20).
the security needs of the Cuban leadership first, ahead of even those of the regime itself.\textsuperscript{2} Cuba's strategic profile seems predicated on a design in which no one has a monopoly of organized violence, in which the armed forces and the party have sought to maintain separate spheres of autonomy, and in which the deterrent against external aggression is a prospect of total war, because Cuban leaders mean it literally when they aver that their greatest defense asset is the people. In civil-military terms, applying these doctrinal principles to domestic matters has resulted in very negative consequences that ultimately compromise national security.

**More Fidelista than Revolutionary.** Above everything, Cuba's armed forces are revolutionary and, at any one time, the components or segments of those forces charged with the more sensitive missions are those that have shown the greatest revolutionary commitment-- be it the militia, when the Rebel Army became suspect; the FAR as a whole or any one of its components, when, after 1965, the internal insurgency had been subdued and the Interior Ministry kept tabs on everyone; the MININT or its Special Troops, to spearhead sensitive politico-military missions abroad; the reserve and the production and defense brigades, as redundant forces that may be utilized as a reserve against external aggression and/or to thwart internal uprisings in the post-Angola environment; or the rapid response brigades or the Frontier Guards, to shield the National Revolutionary Police and the regular army from having to confront a mobilized mass of enraged citizens. In this case, redundancy is built into the defensive scheme not only to provide additional strength but also guard against the possibility of internal uprisings of any kind.

\textsuperscript{2} One may debate the degree to which the historic leadership consciously separate the two in actual practice. As a matter of fact, no such distinction is made in their speeches between the revolution, socialism, fatherland, the Party, Fidel, Raúl, and the armed forces. There may or may not be a separation in the minds of those further down the chain of command. For illustration see Baloyra (1989).
The armed forces played a central role in the creation of the new order (Fernández 1989: 5-8). The Rebel Army of the incipient revolutionary state ceased to exist relatively quickly and was replaced by the FAR in the early sixties. Subsequently, FAR itself underwent at least three major reorganizations, beginning in the mid-sixties, when they were given the profile of a professional military force, but too large in size and too involved in domestic economic production; another in the early seventies, to increase their professionalism and combative readiness; and the other, in the late eighties and early nineties, to downsize and adjust them to the conditions of the "special period of peace" resulting from the disappearance of the Socialist community, the subsequent loss of ideological referents and of the major trading partner and political ally, and to the new security requirements.

All of these reorganizations may be interpreted from different angles, including the need to institutionalize the armed forces, the need to accommodate to Soviet demands, the degree of conflict with the United States, and the material resources available. But none of these individually nor all of them together eliminate an unexplained residual requiring of the additional element of the convenience of the leadership, in order to account for otherwise obscure aspects.

The Rebel Army-FAR transition was not a smooth discontinuity. Following the designation of Raúl Castro as head of the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, appointed on 16 October 1959, Major Huber Matos, commander of the Camagüey garrison, sent a latter to Fidel Castro protesting Communist infiltration in the Rebel Army and demanding an explanation. Matos was incarcerated and sentenced to a long prison term.3 Ostensibly, the leadership interpreted that episode as an attempt to use the Rebel Army against the revolution. This confirmed Fidel

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3 The crisis was the boiling point of growing discontent within the Rebel Army over the presence and influence of elements of the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), the traditional Communist party of Cuba, within its own ranks.
Castro's worst fears about a standing army "which, at an inopportune time, could easily have developed into a semiindependent power bloc" (Vellinga 1976: 247). As a result of this, creation of the militias was accelerated and revolutionary tribunals were reestablished (Pérez, Jr. 1976: 261). The Rebel Army was relegated to a mobile reserve. But Che Guevara's concept of an "armed democracy," which he had proposed since January 1959, was not put in practice. Instead, the National Revolutionary Militias (MNR) were launched from the Department of Instruction of the Rebel Army. Therefore, neither a people-in-arms model nor a professional fighting force were adopted fully since neither suit the interests of the very top leadership (Suárez 1987: 9-10; Vellinga 1976: 247).

"The organization of the militias was further promoted as a counterbalance to the regular army, and the budget and size of the latter were reduced. By the beginning of 1960, the revolutionary militias had gained in strength and were— at least on paper— as heavy in military "weight" as the regular armed forces" (Vellinga 1976: 247).

The militia's predominance was relatively short-lived. Their enthusiasm posed serious problems of organization. Although the militias gave a good account of themselves in it, the battle of Bay of Pigs brought home the lesson that the security of the revolutionary state would also have to depend on a professional army. Therefore, between April 1961 and August 1963, a period of feverish organizational activity, the Cuban defense structures grew more complex as the Western, Central and Eastern armies, the Anti-Aircraft Defense and Revolutionary Air Force (DAAFAR), the counter-insurgency units (LCB), new military ranks, five deputy ministries, the Ministry of the Interior (MININT), the Máximo Gómez Superior Military School, and the Revolutionary Navy were created and military conscription was instituted (Suárez 1987: 10-11).

Apparently, this tilted the balance decisively in favor of a professional military force, as the more promising elements of the militia was absorbed into the regular ranks, the remainder organized as a Popular Defense, and, in August 1965, civilian
units turned in their weapons by order of the FAR Minister (Vellinga 1976: 248). But the incorporation of the militias into the regular army was tumultuous, the size of the army was allowed to grow to the point of being dysfunctional, and the rank and file were quickly incorporated into too many domestic pursuits, notably agricultural production (Suárez 1987: 11). This clear political interference with corporate exclusivity and professionalism may suggest a similarity with the Red Army of the People's Republic of China, but this really is superficial, because Cuban military chiefs became party bosses and, according to FAR Minister Raúl Castro, "the orders of the chief is the law embodying the will and command of the nation." This principle was upheld until recently.

The transition to a smaller and more professional army in the early seventies went smoother, but not without incident as it led to the deployment of Cuban troops overseas and to the creation of a new major role for the FAR (Domínguez 1986: 275). Overall troop strength was cut from more than 300,000 down to between 100,000 and 120,000 in mid-decade; new and more sophisticated equipment was assimilated; ranks and hierarchies were more clearly delineated and brought in line with standard practice in other armies (in late 1973 and again in November 1976); the Youth Labor Army [Ejército Juvenil de Trabajo or EJT] was created, thereby liberating the less malleable recruits for productive work and saving the rest for more professional pursuits (August 1973); and the system of military education was tightened up (Domínguez 1986: 269-275). The most glaring consequences of this was that the massive but rudimentary army of the 1960s, very much involved in domestic production, became the largest military machine in Latin America (Suárez

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1987: 18). But that formidable military machine, that more professionalized force, did not stay around for long; it was deployed in Africa.\(^5\)

The more recent downsizing coincided with one of the most traumatic episodes in the history of the regime, involving the demise of a soldiers' soldier, one of only five heroes of the Republic of Cuba. The trial and execution of General Arnaldo Ochoa was a very serious instance of elite conflict. The “Ochoa case” is really a convenient shorthand for a wider and much more complex pattern of conflict involving MINFAR-MININT contradictions, official Cuban complicity in drug smuggling into the United States, and the perennial game of reequilibration of the central command group or historic leadership vis-à-vis real or suspected antagonists. In addition, there were some substantial internal reaccommodations before these most recent changes were made.

The Cuban leadership reactivated the militias in 1980 under the rubric of Militias of Territorial Troops (MTT). This occurred well before the collapse of the regimes of real socialism and of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The MTTs were created by a regime whose confidence was badly shaken by the Mariel exodus of 1980. The move coincided and was legitimized by the belligerent rhetoric of the incoming Reagan administration, but at the same time served to gird them for the security consequences of the need to implement economic austerity in the mid-eighties. The creation of the MTTs was apparently against the will of the FAR, in what was a major change in overall strategic posture, the concept of the “war of all the people” (WAP) was proclaimed (Suárez 1987: 25-40). Therefore, before the “Africa Corps” returned home in 1990-1991, major changes in strategic disposition

\(^5\) According to Raúl Castro, 377,003 Cuban soldiers, including 56,622 officers served in Angola between the beginnings of “Operación Carlota,” on or about 7 November 1975, and 25 May 1991, when Angolan President José Eduardo Dos Santos bid farewell at the Luanda airport to the last Cuban military contingent. These figures suggest that an important number of reservists were sent to Angola to accompany the regular army. See the 26 May 1991 speech delivered by Raúl Castro at the Cacahual Mausoleum, to mark the return of the last group of Cuban troops from Angola (FBIS-LAT, 91-105: 1-4).
and doctrine had taken place. Incidentally, compared to the magnitude of other Cuban military ceremonies, the Angolan veterans did not march in a massive ticker-tape parade. Instead, there were a series of small ceremonies conducted at the municipal level to honor the returnees, many of whom were already out of service by that time.

As a side bar, it bears emphasizing that the Ochoa crisis put to rest the interpretation that there were no factions within FAR and that the fused or multiple role hypotheses (LeoGrande 1978) were satisfactory explanations accounting for the absence of factionalism. Instead, what the Ochoa crisis revealed that, as the more astute observers had anticipated, conflict did not occur neatly along the civil-military divide but, instead, involved rival civil-military coalitions. The Ochoa affair also demonstrated that the historic power bloc remained hegemonic within the revolutionary coalition. But that power bloc found reason to renew its vigilance and build up redundancies around the downsized army once its African adventure had come to an end.

As for these more recent changes, they had their technical and political components. Regular troop strength was once again reduced, to about 120,000 active and 350,000 reserve; some of the equipment utilized by the FAR and provided by the Soviets was received and assimilated; a massive program of training and outfitting was undertaken for the MTT; the FAR was reengaged in agricultural work, seeking to provide self-sufficiency for the armed forces and, possibly, a surplus for the civilian population; training was scaled down to maintaining basic infantry skills; much of the heavy equipment was stored underground or cannibalized; and the bulk of the EJT is now permanently dedicated to agricultural production (Millett 1993: 5-7; Montes 1993: 20-22).

The more political aspects involve FAR officers heavily into the tourism sector and some productive activities outside agriculture, in which Western management
techniques and economic incentives are utilized. What makes this "political" is that
the work ethic and alleged superior results obtained by military enterprises are
proffered to the rest of the society as paragons of what can be achieved without
renouncing socialist principles, as an examples worth imitating. This reedition of the
"civic soldier" mode described by Jorge Domínguez some time ago is, therefore, one
aspect of civil-military relations in which the hegemonic group controlling the Party-State utilizes army personnel to tilt the balance of change in the direction of a
minimalist policy and an ill-disguised state capitalism. Also political in implication
is recruiting civilian labor into the construction of a vast network of underground
tunnels, thereby fomenting at atmosphere of imminent aggression that may justify
a militarization of the economy; creating an association of revolutionary veterans that
includes FAR and MININT veterans, and LCB, Bay of Pigs and internationalist
fighters; upholding the "war of all the people" as the strategic cornerstone of Cuban
national security; and, ever since the Ochoa affair, a chastised MININT under the
jurisdiction of the FAR.

Straddling the politico-military divide are some of the strong features of the
WAP doctrine: heavy involvement of militia and BPD units in defense, made
manifest in maneuvers during recent years; a mix of conventional and irregular
tactics; authority conferred upon the Cuban president to declare states of internal
emergency without the concurrence of the National Assembly of Popular Power
(ANPP); the country being divided into a grid of small defense zones, each under the
supervision of a defense council headed by the most senior member of the PCC in the
area; and approximately fifty thousand BPD units of about 40 to 50 lightly armed

In a nutshell, this WAP blueprint for defense readiness goes well beyond and,
to a degree, interferes with the preparations that may be undertaken anticipating a
foreign invasion. It clearly provides for measures for parrying an internal blow,
regardless of its nature, and on being able to count on an adequate tactical mix to blunt it. One problem with this WAP blueprint is not that the yearly maneuvers are too expensive to afford, particularly in conditions of extreme economic hardship. There are a number of ways in which one may cut costs. The Cuban revolutionary military have always believed that the national defense cannot be improvised. In Fidel Castro's own words, "It is better for us to mobilize one hundred times and have nothing happen, than for something to happen and finds us demobilized." This may be wasteful but not totally irrational, at least from their standpoint. But Raúl Castro recently invited civilians and military to think of how a war economy can contribute to defense and development at the same time. In May of this year, Decree #205 established a series of directives so that economic entities and social institutions may prepare to guarantee, during peace time, the fulfillment of service and production plans that have been anticipated for exceptional situations. These directives are now part of the country's planning system. Therefore, although at one level the military institution may be contributing to evolve a form of state capitalism, these defensive measures— which appear to be carbon copies of North Vietnamese local tactics for contested territories—do not have much chance of working out in actual practice. Instead, they are quite likely to interfere with the gradual evolution of a market economy; they may help impose through national defense reasons what cannot be defended on grounds of economic rationality serving the national interest, and they

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6 Featured in fifteen-minute FAR documentary aired by Tele Rebelde on December 1, 1990 (FBIS-LAT, 90-232: 12).

7 On 30 January 1996, in comments following Central Army defense exercises, in which he praised FAR's for (1) contributing to the miracle of preserving the country's defensive capacity and (2) consolidating the WAP strategy and its contribution to the country's economic effort (Tele Rebelde: 31 January 1996).

8 Granma, 16 May 1996.
may contribute to worsen an economic crisis that is probably the main threat to the security of the regime at this time.\(^9\)

The use of irregular forces, the militia reserve, and the BPD in the defense of large cities, as in June 1996 in the so-called "bilateral exercises" practicing the defense of the cities of Havana and Santiago de Cuba, seems to contradict the mixed tactics of the WAP. Supposedly, these tactics call for the use of regular FAR contingents to blunt any initial thrust and inflict heavy casualties, and then fall back on an irregular war of attrition in which the aggressor must confront the resistance of the majority of the population, orchestrated through unconventional tactics. Ostensibly, by committing the contingent that would fight the "total war" (the latter) to an early engagement one is either raising the deterrence value against external aggression, playing on international public opinion, as has been practiced by Cuban diplomacy for thirty-six years, to accumulate "moral force," or one is anticipating that this deterrence value is not a factor since the conflict is internal and every available element must be engaged and thrown into a civil war type of conflict.

Therefore, even within the parameters of their standard practice of nonproportional responses to threats, the more recent tactical displays of the updated strategy of the WAP go well beyond what may be reasonably expected by a small nation that refuses to rely on anything except its own resources to deter external aggression. This version of WAP seems designed to protect the leadership, not the nation, at any cost.

**A Revolution with Several Armies.** From the foregoing, it is evident that for the largest part of their existence, basically from 1960 through the early seventies and from 1980 through the present, the FAR have been shaded by other massive military

\(^9\) It must not be forgotten that, anticipating an era of economic austerity, the Cuban president launched an "economic war of all the people" in the mid eighties.
organizations. This means that, regardless public acknowledgments that FAR was not a bourgeois army and that it did not need to be policed by commissars, except for 1959 and for the balance of the seventies (until May 1980, to be exact), the FAR have not been the only army of the Cuban people. They have been a component of several redundant layers of the “people in uniform.”

That there were other armies suggests a defense doctrine that does not confide in any one force guaranteeing security by itself, without the support or assistance, in reality, the counterbalance, of others. This implies that Cuba's similarity with that other revolutionary army, the Zahal of Israel, is also superficial. In the Israeli context, given the substance of external threats and the undisputed loyalty of the armed forces to a legitimate state, subjective control is more than enough to keep the Zahal obedient. It is an army totally focused on external defense. In the Cuban case, it is a revolutionary army, with several missions, implicitly kept in check by other forces.

According to most observers, since early 1960 the militias had become the more important military organization, were being used to resocialize important segments of the population and to keep it in state of permanent mobilization, and would later be used as a first line of defense against internal uprisings in Central Cuba and against an invasion by counterrevolutionary forces (Pérez Jr. 1976: 261-262; Vellinga 1976: 247). In other words, from the very beginning the Cuban army has not had a monopoly of the use of organized violence at the service of the state. Instead, there have been all kinds of different layers and branches of the defense establishment that while theoretically linked and subordinated to the MINFAR, are capable of responding on their own to an armed challenge from within or without. On top of that, they can now be directly subordinated to local Party authority, by a unilateral decision of the Cuban president.
Plowshares into Swords. Redundancy and disproportionate response are also programmed for internal security purposes as well. The Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) utilized the foundational myth to evolve a mystique of obedient efficaciousness which they used to become the pivotal actor in the reorganization of the Cuban state in 1959-1962.10 From very early on, the Cuban approach to socialist development has been very militaristic, even jingoistic, to the point of evolving a discourse suffused with military vocabulary to describe government plans in terms of "campaigns," "battles," and "wars" against real and imagined obstacles created by ignorance and underdevelopment.

"... efforts to bind the Rebel Army to the sierra leadership received considerable attention. The theme of struggle as a continuum with the Sierra Maestra dominated government programs as efforts were made to fasten the sierra consciousness on to the military ... The invocation of the sierra experience pervaded government programs" (Pérez, Jr. 1976: 263-264).

The style of decision-making and implementation that emerged from these conscious efforts by the leadership has merited different labels, including the "Moncada assault mentality" (González 1974: chapter 5), “the guerrilla mentality” (Karol 1970: 451-476).

"... The Rebel Army introduced the organization, the method, the rhetoric, and the administrative expertise of the armed forces into the larger polity" (Pérez Jr. 1976: 267, 269).

This is familiar territory and this topic need not be entertained at any further length.

But I would like to emphasize that much of the blame for the consequences of the classical fidelista style of decision-making is a result of, first, the militaristic mentality of the leadership, and, second, as a result of this, the application of simplistic and unsuitable methods to problems requiring of a different optic and of designating unqualified but trusted military leaders to implement such strategies.

10 Enshrined in the motto: "Comandante en Jefe, ordene!"
Much has been written on what this supposedly reveals about Cuban national character or about the originality, informality, creativity, and vigor of the revolution. Be that as it may, all I want to say here is that this reveals the Cuban regime as Sparta, not Athens. In addition, and despite official claims to the contrary, many of the shortcomings of the Cuban regime imputable to design and execution lay squarely at the feet of the armed forces. Their obedient efficaciousness was not enough to solve the problems of Cuban agriculture in the sixties, culminating in the disastrous sugar harvest of 1970. How could this possibly suffice to create a competitive tourist sector, a more efficient agriculture, and trail-blazing industrial enterprises in the nineties? Which armed forces are we talking about here? Continued utilization of the EJT in agricultural pursuits may produce some food and keep some unruly youth entertained, but cannot possibly be the key resource in Cuban agricultural productivity. Their obedience, work ethic, and loyalty may make retired and reserve elements of FAR, as well as PCC members, more reliable employees in the tourist sector but their “revolutionary commitment” cannot make up for their lack of expertise in the industry. Stretched to the limit, therefore, obedient efficaciousness may contribute to aggravate domestic problems and ultimately compromise the security of the regime.

Revolutionary Professionals: The Party and the Gun. As a revolutionary army, on the question of civilian supremacy, the supposition has been that the FAR stand somewhere in between the proletarian, mass line Maoist “Party-controls-the-gun” model (Jordan 1980: 485-486), and the “instrument-of-nation-building” of a garrison state Israeli model (Perlmutter 1980: 495; 504-505) model. The FAR have consistently presented themselves as “the people in uniform” and have made every effort to demonstrate that they are the armed forces of the Cuban people. This had become a feature of the regime long before René Dumont discovered that “an
increasingly militarized agriculture [was being directed] from a national command post," that the Che Guevara Brigade was clearing land in "a line of march roughly paralleling that of the rebel columns ten years before," that "clearing tactics were most brutal," that "all important posts [were being] entrusted to the Army," and that this amounted "to a genuine takeover of a faltering socialist agriculture, by the military" (Dumont 1970: 417-419).

Concerning the Maoist referent, interpreting the FAR's obedience is complicated by the fact that Fidel Castro is chief of state and government, ostensibly a civilian category; first secretary of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), the other long-lasting revolutionary institution in the Cuban regime; more than commander-in-chief, as demonstrated by his competence in military affairs; and a charismatic figure. Until he passes from the scene, therefore, we cannot make a definitive judgment on whether the FAR are obedient to a civilian president, a party secretary, their own commander-in-chief, or "undefeated" leader. If anything the element of personal loyalty has been reinforced in recent years, as witnessed by Raúl Castro's admission, on the occasion of the June 1996 Encounter on General Tactics of the FAR, that the systematic study of the politico-military thought of the Commander-in-Chief was being emphasized. In addition, the FAR Minister reported that Cuban armed forces now had the highest number of party militants in all its history. Therefore, subjective controls are being tightened up as well.

FAR were an institution long before the Party deserve its name in actuality. As a matter of fact, the state and the official party emerged from the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR).

"... Army officers appropriated increasing authority over a variety of government departments at ministerial and vice-ministerial levels, including Industry, Transportation, Interior, and Education... The authority of the sierra military command was further underwritten in the

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11 Granma, 8 June 1996: 4-5.
composition of the new Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC). Military leaders dominated the strategic sectors of the Party. Army commanders were singularly pre-eminent on the Central Committee. At the time of its organization, 70 of the 103 members held commissions in the armed forces" (Pérez Jr., 1976: 267, 269).

The PCC did not hold its first congress until 1975, that is, sixteen long years after the revolutionary triumph. During that time, and until the late eighties, the Party was not an effective check on the army. From an institutional standpoint, the only rival institution was the MININT, deeply resented by Raúl Castro and his immediate entourage. Revolutionary instructors were resisted and neutralized, and largely put in place by the so-called “unified command” principle (*mando único completo*) in which military unit chiefs were also the party leaders and the political instructors were there to help augment the prestige of the chiefs (Suárez 1987). This has apparently been reversed by the “war of all the people” and attendant changes in tactical disposition discussed above. It is obvious that the PCC now has more influence over the FAR than ever before, but short of the domination that the FAR is actually exercising over MININT. Nevertheless, the new configuration is still unsettled.

As revolutionary soldiers, FAR members have lived with a certain murkiness in the separation between military and civilian spheres (Albright 1980: 573-574).

“There was no real issue of civilian control over the armed forces in these early years of the revolution. Those who held administrative control were the armed forces. . .performing the functions usually performed by the Communist Party in the initial phase of a socialist revolution” (LeoGrande 1978: 279).

Jorge Domínguez has described the outcome of this institutional setting as a “civic soldier syndrome,” in which,

“Cuba has been ruled in large part by military men who govern large segments of both military and civilian life, who are held up as paragons to both soldiers and civilians, who are the bearers of the revolutionary tradition and ideology, who have politicized themselves by absorbing the normas and organization of the Communist party, and who have educated themselves to become professional. . . Their civilian and their military lives are fused” (Domínguez 1986: 263).
But it does not follow that the FAR have never been subject to internal factionalism nor that they have always been one happy family. We have already commented on the Ochoa affair and its implications. There are also the discrepancies between fidelistas and raulistas, in a terminology made famous by Edward González, concerning military professionalism and FAR-PCC relations. What I want to emphasize in closing is that the detectable and the implicit faults have been controlled, and that whatever military dissidents there may be do not seem to have the means or the opportunity to engage in anything unless a cataclysmic event comes to pass.

Recapitulation. Cuban defense doctrine insists on self-reliance assisted by international moral force, disproportional preparedness and response, and vigilant distrust. Cuban strategic thinking emphasizes the importance of rigid adherence to uncompromising principle, subordination of the economy, multiple missions for the professional military, and constant counter-balancing of the Party and the military, as well as the military with other means of organized violence.

As the oldest, most successful, and relatively autonomous institution within the Party-State, the Cuban FAR have enjoyed a degree of identification with the regime unmatched by any other institution. As the cradle of many other arms of the Cuban state, including the Party, the FAR have been relied on to carry out a number of special missions, whether internal counterinsurgency, the construction of the Party, the projection of power overseas, or more recently, the development of the tourist industry.

In carrying out these multiple missions, and in accepting tasks that clearly infringed on their corporate exclusivity, the FAR have contributed to two clearly insidious and detrimental trends. One is the not-to-subtle militarization of the society. By introducing norms, routines, and practices that could only be justified
within an armed institution, the military contributed to a jingoistic and short-sighted approach to development that could not possible yield fruitful results. At worst, this produced "experiments" like the infamous Units of Military Assistance to Production (UMAP), which in the late sixties forcefully recruited "deviants" (primarily religious believers, hippies, homosexuals, and intellectuals), put them in work camps, and subjected them to infrahuman conditions (Clark 1990: 203-204; Karol 1970: 395); or the really wild exploits of the Che Guevara Trailblazing Brigade in 1970. At best, whatever the successes that the FAR may have achieved, they cannot possibly be transmitted to a civilian setting, much less to the economy without major negative consequences.

The other insidious and detrimental trend is closely related to this, namely, the fact that in the subtle struggle to justify and implement suitable models of socio-economic development, the availability of a disciplined, obedient, and poorly-paid "reserve labor army," whether the EJT or the reserves or the FAR themselves, may always be utilized to defend "bureaucratic centralism" and undercut and sabotage reform attempts (Fitzgerald 1989).

In other words, the utilization of the FAR in domestic production has not been a harbinger of reform but an extra security measure to guarantee minimum results to a beleaguered leadership. FAR is not sent into agriculture or to administer hotels to spearhead reform but to guarantee a minimum of food supply without having to make political concessions to reformers and to guarantee a flow of foreign exchange directly into state coffers. In both cases this is for purposes of bolstering not undermining the regime. But in neither case does this obedient efficaciousness of FAR yield truly satisfactory results; it did not to do so before and is not likely to now.

Even though the Cuban defense establishment was shown to have been other than one happy family in the summer of 1989, the Ochoa affair demonstrated that it is extremely difficult for active duty officers to get to the point of organizing a
cabal that may pose a challenge to the historic leadership. Long before any loose group defined by a common interest is able to articulate anything, this is likely to be detected and neutralized. In addition, there is no recorded instance of a socialist or a Latin American army rebelling during the lifetime of its founder. Therefore whether one thinks of the FAR as a Latin American or a socialist armed force, the precedent is that those armies do not normally move against their creators.

As for speculation of the conditions under which a political challenge or cataclysmic event may produce a rupture in the cohesion of the Cuban armed forces and lead them into disobedience, insubordination, and violently confronting the historic bloc, the evidence is still scanty and the precedent is that they would remain obedient, at least through the early stages of such an episode. Although perpetrated by some of the most loyal and unthinking elements of the “raised sword” of the Cuban state, the shooting of people trying to leave the country from villages in the Havana littoral, occasional killings of unarmed civilians by agents of the National Revolutionary Police, and the killings of individuals trying to steal fruit or agricultural produce from state farms and cooperatives by peasant patrols have generated incidents of violence and protest that did not take on national proportions. The worst incident to date, the popular disturbances of August 1994 at the Malecón waterfront and in the old city in Havana. The August riot was fueled in part by outrage at the sinking of the “13th of March” tugboat, a vessel which was commandeered by Cubans trying to escape the island and in which 41 people lost their lives, including women and children. The disturbance failed to maintain its momentum or sustain itself over the course of several days.

In short, nothing has challenged the regime at the level of the street that has forced it to engage in sustained bloody repression over a number of days, to the point of having to call regular army units to control the situation. That remains a possibility to which we cannot attach a probability. What we know is that the regime
has not vacillated in using violence against Cubans, as it did when, on 24 February 1996, it shot down two Cessna airplanes piloted by the exile humanitarian group "Brothers to the Rescue" in international waters.

The regime had a very mixed bag of motives to engage in that particular action but what matters for present purposes is that Cuban pilots gleefully followed an order to shoot down unarmed civilian aircraft. So there you have it, a corps of revolutionary professionals, engaged in projects well beyond its competence, obedient in their purported efficaciousness, but never completely trusted. In the country that "repeats itself," the military may not, after all, prove to be the saviors. They may not be the key to change the regime, but they are not likely to be able to save it either.
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Enrique Baloyra is Professor of Government at the Graduate School of International Studies, University of Miami. Dr. Baloyra's writings and research have primarily dealt with the question of democratization in Latin America, whether at the level of the masses or the elite. His publications include Political Behavior in Venezuela, co-authored (1976); Electoral Mobilization and Public Opinion: The Venezuelan Campaign of 1973 (1976), Political Attitudes in Venezuela, (1979); El Salvador in Transition, an academic best-seller, (1982); Iberoamérica en los Años 80, co-authored, (1982); Comparing New Democracies: Transition and Consolidation in Mediterranean Europe and the Southern Cone, (1987); Lecciones Para Demócratas en Transición (1987);and co-edited Conflict and Change in Cuba (1993). Dr. Baloyra has published articles in the Journal of Latin American Studies, American Political Science Review, and other academic publications. His most recent research has focused on the politics of change in his native Cuba.

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This is the fourth paper to be published as part of the CSA Occasional Paper Series. It was originally delivered at the CSA's First Annual Symposium on Cuba held on October 18, 1996, at the James L. Knight Center in Miami.

The first paper entitled, “Political Pilgrimage to Cuba, 1959-1995,” by Irving Louis Horowitz, began as a lecture at the Graduate School of International Studies of the University of Miami. The second published work was an article on Spanish-Cuban relations by Joaquín Roy of the University of Miami, titled “España, la Unión Europea y Cuba: la evolución de una relación especial a una política de gestos y de presión” [ “Spain, the European Union, and Cuba: The Evolution from a Special Relationship to a Policy of Gestures and Pressures”]. The most recent paper was Antonio Jorge’s “Methodology, Ideology, and the Economy: The Dismal State of Cuban Studies.” All three are still available.

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