



Directorate of  
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## Africa Review



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Supplement  
24 January 1986

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ALA AR 86-002J

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	Cuba's willingness to defend its Angolan ally remains strong despite the unpopularity of the cause at home, and Havana could decide to increase its military presence in Angola—now some 36,000 personnel—even further. <div></div>	

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Articles have been coordinated as appropriate with other offices within CIA.  
Comments and queries regarding this publication may be directed to the Chief,  
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## Article

Cuba: Military Commitment  
in Angola

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Both Havana and Luanda appear convinced of the need to maintain a large Cuban military presence in Angola, where the Cuban military contingent has grown to some 36,000 personnel. While mounting Cuban casualties probably remain politically and militarily acceptable to the Castro regime, any measurable increase in Cuba's participation could heighten the war's unpopularity at home, where economic and political incentives must be used increasingly to entice recruits into serving in Angola. Even so, Cuban willingness to defend its Angolan ally remains strong, as reflected by recent public reiterations of Havana's commitment. Moreover, some growth in Cuba's military presence seems possible as Cuban units obtain their full complement of personnel and new Soviet equipment deliveries require additional Cuban advisers.

Havana's intent to maintain its sizable military presence in Angola was underscored in early November by Cuban Communist Party Politburo member Sergio del Valle, who stated that Cuban forces would remain in Angola until the Luanda regime decides that "the aggressions against its sovereignty and territorial integrity have ceased." Moreover, Cuban President Fidel Castro asserted in late May, during UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar's visit to Havana, that "200,000 Cubans have already gone to Angola, and, if another 200,000 must go, they will."



Angolan President dos Santos meeting with Fidel Castro in Havana in May 1984.

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Angolan insurgents, and an apparent improvement in Angola's military performance.<sup>1</sup> Following Angolan

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Castro's resolve probably has been strengthened recently by developments in southern Africa, visits to Havana by leaders of the Frontline States, the repeal of the Clark Amendment prohibiting US aid to the

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[redacted]

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President dos Santos's visit to Cuba last October, Castro publicly proclaimed that the "new strength" of Angolan and Cuban forces coincided with the "irreversible crisis of apartheid in South Africa."

[redacted]

**Cuba's Current Military Posture**

The breadth and depth of Havana's involvement in Angola remain high, as indicated by an estimated total presence of some 42,000 civilian and military personnel. [redacted]

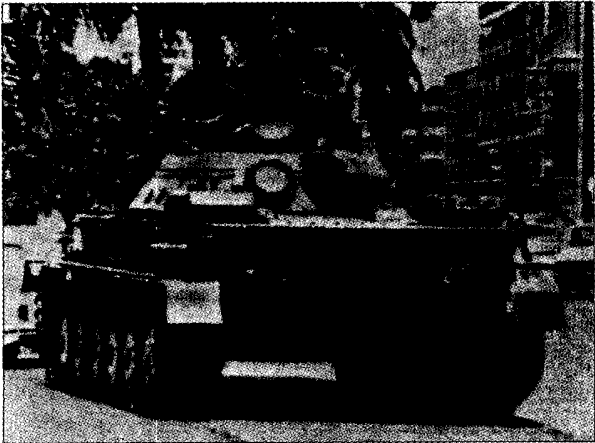
[redacted]

There are indications that Cuban forces probably played a more visible role in the recently concluded FAPLA offensive against the forces of Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] A senior UNITA official told the US Embassy in London that perhaps as many as 5,000 Cuban troops took part in the FAPLA operations, but added that no major Cuban combat units were involved in the actual fighting. [redacted]

[redacted]



Cuban-manned, Soviet made PT-76 light amphibious tank in downtown Luanda. [redacted]

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Convincing evidence of Cuban participation in the offensive remains sketchy. Nevertheless, we believe Cuba's involvement probably mirrors its participation in past Angolan operations, in which Havana has provided officers, specialists, and other skilled technicians to supplement—but not replace—Angolan troops. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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Cuban personnel also play a key role in Angola's growing air defense network, operating and providing technical expertise to Luanda's mobile and fixed surface-to-air missile (SAM) batteries and air warning radar sites, most of which are located in southern Angola along the Namibe-Menongue rail line. Havana also is involved in an effort to upgrade the air defense of its forces in Angola. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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[redacted] at one air defense site in southern Angola, a probable SA-13 battery had replaced SA-9 equipment, which subsequently was deployed to another location in Luanda's southern air defense perimeter. [redacted]

1978, when the majority of combat responsibilities were turned over to Angolan Government forces, the spread and intensification of UNITA guerrilla activity since 1982 appears to have again accelerated Cuban losses. [redacted]

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Cuban pilots fly virtually every type of aircraft in Luanda's inventory, including MIG-21 and MIG-23 jet fighters and MI-8 and MI-25 helicopter gunships.

[redacted] Cuban troops are ill prepared for their involvement in Africa, where malaria, primitive living conditions, heat, and isolation have been serious problems. Heavy casualties also reportedly are exacted on the Cubans by insurgent mines, and Cuban troops routinely use underground shelters to avoid UNITA and South African artillery. [redacted]

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[redacted] Cuban pilots—who appear to be heavily involved in combat support operations—probably carried out the lion's share of airstrikes against UNITA positions during the recent FAPLA offensive. [redacted]

[redacted]

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#### Drawbacks to Further Involvement

Reassurances from Havana of its continued support to Luanda, however, are likely to be tempered by the reported distrust and periodic hostility between Cuban and Angolan forces, the mounting Cuban casualties, and the need by Havana to provide its personnel with incentives for overseas service.

Recent Intelligence Community estimates place the total number of Cubans killed and wounded at some 4,000 to 5,000 since 1975, but data on Cuban casualties remain imprecise and Havana's losses could be higher. Community analysts, for example, calculate that several thousand Cubans probably have died as a result of accidents or disease. [redacted]

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[redacted] it is not uncommon for Cubans to be verbally and physically abused by the Angolan populace, and considerable anti-Cuban graffiti has appeared in the Angolan capital. [redacted]

[redacted] Cuban deaths in Angola by early 1985 totaled 8,000 to 10,000. [redacted]

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[redacted] many Angolans view the Cubans—who are given preferential treatment in many areas—as responsible for many of their food and commodity shortages. One unconfirmed UNITA press report claims, for example, that seven Cubans were killed last October when Angolan Government forces mutinied against them. [redacted]

Havana's leaders have sought to diffuse any popular discontent with the war by limiting television and press coverage of the conflict, by not bringing Cuban war dead home for burial, and by offering incentives to Cuban military personnel for service in Angola. [redacted]

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[redacted] even though the government-controlled media largely ignores Angola, most draft age Cuban youth try to avoid service there—after receiving information from returning Cuban troops. [redacted]

[redacted] Cuban enlisted personnel—who serve two-year tours with no home leave—can refuse to serve in Angola, but to do so means no chance for promotion and an early assignment to an undesirable job in Cuba. Similarly, failure of a party member or aspirant to accept an overseas assignment effectively ends any chance of advancement within the party, [redacted]

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the Cubans suffer from low morale, in part because of growing frustration over their consignment to largely defensive functions in rear areas. [redacted]

The growing number of casualties and other depredations suffered by Cuban military personnel is also likely to influence Havana's thinking with regard to any further combat commitment by its Ground Forces. Although Cuban casualties declined after

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Incentives are used increasingly by Havana to entice new recruits or additional service from its officer corps for overseas duty. For example, "internationalist duty" is used to accrue benefits at home, such as permission to buy major appliances or obtain an apartment. Following the expulsion of Cuban forces from Grenada in October 1983,

[redacted] Castro offered veterans who survived the US intervention an opportunity to recoup their prestige and rank—stripped by Castro after the hostilities ended—by serving a tour in Angola. [redacted]

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**Outlook**

Some modest growth in Cuba's military presence is possible over the next six months to a year as newly formed units are brought up to full manning levels, and as the arrival of new military equipment from the Soviet Union—such as air defense systems—necessitates the deployment of additional Cuban advisers. [redacted]

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[redacted] we believe Havana probably would commit additional resources if it appeared the Luanda government was in danger of falling to UNITA forces. [redacted]

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In our judgment, however, Havana is most likely to continue its policy of defensive rear-guard operations, and—at a minimum—its present level of involvement in air and air defense operations in support of its Angolan ally. We anticipate that Havana will consider its support to Luanda on a case-by-case basis, to provide Cuban decisionmakers the widest flexibility, but we conclude that there is little prospect for a withdrawal of Cuban troops in the near future. Indeed, we believe it unlikely that Havana would significantly reduce its military presence even if Angolan forces were to make noticeable gains against UNITA in the coming months. [redacted]

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