

**FOCAL's SUMMARY OF NEWS ITEMS
REPORTED ON CUBA
January-December 2006**

*This resource is a compilation of news items on Cuba listed in FOCAL's monthly
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SECURITY

FESTIVITIES FOR THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARMED FORCES

November 4: Troops marched in the streets and fighter jets streaked across the skies of Havana rehearsing a December 2 celebration of the 50th anniversary of the start of the Cuban revolution and the 80th birthday of its leader, Fidel Castro. The military parade will be the first in a decade in the Cuban capital and may bring Castro's first public appearance since he had intestinal surgery in July that forced him to cede power temporarily to his brother Raul. The rehearsal included the reading of a script over booming loudspeakers that contained several references to "our undefeated and invincible commandante Fidel Castro Ruz," giving no indication he would not show up. After the Granma replica passed the reviewing stand, about 2,000 soldiers and marines marched past. Earlier, three fighter jets and two military helicopters made a practice run over Havana. The actual parade will include tanks and heavy weapons, said an organizer who identified himself only as Lt. Col. Rodriguez. "We're not going to fill the plaza with all the planes, tanks or all the arms we have, only what is necessary for the enemy to know that we are prepared," he told the press. (*Reuters*, 4/11/06)

November 19: More than 300,000 people will take part in a military parade marking Fidel Castro's 80th birthday, as well as the 50th anniversary of the start of the Cuban revolution, according to press reports. The weekly newspaper *Tribuna de La Habana* reported that the massive December 2 display would feature tanks, artillery, anti-aircraft weapons and other military hardware parading through Revolution Square. The December 2 date was picked because it marks the 50th anniversary of the day Castro and 81 bearded rebels -- including brother Raul and Argentine-born revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara -- returned from exile in Mexico aboard a yacht named *Granma*, launching a military campaign that would topple US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959. Castro turned 80 in August, but birthday celebrations were postponed because of a reported intestinal operation and recovery. (*AFP*, 19/11/06)

November 24: With a cultural gala at the Karl Marx Theater in Havana began the festivities in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the landing of the Granma yacht in eastern Cuba on December 2, 1956. The colorful event, broadcast on national television, was presided by commanders of the Revolution Juan Almeida, Ramiro Valdes and Guillermo Garcia —three of the 82 members of the expeditionary force who accompanied Fidel Castro on that historic voyage across the Gulf of Mexico. Among the guests attending the gala were members of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, participants in the 1953 assault on the Moncada Garrison in Santiago de Cuba, members of the Rebel Army established in the Sierra Maestra Mountains after the Granma landing, participants in the defense of Cuba in the 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion, Cubans who fought abroad on internationalist missions, and officers of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) and Ministry of Interior. Works of art were presented to the FAR from different Cuban political and mass organizations, received by Chief of Staff Vice-Minister, General Alvaro Lopez Miera. Army General and Minister of the Armed Forces Raul Castro did not attend the event. (*Granma, El Nuevo Herald, 25/11/06*)

November 26: An exhibition of photographs from Fidel and Raul Castro was inaugurated in Havana, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Armed Revolutionary Forces (FAR) and birthday celebrations for Fidel Castro. "Homage," title of the exhibition, was opened to the public at the Jose Marti Memorial, with 58 photographs by several Cuban artists, according to the official newspaper Juventud Rebelde. (*Prensa Latina, 26/11/06*)

December 2: Cuba's armed forces marshalled their Soviet-era arsenal in a parade to show the world, especially the arch-enemy United States, they remain a force to be reckoned with as their ailing leader Fidel Castro fades. Aged tanks, rocket launchers and MIG jet fighters roared through Havana's Revolution Square before a crowd of 300,000 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Revolutionary Armed Forces' (FAR) birth as a ragtag rebel force Castro led ashore from the leaking yacht ``Granma'' on December 2, 1956. Soldiers marched past and a replica of the Granma, the yacht that carried Fidel Castro back from exile, was pulled along the street. Leading the pomp was Defense Minister and interim president Raúl Castro, accompanied by three original commanders of the Revolution: Ramiro Valdes, Juan Almeida and Guillermo Garcia. In his speech, Army Raúl Castro Ruz said that Cuba is increasing its combat capacity and modernizing its combat equipment to guarantee the country's defense. The parade was also scheduled to close the festivities of Fidel Castro's 80th birthday. (*The Miami Herald, BBC, Reuters, Granma International, 2/12/06*)

GENERAL

June 5: Cuban First Vice President Raul Castro chaired the main ceremony marking the 45th anniversary of the Ministry of Interior (MININT). After receiving a commemorative diploma from the hands of Minister of Interior Division Major General Abelardo Colome Ibarra, the vice president congratulated MININT members for their presence in every crucial battle of the homeland. In turn, the members of MININT vowed to continue to defend state security and domestic order in Cuba. (*Prensa Latina, 5/6/06*)

January 26: Fidel Castro has cautioned that the planet is in danger because the world's top powers have a monopoly over nuclear weapons. The world is in real danger because the US has a monopoly on nuclear arms and they have the nerve to get upset when another country like Iran wants to produce nuclear energy, said Castro. He pointed out that the US has no right to prohibit Iran from the peaceful use of nuclear energy and added that they are now speaking of attacking this Middle Eastern country on the pretext that it represents a threat. Meanwhile, the US has never objected about the nuclear arms that Israel has, Castro said, recalling as well that South Africa once considered launching a nuclear attack against Cuban troops in Angola. The world will disappear if it doesn't have the courage to condemn the militaristic policies of Bush, who used the appalling 9/11 attacks as a pretext and became so defiant as to speak of the possibility of preemptive attacks on some 60 countries comprised in a list that included European countries such as Holland, Fidel Castro noted. "Not even Hitler said that; Hitler looked for pretexts, but Bush attacks with more audacity and a far greater arsenal; he is a nut and the world is running a real risk. Only the truth will save this species," declared the Commander in Chief. Fidel Castro recalled that Cuba has already faced the threat of nuclear arms that dates back to 44 years ago when the October Missile Crisis cast a "shadow" over the island: "We didn't blink; nobody trembled." "Bush is an out-of-control lunatic, go ahead and be scared, but we are not the least bit afraid of him." (*Prensa Latina, Granma* , 26/1/06)

April 23: Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez, Member of the Political Bureau and Communist Party First Secretary in Holguin province, addressed the political and military ceremony to celebrate the 45th Anniversary of the founding of the Cuba's Eastern Regional Army, presided over by its founder, the Second Secretary of the Communist Party and Armed Forces Minister, General Raul Castro Ruz. "Only a legitimate Revolution, made up of common people in uniform, can achieve the miracle of a close alliance between the Army and the population", Diaz-Canel said. A crowd of more than a hundred thousand attended the ceremony, interspersed around the military equipment deployed in the local Calixto Garcia square. After the military parade, and a salute to the participants by the young Brigadier General Onelio Aguilera Bermudez, Chief of Staff of the Eastern Army, retired Lt. Colonel Rubinson Silva Perez spoke on behalf of the Army's founders. (*Granma*, 24/4/06)

August 15: Cuba's armed forces, a one-time guerrilla outfit that became the communist country's most efficient and business-savvy institution, will play a crucial role whatever happens after Fidel Castro, experts on Cuba said. With their commander, Defense Minister Raul Castro, now taking over at least temporarily from his brother Fidel Castro as president, the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) are virtually running the country, they said. "We have the head of the armed forces as the head of state," said Hal Klepak, a professor of history at the Royal Military College of Canada and author of a book on the FAR. "The message is very clear -- there will not be disorder because it won't be permitted." (*Reuters*, 15/8/06)

August 20: Cuban Defense Minister Raúl Castro discussed plans for the 1996 shootdowns of two Brothers to the Rescue airplanes during a meeting with official journalists just weeks after the event, according to an audio tape obtained by El Nuevo Herald. In the tape, a voice identified as Raúl's details the planning carried out during a meeting of military officers around January 13, 1996, the day Brothers aircraft allegedly had overflown Havana to drop anti-government leaflets. The two Brothers Cessna C-337 were shot down by MiGs February 24, killing Armando Alejandre, Carlos Costa, Mario de la Peña and Pablo Morales. Brothers to the Rescue

has denied any violations of Cuban airspace. The 11-minute recording was taped during a June 21, 1996 conversation at a Cuban Communist Party office in the eastern city of Holguín between Castro, government officials and journalists from the government's Radio Rebelde network. (*The Miami Herald*, 21/8/06)

MILITARY RELATIONS

Angola

December 4: Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces Minister Army General Raul Castro met with Angolan Defense Minister General Kundy Paihama, local mass media reported. According to a brief note and a photo published by Granma newspaper, both top leaders held a friendly and respectful conversation, characterizing relations between the two countries. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/12/06)

December 20: The "Jornal do Angola" carried on its front page a report about a meeting between Angolan President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos and Cuban Lieutenant General Leopoldo Cintra Frias. The main Angolan daily stated that Dos Santos and Cintra Frias reviewed relations between the two countries. The chief of the Western Army and member of the Cuban Communist Party's Political Bureau delivered the Angolan government a message from the island's Armed Forces Minister Raul Castro, although the source did not reveal the content. Cintra Frias arrived in Angola from South Africa, where he attended the partial opening ceremony of the Solidarity Park, to pay tribute over 2,000 Cubans fallen in the struggle for the freedom of this continent. (*Prensa Latina*, 21/12/06)

Belarus

July 18: Belarusian Defence Minister Leonid Maltsev arrived in Cuba on a three-day visit. Colonel General Maltsev toured places of historic interest and military units. The official welcoming ceremony took place in El Cacahual, Havana province, where he laid a wreath for Major General Antonio Maceo. (*BelaPan*, *Prensa Latina*, 18/7/06)

July 18: General Raul Castro, Cuba's first Vice President and its Minister of Defence, met in Havana with the Defence Minister of Belarus, Colonel General Leonid Semionovich Maltsev, and the delegation that accompanies him on a visit to the island. The official talks also included the participation of General Alvaro Lopez Miera, FAR Chief of Staff and Victor Vasilievich Kozintsev, advisor to the Belarus Embassy in Havana. (*Granma*, 19/7/06)

China

March 8: A top-level Chinese military delegation, led by Lieutenant General Peng Xiaofeng, political commissary of the People's Liberation Army, has been visiting Cuba since March 4, Granma newspaper reported. Peng and his accompanying group were welcomed by the vice minister of the Cuban Chiefs of Staff, Alvaro Lopez Miera. The Chinese military delegation's agenda includes visiting military schools and units

and meeting with chiefs, officials and teaching staffs (*Prensa Latina, Reuters, 8/3/06*)

April 17: Guo Boxiong, vice-chairman of the Chinese Central Military Commission (CMC), met with a visiting Cuban military delegation in Beijing. The delegation, invited by the General Logistics Department of the Chinese Liberation Army (PLA), was led by Claro Orlando Almaguel Vidal, director of the General Logistics Department of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces. Guo said the military relations of the two countries had witnessed great progress in recent years, with frequent high-ranking visits and smooth cooperation in technical and personnel training. (*Xinhua, 17/4/06*)

December 4: Cuba is willing to strengthen cooperation, including military cooperation, with China, the first vice-president of the Council of the State of Cuba and Defence Minister Raul Castro said, while meeting with a visiting Chinese military delegation. Raul expressed his satisfaction at the smooth development of exchanges and cooperation between the Cuban and Chinese armies in the areas of personnel and military trainings, and hoped the cooperation could be further strengthened. He also thanked the Chinese military delegation for attending the 50th anniversary commemorating the founding of Cuba's armed forces. Leader of the delegation Gen Zhao Keming conveyed the kind wishes from the Chinese people and military to the Cuban leader, Raul's brother Fidel Castro, hoping him a quick recovery from surgery. Before the meeting, Gen Zhao also met with Alvaro Lopez Miera, chief of the General Staff of Cuba's armed forces. The two generals discussed possible cooperation between the two armies in the future. (*Xinhua, 4/12/06*)

Congo

September 25: The Chief of Congo Brazzaville's Armed Forces (FAC) staff, Division General Charles Richard Mondjo, received high rank military honours during the first day of his official visit to Cuba. While reviewing the troops at Rescate de Sanguily Tank Unit, the official and his delegation were accompanied by Cuban Brigade general Eliecer Velazquez. Cuban Division general Samuel Rodiles Planas welcomed the Congolese military delegation at El Cacahual, where the visitors dedicated a wreath to Cuban hero Antonio Maceo. Division general Mondjo and his delegation were issued an invitation by the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces Ministry (FAR). In September 2003, Minister Delegate to Congo's Presidency, Division General Jacques Yvon Ndolou, visited Cuba and was received by Defense Minister Army general Raul Castro. (*Prensa Latina, 25/9/06*)

Russia

April 17: "Arms oligarch" Mikhail Kalashnikov will be visiting Cuba shortly. As far back as the Soviet era, the AK rifles made in Cuba were of good quality. According to Kalashnikov, he's interested in whether the Cubans are using modern production facilities to manufacture his creation these days. But there seems to be some greater purpose to Kalashnikov's forthcoming trip - judging by the fact that Rosoboroneksport spokesman Nikolai Shvets gently but firmly silenced the veteran designer when Kalashnikov started elaborating on his "creative plans." Russia's chief arms exporter, Rosoboroneksport, has denied allegations in the American media that

Russia is delivering poor-quality AK automatic rifles to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. (*Vremya Novostej*, 17/4/06)

April 28: Russia's state-controlled arms exporter will push to stop the illegal production and supplies of Kalashnikov assault rifles, a company spokesman said. "Rosoboronexport is resolved to use all available legal means to press for an end to the illegal production and supplies of Kalashnikov automatic rifles," Valery Kartavtsev said, adding that Russian enterprises intended to file lawsuits against illegal producers. Rosoboronexport says that almost 20 countries, including Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, China, Cuba, North Korea, Iran, and Germany, produce the cult rifle illegally. "In some instances, the terms of such agreements have expired, while in others different-caliber weapons are being made, since all licenses for the production of Kalashnikov rifles were issued decades ago," he said. (*Novosti*, 28/4/06)

May 3: Russia and Cuba have signed a number of documents concerning military technological cooperation during the visit of Rosoboronexport to Cuba. "Important agreements in the sphere of military technology, which will strengthen cooperation between our countries, were signed by the two sides", stated Rosoboronexport associate director Nikolay Shvets at a press conference. According to his words, the members of the Russian delegation, among which there was the outstanding Russian small-arms weapon constructor Mikhail Kalashnikov, conducted in a number of negotiations with representatives of various ministries and departments of the country, including Cuba's Ministry of Defense Heads. The Rosoboronexport delegation was in Cuba from April 17 to April 26. (*Novosti*, 3/5/06)

September 28: An intergovernmental agreement on settling Cuba's debt to Russia on earlier Russian credits has been signed during a visit to Cuba by Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov. The sides also concluded an agreement on military-technical cooperation. Mikhail Fradkov told journalists that the military agreement is not covered by the credit which Russia is giving Cuba. "This means that Cuba will pay Russia directly for the military machinery which interests it," Fradkov explained, noting that, "the Cuban army has Soviet hardware which requires repairs and maintenance". According to the online publication Strategy Page, the agreement will allow Russian forces to use Cuban bases for intelligence collection, and other purposes. (*ITAR TASS, Strategy Page*, 28/9/06)

United States

January 26: The Cuban army general who has been the Pentagon's primary contact with this isolated US Navy base has retired and been replaced by a navy captain, the US commander at Guantanamo said. Brigadier General José Solar Hernández, commander of the Cuban Frontier Brigade deployed around the base, announced his retirement on January 20 at the regular monthly meeting held along the fence that separates the Navy facility from Cuba proper. He was replaced by Cuban Navy Captain Pedro Román Cisneros, US Navy Captain Mark Leary told the press. The United States and Cuba started monthly meetings here a decade ago to avert misunderstandings between US Marines and Cuban soldiers who face off across a 17.4-mile fence. Leary said the new commander, Cisneros, is a veteran navy officer of 37 years who served in submarines. Cuba is believed to have retired its three submarines nearly a decade ago after the loss of Soviet subsidies to Havana. Leary reported that so far there has been a seamless transition from Solar to Cisneros, who

already has engaged in a routine e-mail exchange with the base through a special communications link. (*The Miami Herald*, 27/1/06)

Vietnam

December 4: Cuban Defence Minister, Raúl Castro, met in Havana with military delegations from Vietnam and Lao invited to festivities for the 50th Anniversary of Cuban Armed Forces. Together with Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, and Fernando Remírez de Estenoz, Chief of the Department of Foreign Affairs Relations of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, Army General Raul Castro met with Lao Army General, Douangchay Phichit. Phichit is also Lao's Defence Minister. (*EER*, 6/12/06)

NATIONAL DEFENSE

February 24: "The prospects of the country, which are being achieved mainly due to energy savings, demand even greater attention be paid to defense tasks. We cannot forget that the enemy will take advantage of any oversight, because they also are preparing and improving their weaponry and ways of engaging in war," said Cuban Defense Minister Raul Castro. Under this premise, the Military Council of the Western Army convened by its chairman, Army Corp General Leopoldo Cintra Frias, conducted a thorough and critical assessment of the results achieved during the Combat Readiness Year 2005. The important meeting, held at the Military Council's headquarters in Havana, was attended by Political Bureau Members, Commander of the Revolution Juan Almeida Bosque, and Pedro Saez Montejo, Communist Party Leader in the Cuban capital. General Raul Castro congratulated the members of the Army when he said "a noticeable leap forward has been made." This, he said, is confirmed by the progress made in combat capacity and readiness, and the training of personnel, including the updating of knowledge about our defense conceptions provided to reserve and territorial militia officers, and Party and Government cadres of the territory. (*Ahora*, 24/2/06)

May 5: Cuban authorities are using factories of sugar cane cutting equipment and other agricultural tools to restore tanks, artillery and armored vehicles, reported the Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), Raúl Castro. Castro acknowledged the contribution of several metallurgical complexes in Holguín to the restoration and modernization process of the Cuban armament. (*AFP*, 8/5/06)

July 1: During the 5th Plenary Meeting of the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee, the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces made a report about the state of readiness of the nation's defense, presented by the Second Secretary of the Central Committee and Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, Army General Raul Castro, and approved by the Fifth Plenary Meeting. The document summarizes the results achieved since the July, 2003 Extraordinary Plenary Meeting of the Communist Party Central Committee that analyzed this topic and the main tasks to be accomplished in such a decisive area. Defense preparation has gained in its effectiveness, both of the military personnel on active duty as well as the civilian leaders and officials and the population in general, with a more rational and efficient use of the time that Cubans devote to such a sacred duty, the report said. Also

mentioned as significant are the results achieved in the preparation of the theater of military operations, as well as the study of every inch of the national territory in the interest of the defense, among other tasks of great complexity and magnitude. Also highlighted were the efforts made by a large number of businesses and other entities both military and civilian. (*Granma*, 3/7/06)

July 13: Sea, air and ground military manoeuvres by the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) entered their second stage. FAR ground troops, regular and people's forces of the Revolutionary Navy, members of the territorial militias and the Production and Defense Brigades are participating in the exercises held in the western zone. Special troops carried out missions backed by small infantry units, while tanks and artillery jointly operated with other equipment. The goal of these "Anniversary 53 of the Attack on Moncada Garrison" war games is to prepare Cubans for night fighting and continue improving Cuba's defence conception. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/7/06)

August 1: The Cuban military has begun to call up reservists. Cuba's military committees, which serve the same function as US draft boards, began mobilizing registered young men after the announcement of Fidel Castro's transfer of power to his brother Raúl. Registration is mandatory and lasts until the age of 45. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/8/06)

August 5: Former revolutionaries promised to keep fighting for Cuba as the island beefed up security, saying it fears a US attack during Fidel Castro's health crisis. Cuban army reservists took to the streets of Havana. The government, under the control of Castro's brother, Defence Minister Raul Castro, has mobilized citizen militias and asked military reservists to check in daily. The White House has insisted no such threat exists, with press secretary Tony Snow dismissing the suggestion that the United States would attack the island as "absurd." The Communist Party daily newspaper *Granma* issued a statement by the Association of Combatants of the Cuban Revolution on its front page. "We will continue working with the same revolutionary fervour that you taught us," the veterans' group assured Castro. It also expressed confidence that Castro would be back on his feet soon. Cubans interviewed on state-run media also said they would fight to the death against any invaders from the north, while the official *Granma* wrote: "We Cubans are prepared for the defence" of the island. (*Canadian Press*, 5/8/06)

August 8: The authorities in the province of Santiago de Cuba are in a state of high alert for fear of a massive exodus towards the US Naval Base at Guantánamo. The southern coastline is constantly patrolled and all highways running the length of it in that province have been placed under military control. On the Siboney beach highway, near the US Naval Base, checkpoints have been set up to control traffic through the area. (*Cubanet*, 8/8/06)

August 16: Cuba began demobilizing thousands of reserve troops on alert since Fidel Castro temporarily handed power to his brother Raul Castro for health reasons, Communist Party sources said. The alert for civilian rapid-response brigades in case of domestic unrest was also winding down, the sources said. Dressed in olive green fatigues, reserve troops were seen patrolling the streets of Havana. (*Globe and Mail*, *Reuters*, 17/8/06)

September 14: A total of 130 security devices were installed in different parts of Old Havana in the lead up to the XIV Summit of the Non-Aligned countries. Some of

these governmental spying eyes were installed along Obispo's boulevard, from the Floridita restaurant to the Armas Square. SEPSA, a Department of the Interior's company specializing in monitoring and security, installed the devices. (*Cubanet*, 15/9/06)

October 8: Speaking at the closing session of the Fourth Congress of the Jose Marti Pioneers Organization, Raul Castro said that they [the US] should not be mistaken with this small country home to an honourable and peaceful people, "If they pick a fight with us they will met by a potent olive-green force (...) We want the best for our people, but they want the worst." Raul Castro announced that a military parade would take place in Havana on December 2, to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, during which a display of the army's modernized weapons systems would take place. He also said that another military parade would take place on November 30 in Santiago de Cuba, on occasion of the 50th anniversary of the uprising of that city in support of the landing of the revolutionary forces of the Granma yacht. (*Granma*, 10/10/06)

November 2: Cuba's First Vice President Raul Castro appraised the readiness, living conditions and work of the Rescate de Sanguily combat unit in western Cuba, accompanied by high military chiefs. Raul Castro, also Chief of the Cuban Armed Forces received detailed information on the state of the unit from its chief, Brigade General Eliecer Velazquez Almaguer, and reviewed preparations for the military parade for December 2. The also defense minister visited classrooms and viewed simulators used for personnel preparation as well as for reviewing the effectiveness of communication media trainers. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/11/06)

November 3: Unconfirmed media reports alleged that the acting president of Cuba, Raúl Castro, would have ordered - through general Julio Casas Regueiro - the withdrawal of Cuban military personnel from Venezuela. According to Venezuelan press reports, neither confirmed nor denied by Caracas or Havana, several flights carrying Cuban military personnel have taken off from Ramp 4 of the Maiquetía airport, Barquisimeto, and from the Oro Negro Airport in Cabimas. (*EER*, 3/11/06)

December 10: Thousands of Cubans participated in the National Defense Days, aimed at training the population to face any possible armed aggression. The two-day exercises intend to continue improving the preparation of all Cubans involved in the Defense Councils, under the principle of the "War of the Entire People". Members of the Territorial Troop Militias, Special Troops, Production and Defense Units, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces participated in territorial defense drills. (*Prensa Latina, Granma*, 11/12/06)