

FOCAL SUMMARY OF NEWS ITEMS REPORTED ON CUBA January-December 2004

This resource is a compilation of news items on Cuba listed in FOCAL's monthly Chronicle on Cuba throughout 2004

SECURITY

MILITARY RELATIONS

China

[See also, Economy/ Foreign investments and trade, and Nickel; and Foreign Relations/ Asia]

April 19: A top level Chinese military delegation arrived in Havana for intense contacts with counterparts in communist Cuba, an official statement said. General Xu Caihou, a top official on the Chinese Communist Party central committee and head of the People's Liberation Army's political department, is leading the five day mission, said the statement published in the official Granma newspaper. Xu will hold talks with senior officials from the Revolutionary Armed Forces Ministry. The delegation will visit Cuban military units, training centres and historical and cultural sights, added the statement. This is the second recent visit to Cuba by a Chinese military delegation. (*AFP*, 19/4/04)

April 22: Fidel Castro met with visiting General Xu Caihou, China's General Political Department director, and his entourage at the Revolution Palace in Havana. (*People's Daily*, 23/4/04)

April 24: Fidel Castro and his brother Raúl, Minister of the Armed Forces, saw off a high-level military delegation from China. The delegation held "extensive exchanges" during a six-day official visit to the island. The news appeared in the Cuban official daily Granma, which also published a photograph of the Cuban leader shaking hands with Chinese Army Colonel General, Xu Caihou, who headed the delegation. (*AFP*, 24/4/04)

September 1: General Leopoldo Cintra Frías, hero of the Republic of Cuba and general of the Army Corps, is in the Chinese capital at the invitation of the Chinese armed forces for an official visit. Cintra Frías, a member of the Cuban Communist Party Political Board and chief of the Army for the island's western region, is leading a delegation of several high officials of the Cuban Armed Forces. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/9/04)

September 3: Chinese Defense Minister and Central Military Commission vice president, Colonel General Cao Gangchuan, received Cuban General Leopoldo Cintra Frías in Beijing. The meeting between the generals was described as friendly. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/9/04)

North Korea

[See also, Foreign Affairs/ Asia]

November 22: North Korea's top military officer Kim Yong-Chun is heading a delegation that began an official visit to communist-led Cuba, according to an official statement. Vice Marshal Kim, chief of the general staff of the Korean People's Army, and his delegation will visit the

Revolutionary Armed Forces Ministry headed by Fidel Castro's younger brother, Raul Castro, according to the statement released in state-run newspapers. The North Korean delegation will also visit Cuban military units on the Caribbean island. (*AFP* 22/11/04)

November 24: Vice Marshal Kim Yong Chun, chief of the general staff of the Armed Forces of the People's Democratic Republic of Korea (PDRK), held official talks with Cuban Army General Alvaro Lopez Miera at the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR). The North Korea's army chief of staff toured Cuban army units and observed training exercises during a five-day visit to Cuba, Cuban state media said. State television showed Kim watching Cuban soldiers firing rifles during infantry exercises. Cuba and North Korea are "in the front trench of the fight against North American imperialism and for the defense of socialism," Kim said in statements published by Cuba's ruling Communist Party daily, *Granma*. Kim praised Cuba for its resolve in "resisting threats of aggression" from the Bush administration, *Granma* said. (*Prensa Latina, Reuters*, 24/11/04)

November 26: Defense Minister Raul Castro, second only to his brother Fidel in the Cuban government hierarchy, met with North Korean Vice Marshal Kim Yong Chun and other members of the military delegation he leads. In a "friendly atmosphere that characterizes relations between the armed forces of both countries," according to the local press, Raul Castro, younger brother of Fidel Castro, together with other high-ranking Cuban and North Korean military, spoke about their respective efforts to strengthen their national defenses. (*EFE*, 27/11/04)

December 31: A top North Korean official said North Korea and Cuba will wage a joint struggle against the United States. In a message to Fidel Castro, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il and Kim Yong-nam, president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, said the two countries will continue to jointly fight US aggression and intervention on the basis of their traditional friendship and cooperation. (*Yonhap News*, 31/12/04)

Vietnam

[See also, Foreign Affairs/ Asia]

September 1: Vietnam's Public Security Minister, Le Hong Anh, arrived in Havana at the official invitation of the Cuban Ministry of Interior. The Vietnamese minister will hold official talks with his Cuban counterpart, Brigadier General Santiago Borges. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 1/9/04)

NATIONAL DEFENSE

April 19: The Cuban people is prepared to face any imperialist intervention, said Fidel Castro during a TV program on occasion of the 43 anniversary of the Bay of Pigs battle. The statesman attended the Round Table Radio and TV program together with other participants in the events originated by the Bay of Pigs invasion. Those who pretend to threaten us with defeating the Revolution when I die are losing their time and talking a lot of rubbish, as there is no power in the world capable of defeating it, he added. "As long as there is a man defending a cause, that cause is not lost." Fidel Castro assured that the level of revolutionary support to this process has not been ever achieved by any other political cause in the world and this has been possible, above all, due to the strength of the ideas, patriotism and conscience of Cubans, who have resisted for 45 years the power of an empire like the United States. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/4/04)

December 2: Faced with escalating hostility from the United States government, Cuba is stepping up its defense preparedness, states an official announcement from the Ministry of the Armed Forces. The communiqué describes the hard-line anti-Cuba policy of the Bush

administration as the most aggressive in 45 years of US antagonism towards the island. Such reality —it asserts— imposes the need for Cuba to continue improving its defense readiness under the national defense strategy known as the “Guerra de Todo el Pueblo” or People’s War. (*AIN*, 2/12/04)

December 7: Cuban Defense Minister Raul Castro warned the United States not to repeat its mistakes in Vietnam and Iraq by invading Cuba because its armed forces and civilian population were ready to resist. "The Americans should watch closely, so that they do not commit the mistakes they made in Vietnam and are now making in Iraq, where they are bogged down," Castro told reporters. Like the Vietnam War, Castro said, US troop escalation had already begun in Iraq due to local resistance. Bastion 2004 is the latest annual mass drill involving troop exercises with civilian involvement based on a guerrilla strategy designed to resist an invasion force. This year's operation is more extensive than last year's. "We are holding Bastion 2004 so they observe well and do not underestimate our people who are more united and therefore much stronger than the Iraqis. That is the reason," Castro said. Raul Castro said Cuba was seeking to deter a confrontation. "For us, avoiding the war is equal to winning the war," he said. "To win by deterring war, we have to shed a lot of sweat, which is better than rivers of blood." (*Reuters, Prensa Latina*, 7/12/04)

December 12: Cuba's armed forces are gearing up for their biggest military exercises in almost 20 years involving thousands of troops, MiG-29 jets, anti-aircraft batteries and millions of civilians, General Leonardo Andollo told reporters. Senior military and Communist government officials in Havana warned that the administration of US President George W. Bush should take note of the island's war footing. General Andollo, who was the head of the Cuban military mission in Ethiopia, assured "circumstances around wars fought in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq, have confirmed how justifiable defensive concepts elaborated by our political-military leadership are." The mass war games start on December 13 and are due to run through to December 19. (*AFP, Prensa Latina*, 12/12/04)

December 13: Cuba's Defense Minister Raul Castro officially announced the beginning of the Bastión 2004 military defense exercises that will take place across the island over the next 7 days. During a radio and television announcement from Havana, Raul Castro said that hundreds of thousands of combatants will unite with millions of Cubans in the various military activities and civilian preparations programmed to repel a possible enemy attack. The Cuban military leader informed the population that the National Defense Council will emphasize adapting the country's economy to war conditions and perfecting economic production, services and other structures designed for prolonged resistance. He stressed that Bastion 2004 is focused on the defense of life and the achievements of the Cuban people. (*Radio Habana Cuba, Prensa Latina*, 13/12/04)

December 19: Cubans awoke to air raid sirens, and practiced shooting, putting on gas masks and doing duck-and-cover drills as the communist nation wrapped up a weeklong series of defense exercises to prepare for a potential attack by the United States. The activities, called the Strategic Bastion 2004 Exercise, were aimed at evaluating how prepared Cuban society is to face possible military action against Cuba during a second term by US President George W. Bush. State-run newspapers reported that the exercises were a success, and that Cuba's "capacity to resist and overcome an imperialist aggression" was demonstrated. (*CNN*, 19/12/04)

December 29: Cuba's Army General Leonardo Andollo considered that the country has extensively reinforced its defense system with the recent drills Bastion 2004 (Stronghold 2004). Addressing a TV-radio round table talks, the vice chief of Cuban Armed Forces Ministry's General Staff announced that from now on maneuvers will be carried out every four years. "Recent drills have provided us with lots of experiences and ideas for reinforcing our defense system in the face of US increasing threats and aggressions," added Andollo. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/12/04)

