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The Growing Influence of Cuba's Military Establishment

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THE GROWING INFLUENCE OF CUBA'S MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT

For more than a year, the Cuban military establishment has been increasingly involved in activities normally considered outside the realm of national defense. The Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (MINFAR) under Raul Castro is gradually assuming a major role in fields of responsibility formerly reserved for the ministries of Education, Sugar Industry, and Construction, as well as other government agencies. There are even signs that MINFAR is intruding into the domain of the powerful Ministry of the Interior, but evidence to this effect is circumstantial so far.

Fidel Castro may have decided to shift many nonmilitary responsibilities to the armed forces because the success of his brother's ministry in molding a respectable military force contrasts sharply with the repeated failures of other governmental institutions. He probably believes that the gradual diminution of his popularity must be countered by increased regimentation and discipline if Cuba is to overcome its serious economic problems. The armed forces constitute the most convenient and efficient mechanism for achieving this goal.

Military Influence in the Party

The military establishment is linked closely to the Cuban Communist Party. The formation of the party in the armed forces was completed by January 1967, long before party cells had been established throughout other branches of the government. Military men comprise approximately two thirds of the party central committee,* and six of the eight members of the central committee's

**The exact number of military officers on the central committee is not clear; when the 100-man central committee was formed in October 1965, 67 military officers were included in its membership. Of these, at least three have been killed while on subversive missions abroad and one was stripped of his position for immoral behavior. Two other military officers may have been named in late 1967 to fill the vacancies.*

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political bureau hold the rank of major, the highest rank in the Cuban military service.

In January 1968, shortly before the purge of the Anibal Escalante microfaction of the party, Major Jose Ramon Machado Ventura was relieved of his duties as minister of public health and named "political bureau delegate" to Matanzas Province. There was no mention of what his responsibilities would be nor was there any explanation for the creation of the "political bureau delegate" system. It soon became apparent, however, that the "delegate" functioned as the representative of the political bureau and, as such, wielded considerable power. Other appointments were made for differing regions or specialties in the months that followed and by 1 November 1968 a total of seven had been named.

Significantly, all are military men and all shared in the Sierra Maestra campaign against former president Batista. The "delegates" seem to operate as troubleshooters, searching for ways to bypass economic bottlenecks and to increase production. Their authority is supreme within their venues. Major Juan Almeida, for example, in his capacity as "political bureau delegate for construction," outranks Minister of Construction Darias Rodes and the various other officials involved in the construction industry.

The system of "political bureau delegates" is Fidel Castro's answer to the knotty problem of how to manage Cuba's economic resources efficiently. Castro apparently believes that by giving a trusted subordinate the responsibility for a particular management dilemma and complete freedom of action to deal with it, the problem can be overcome. Although the system may be expanded in the near future, its success as a managerial tool is threatened by one basic weakness

POLITICAL BUREAU DELEGATES

Major Jose Ramon Machado Ventura	**Delegate to Matanzas Province**
Major Guillermo Garcia Fria	**Delegate to Oriente Province**
Major Diocles Torralbas Gonzalez	**Delegate to Pinar del Rio Province**
Major Rogelio Acevedo Gonzalez	**Delegate to Camaguey Province**
Major Luis A. Zayas Ochoa	**Delegate to Holguin Region**
Major Carlos Mir Marrero	**Delegate to the Isle of Pines Region**
Major Juan Almeida Bosque	**Delegate for Construction**

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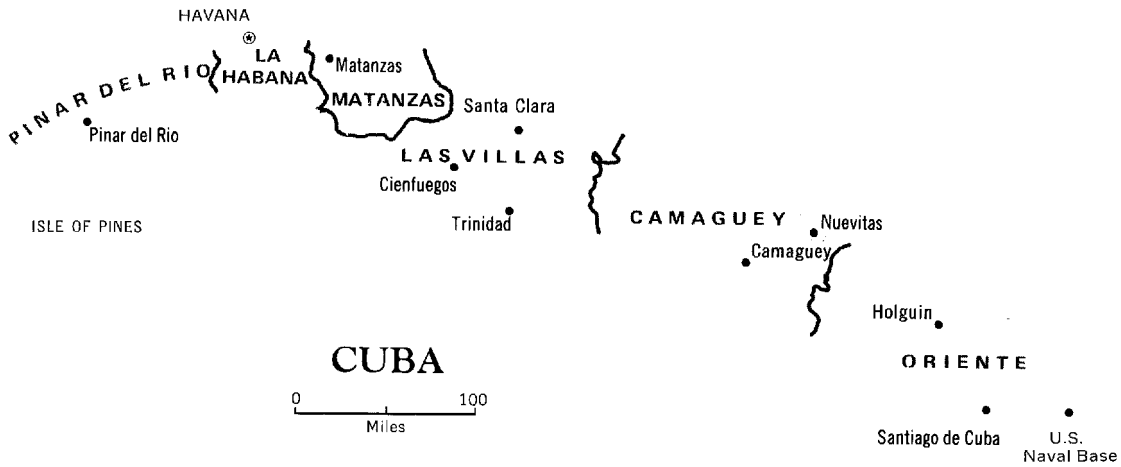

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--the "delegates" are chosen on a basis of political loyalty rather than management ability.

The Military Take-over in Pre-University Education

The military establishment's main source of recruits--the draft system--is scheduled for a complete overhaul. Law No. 1129 of 26 November 1963 created Cuba's system of obligatory military service. It states that every male citizen between the ages of 16 and 45 is subject to the draft and must fulfill an obligation of three years of military service. Each young man must register at his local military committee (draft board) between 15 and 30 November of the year in which he attains his 16th birthday. Unless deferred because of physical incapacitation, essential employment, or student status, those who register can expect to be inducted within a year. The first call-up was in April 1964; these draftees were released in 1967. The fifth--or 1968--draft call took place in two stages, 25 to 30 March and 5 to 10 May, and involved young men born in the years 1946 through 1951.

The inequities inherent in the draft system--with its deferments and special exemptions--caused the Cuban Government to review the entire program. A new system is now in the late stages of development whereby all young Cubans, both male and female, will receive three years of military training while attending senior high school. Forty-seven high schools and technological institutes are already operating under the new system and eventually all such schools will adopt the program.

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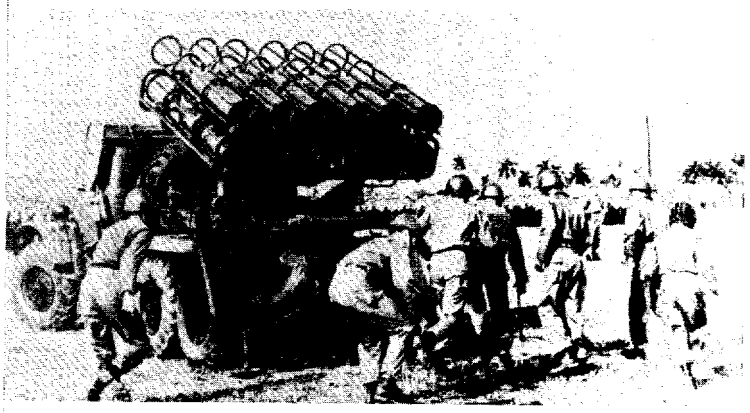
So that no one can avoid serving, a law will be passed making education up to the university level compulsory.

The schools in the new system are called "military training centers." Students at the centers wear uniforms and receive full military indoctrination and instruction in addition to their regular academic subjects. They are under strict military discipline and upon completion of their three years of schooling are credited with having satisfactorily completed their term of compulsory military service. When the new system is in full operation, the student-soldiers will form the rank and file of the armed forces and, theoretically, the only permanent military men will be the commissioned and noncommissioned officers who will constitute the command cadres and provide the necessary professional leadership. The military training centers are directed by commissioned officers and are staffed by instructors selected jointly by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces.



Senior high school students at a military training center preparing a 240-mm rocket launcher for firing.

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The Armed Forces as A Source of Labor

Since the armed forces consist of a mass of healthy, regimented youths, the Cuban Government has frequently tapped the military services when manpower needs have not been satisfied by normal means. On 1 May 1968, for example, Major Raul Castro revealed that in Camaguey Province alone 60,000 military men were taking part in the sugar harvest as cane cutters, truck drivers, and mill hands. Indeed, without the aid of the armed forces, the sugar crops of the past several years would have been considerably smaller.

MINFAR, in conjunction with the Communist Youth Union (UJC), is trying to offset the annual drain on military manpower by forming a new type of labor unit. On 23 April 1968, the UJC began recruiting young men between the ages of 17 and 27 for service in the "Centennial Youth Column." This unit has been formed to work in agriculture and the livestock-raising industry, primarily in Camaguey Province where the labor shortage is most severe. It was originally supposed to be made up of 50,000 males but women are now being enrolled and the planned total strength has been raised to 100,000. Recruits serve for a minimum of three years and are

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CUBAN MILITARY LEADERS

MAJOR FIDEL CASTRO
Commander in Chief
of the Armed Forces

MAJOR RAUL CASTRO
Minister of the Revolutionary
Armed Forces

MAJOR JUAN ALMEIDA
First Vice Minister
of MINFAR

MAJOR SERGIO DEL VALLE
Minister of Interior

MAJOR BELARMINO CASTILLA MAS
Chief of the General Staff

MAJOR PEDRO MIRET
Vice Minister
of MINFAR

MAJOR GUILLERMO GARCIA
Political Bureau Delegate
for Oriente Province

MAJOR ROGELIO ACEVEDO
Political Bureau Delegate
for Camaguey Province

MAJOR ALDO SANTAMARIA
Chief of the Cuban Navy

MAJOR LEOPOLDO CINTRAS
Chief of Artillery and
Rocket Troops

MAJOR DIOCLES TORRALBAS
Chief of the Air and
Air Defense Force

MAJOR ROBERTO FAJARDO
Chief of the Engineers,
General Staff

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permitted to substitute this for their three years of obligatory military service. They receive regular combat training, are subject to military discipline, and live in camps operated on a "semi-military" basis by joint military-UJC cadres. Inasmuch as the total strength of the Cuban armed forces is roughly estimated at 200,000, the formation of the Centennial Youth Column significantly increases the number of personnel under military control.

Regimentation of The Construction Industry

The shortage of semiskilled and skilled construction workers has always been a problem for the Cuban revolutionary government. The acute need for these experienced personnel led to such widespread "pirating" among the various branches of government that some means of control had to be developed to bring a halt to "job jumping" brought about by offers of higher pay. Resolutions of the Labor Ministry freezing skilled construction workers in their jobs helped to some degree, but the government once again turned to the military establishment to provide a system of regimentation for certain sectors of the construction industry.

On 30 October 1967, the "Che Guevara Trailblazers Brigade" of construction workers was formally inaugurated at La Concepcion in Oriente Province. The brigade is a military labor unit under the command of Major Raul "Maro" Guerra Bermejo, a comrade of Fidel Castro and veteran of the Sierra Maestra campaign. At its formation, the brigade consisted of 159 pieces of heavy construction and earth-moving equipment and 1,200 men, but by April 1968 it had expanded to its planned strength of 500 pieces of machinery and 3,000 men formed into seven battalions. The brigade has the mission of clearing brush and trees from unused land so that it can be cultivated. The brigade will be the major factor in the government's drive to increase the amount of land planted in sugar cane in an effort to attain the goal of 10 million tons of sugar in 1970.

The brigade will also be used in the government's extensive dam-building plan and in the construction of roads and irrigation systems scheduled for 1968-70. The equipment, such as bulldozers, road-graders, and tractors, was purchased from the Richard Continental firm of Lyons, France, or imported from the USSR. Not all the workers in the brigade are military men; some have served their three years of obligatory military service and have merely stayed on with the unit in a civilian capacity, continuing to perform their old jobs. The brigade, however, is operated on a military basis and its members are subject to military discipline. In the event of a military mobilization, the men driving tractors and bulldozers are supposed to be given assignments driving tanks and self-propelled guns to take advantage of experience gained in the nonmilitary

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situation; the same practice is theoretically to be followed in all job categories of the brigade.

A similar brigade, the First Hydraulic Works Brigade, was formed in April 1968 in Pinar del Rio Province by MINFAR. The unit, which consists of 400 men and 150 bulldozers, dump trucks, road-graders, and front-end loaders, is used primarily in building dams and canals for irrigation. Ninety percent of the unit's men were demobilized within a month after it was formed--having completed their three years of obligatory military service--but all "volunteered" to stay on with the unit in a civilian capacity. The 40 or so other workers are hydraulic works technicians of the National Institute of Hydraulic Resources and are not military men.

Still another military labor unit, the Special Road Battalion, was formed in late 1967 and is subordinate to the Directorate of Engineering Troops of the General Staff of MINFAR. The unit is a road-building force of six companies of construction equipment under the command of Captain Oriente Fernandez. It operates in western Cuba with a total of 150 dump trucks and 60 other pieces of heavy equipment. This is only one of the many road-building units that have been formed or are in the planning stage; many more will be needed if the government is to achieve its ambitious highway construction goals.

Military Management of The Sugar Harvest

In addition to providing masses of personnel for cane cutting and other agricultural tasks, the armed forces are assuming a major share of the responsibility for managing the sugar harvests. As an experiment, the 1968 sugar harvest in Oriente Province was carried out under the direction of the military establishment and involved the total mobilization of all military and civilian facilities in the province. The total mobilization method was reportedly so successful that it will be expanded to Oriente, Camaguey, and Las Villas Provinces during the 1969 sugar harvest and will be used throughout the entire country for the all-important 1970 harvest on which Castro has staked his prestige. These mobilizations permit the maximum degree of control over the population and are part of the government's answer to growing discontent as well as its solution to the critical labor shortage.

Complete Military Control Of Aviation

All aviation in Cuba is now under military control. Although Cubana Airlines is nominally a commercial enterprise, it is controlled by MINFAR. The ministry also has the responsibility for the operation of Cuba's growing fleet of crop-dusting aircraft. As part of its plan to mechanize agriculture, the government has

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imported about 200 Soviet-built AN-2 aircraft to be used for sowing seeds and spraying insecticides and fertilizers. This job was formerly done by commercial pilots who received salaries commensurate with their skills and experience. This "vestige of capitalism" has now been eliminated and regular military pilots are performing all agricultural flying tasks.

Women in the Armed Forces

Women are gradually assuming a larger role in the armed forces. For some time now, females have been admitted to MINFAR's Military Technical Institute in Havana, from which they graduate as officers or military technicians. They are also being admitted into the ranks of the Centennial Youth Column and, when all pre-university - level schools become military training centers, females will receive three years of military training and education just as do males. In early 1968, it was also announced that women are being accepted into military cadet schools and academies for specialization in artillery and communications. They will be graduated as officers in the armed forces and presumably will be assigned to positions in the field in their job specialty.

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Women in the armed forces.

Castro's Rationale

Despite Raul Castro's disclaimer on 1 May 1968, the use of troops in the cane fields and in other nonmilitary endeavors cannot help but weaken Cuba's ability to react immediately to crises. The formation of the Centennial Youth Column and similar units, however, will permit MINFAR to reduce its agricultural commitments and maintain a more stable defensive posture.

By expanding the role of the military establishment, Castro has molded it as the supreme institutional force in Cuba. Because of his instinctive distrust of the political and administrative institutions that developed after 1959, Castro has conducted frequent ministerial reorganizations, "administrative purges," and antibureaucracy drives. Thus, while he has attempted to minimize the number of civil servants, he has slowly placed ultimate responsibility for the administration of Cuba in the hands of his small entourage from the armed forces. Unlike the civilian bureaucracy, the leaders of the military and security forces have Castro's complete confidence. In the martial environment of Cuba, the privileged officer corps in Cuba is increasingly the most indispensable buttress of the Castro government. (SECRET)

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