

# FOCAL SUMMARY OF NEWS ITEMS REPORTED ON CUBA January-December 2005

*This resource is a compilation of news items on Cuba listed  
in FOCAL's monthly  
Chronicle on Cuba throughout 2005*

## SECURITY

### MILITARY RELATIONS

#### Brazil

**May 4:** The head of the Brazilian intelligence agency dismissed rumors about some of his agents being trained in Cuba. Mauro Marcelo de Lima, Director of the Intelligence Agency of Brazil (ABIN) said that a recent trip to Cuba was in line with a strategy to strengthen ties with sister agencies in the region and not an effort to outsource the training of his agents. He pointed that the Brazilian intelligence services have not had ties to their Cuban counterparts for 50 years. (*AP*, 4/5/05)

#### China

**April 6:** US officials said there is no evidence that China is seeking to boost its military presence in Latin America, but for the first time warned about Chinese intentions to establish an intelligence and cyberwarfare beachhead in the region. Roger Noriega, assistant secretary of state for Latin America, and Rogelio Pardo-Maurer, the top Defense Department official for the Western Hemisphere, testified before a House panel as several legislators argued that China is trying to fill the void left by the lack of US involvement in the region. Pardo-Maurer said that "we need to be alert to rapidly advancing Chinese capabilities, particularly in the fields of intelligence, communications and cyberwarfare, and their possible application in the region," he told the Western Hemisphere subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee. This is the first time that a senior Pentagon official warned so directly about Chinese cyberwarfare capabilities in the region. Some US officials have previously and privately expressed concern that Chinese personnel may be working at an electronic listening post in Bejucal, Cuba, believed to be also capable of carrying out cyberwarfare operations. Pardo-Maurer would not elaborate during the House panel's public hearing, and offered to brief members in a classified session. (*The Miami Herald*, 7/4/05)

**June 4:** Cuban and Chinese top military officers met in Havana to boost cooperation and friendship between the armies of both nations. Cuban General Alvaro López and the Chinese Popular Liberation Army's General Political Department deputy chief, Liu Yongzhi, led the meeting. Liu and his delegation toured an army unit in western Cuba where Major General José Carrillo received them. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/6/05)

**November 5:** Cuban and Chinese military leaders have met in Havana to reaffirm ties between the two communist countries. In a meeting at Cuba's Armed Forces Ministry, the country's military chief, Raul Castro, stressed the long-standing friendship between the two nations. He said China's presence on the island will help strengthen relations between Beijing and Havana. His Chinese counterpart, General Liang Guanglie, said his visit will help strengthen what he called the "historic" ties between the government, armed forces and people of both countries. Following the meeting, the high-level Chinese delegation toured a tank base on the outskirts of Havana, where members were given details on the structure, mission and history of the military facility. (*VOA*, 5/11/05)

## North Korea

**May 4:** North Korea and Cuba held senior-level military talks in Pyongyang and exchanged views on boosting friendly relations and issues of mutual concern, the North Korean Central News Agency said. The KCNA said the discussions proceeded in "a friendly atmosphere," but it did not provide further information except for the names of the chief delegates of the talks. North Korea was represented by General Ri Myong-su, while the Cuban delegation was led by Lt. General Leonardo Andollo Valdés, vice-chief of its general staff and director of the operations department. (*Yonhap*, 4/5/05)

**May 10:** Vice-Marshal of the Korean People's Army Kim Yong-chun, member of the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) National Defense Commission and chief of the KPA General Staff, met and had a friendly talk with the delegation of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba headed by Lt-Gen Leonardo Andollo Valdés, vice-chief of the General Staff and director of the Operations Department of the Revolutionary Armed Forces. (*KCNA*, 11/5/05)

## Russia

**December 26:** A high-ranking Russian military delegation arrived in Havana, headed by the chief of staff of the Russian armed forces, Army General Yury Baluyevsky. The Army General said that the principal aim of his visit to Cuba is the strengthening of ties with the island in the military sphere. "We expect to impart a new quality to our relations", Baluyevsky said. "I feel that we are duty-bound to maintain friendly relations with Cuba and not to abandon it at a difficult time for this country," Baluyevsky told the press. "Contacts in the military field will be given new meaning." General Alvaro López Miera, chief of staff of Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces, welcomed the delegation. This is the first visit of a high-ranking military delegation from Russia since 1998. (*Itar-Tass*, 27/12/05)

**December 28:** Cuban Defense Minister Raúl Castro met in Havana with Russia's second-ranking military officer, official media said, in a throwback to the Cold War when Cuba was armed and financed by the Soviet Union. The entire front page of the Communist party daily, *Granma*, was taken up with a photo of the meeting and commentary describing the encounter as one between old friends. "The conversation between the two military leaders was cordial and friendly, with both recognizing the historic ties between their two countries," *Granma* said. Baluyevsky is touring military units and installations equipped with vintage Soviet hardware, and was expected to vacation on the island as well. Diplomats said Russia had been supplying some spare parts, and little else, to the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces, but that could change if Cuba re-entered the arms market in earnest. Russia recently sold 100,000 AK-

47 automatic rifles and other equipment to Venezuela, Cuba's closest ally. (*Itar-Tass, The New York Times*, 28/12/05)

## Venezuela

**May 6:** Fidel Castro once again addressed the nation in a special appearance at Havana's International Convention Center during which he spoke of the very special relationship enjoyed by Havana and Caracas and warned that any US attack on Venezuela would ignite the entire continent. The United States campaign against Chávez, noted Fidel Castro, includes making every effort to prevent Venezuela from buying even light arms with which to defend itself. Venezuela, he added, has every right to protect itself against a possible aggressor - especially given the history of the United States in Latin America and the number of nations it has invaded and its policy of pre-emptive attack. An attack on Venezuela would ignite the entire continent, warned Fidel Castro. The intention of the White House is clear, he added - to provoke a war that would lead to Venezuela's rich oil fields. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 6/5/05)

**June 3:** The class of Venezuelan armed forces officers aspiring to command posts or places on the joint chiefs of staff have selected Fidel Castro as their "godfather," army commander General Raul Baduel confirmed. "Because it is my duty as commander of the army, I presented (Castro's selection) to the appropriate authorities; that is, to the defense minister, General Jorge Garcia, and to the president of the republic, Hugo Chavez," so that they may decide upon the matter," he added. (*EFE*, 4/6/05)

**June 12:** Led by its Dean, Brigadier General Rafael Eduardo Arreaza Castillo, a delegation from the Institute for National Defence Higher Education of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela arrived in Havana. The delegation will visit the Ministry of the Armed Forces headquarters, as well as the head offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Defence College. (*Granma*, 13/6/05)

**June 15:** Fidel Castro received a delegation from the Institute for National Defence Higher Education of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, led by its Dean, Brigadier General Rafael Eduardo Arreaza Castillo. (*Granma*, 16/6/05)

**July 8:** Any "imperialist" attack against either Cuba or Venezuela would be resisted by both nations as one, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said in an apparent reference to the United States. "The Cuban and Venezuelan peoples and revolutions are one and the same," the left-wing leader said during a ceremony at which he awarded decorations to more than 90 Cuban teachers who had worked in a Venezuelan literacy program. "The world should know, in case there's anyone out there who hasn't realized it yet (...) that any imperialist attack against one of us will be an attack against both," he said. (*Swissinfo.News*, 9/7/05)

**July 29:** Venezuela's Brigadier General Eduardo Antonio Centeno Mena, director of the Simon Bolivar Higher Army School, highlighted the nature of relations between his country and Cuba upon arriving in Havana. After arriving at the Jose Marti International Airport heading his country's delegation, Centeno Mena said he is satisfied with the exemplary links between both nations. The Venezuelan officers were welcomed by the director of the Máximo Gómez Revolutionary Armed Forces Academy, Division General Urbelino Betancourt Cruces and Central Army's General Staff chief Brigadier General Rafael Bello Rivero. The delegation's agenda in Cuba includes celebrating a graduation ceremony, as well as visiting Cuban military schools and units. (*World Data Service, Prensa Latina*, 29,30/7/05)

**August 2:** Fidel Castro presided over the graduation ceremony of the Venezuelan military in Havana, in which he highlighted the timely value of the Bolivarian Revolution. The Cuban leader spoke at the "Libertador Simón Bolívar" Venezuelan Army Academy's 46th graduation ceremony, whose graduate officers elected him their patron. In the closing speech, he stressed the Bolivarian revolution has arrived at just the right moment to contribute to the second and definitive independence of Latin America, as Simón Bolívar dreamed. The ceremony took place at the Council of State where the statesman personally delivered the diplomas to each of the 75 graduates. By decision of the Cuban Council of State, the Venezuelan graduates, presided over by director of the military academy, Brigadier General Carlos Antonio Centeno Mena, received the Combat Brotherhood Medal. Castro was presented with a replica of a Venezuelan Navy submarine and batons used by the generals of that country, and then left with the Venezuelan military delegation, who were accompanied by close family members. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/8/05)

**August 8:** A delegation of high-ranking Venezuelan military officers, the second one in a week, arrived in Havana, where it will remain until August 15, informed the Ministry of the Armed forces of Cuba (FAR). The delegation from the Air War College was led by Division General Roger Cordero Lara, general commander of the Venezuelan Air Force. (*AFP*, 8/8/05)

**August 8:** Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez said that the US government, which "won't stop caressing the idea of invading Cuba or invading Venezuela," should be warned of the consequences. "If someday they get the crazy idea of coming to invade us, we'll make them bite the dust defending the freedom of our land," Chávez said to applause. He spoke during the opening ceremony of a world youth festival bringing together student delegations from across the world and convened under the slogan "Against Imperialism and War." The Venezuelan leader said "socialism is the only path," and told the students the collective goal is to "save a world threatened by the voracity of US imperialism." (*AP*, 9/8/05)

**August 11:** Fidel Castro welcomed in the Palace of the Revolution the delegation of the Air War College of Venezuela, made up of officers who graduated from that institution's 35th Air Force High Command and Staff Officer Program, who are currently visiting the island. (*Granma*, *AFP*, 12/8/05)

**August 21:** Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro extolled the work of the Venezuelan army servicemen who built a community in Sandino, a community in Cuba's most western province of Pinar del Rio, for families affected by recent hurricanes. Hugo Chavez met with the young soldiers and army high ranking officers before the "Alo Presidente" television program he traditionally hosts live in Venezuela, but this time was broadcast from Sandino together with Fidel Castro. Members of the Simon Bolivar international rescue brigade and humanitarian aid built 150 houses, which had been donated by Venezuela, in collaboration with workers and people from Sandino. The delegation accompanying Chavez was composed of ministers and top military officers, a police commissioner and the chiefs of the Army and the Navy. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/8/05)

**August 21:** Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, who often accuses Washington of plotting to overthrow his populist government, said Venezuela would come to Cuba's defense if the United States invaded the communist-run island. Chavez spoke for five hours on his weekly Venezuelan television show broadcast live from the town of Sandino, 160 miles west of Havana in westernmost Cuba, where Venezuelan troops built 150 prefabricated houses after

Hurricane Ivan last September. "We want peace (...) We will do everything humanly possible to avoid an imperialist aggression. But if it occurs to some madman, he will find these young men (Venezuelan soldiers) and us in command defending the independence and sovereignty of this land," Chavez said. (*The New York Times*, 21/8/05)

**November 1:** President Hugo Chavez warned he might share Venezuela's US-made F-16 fighters with Cuba and China, accusing the United States of making it difficult for his country to obtain spare parts for the aircraft. Any exchange of military hardware to those countries would break an agreement with the US government on the transfer of technology without Washington's permission and further strain fraying ties between Venezuela and the United States. "If they don't comply with the contract (...) we can do whatever we want with these aircraft, whatever the hell we want. Maybe we'll give 10 planes to Cuba or to China so they can study the technology," Chavez said. "We don't need any US imperialism," he said. The United States does not trade with Cuba and keeps a tight rein on any technology transfers to China. (*CNN, Reuters*, 2/11/05)

**November 1:** Communist Cuba said it had no need for F-16 fighter jets offered as a gift by leftist ally President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. "We do not need the planes, and he (Chavez) has not made a formal offer," said Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. Chavez said his government may give its US-made F-16 fighters to Cuba or China and replace them with Russian or Chinese aircraft after accusing Washington of blocking purchases of US military parts. "The idea sounds legitimate, because Chavez is quite right in rejecting the United States for refusing to sell spare parts," Perez Roque told reporters. The Cuban minister said Venezuela was not a military threat to the United States. "The US government does not have the moral authority nor the legitimacy to demand arms control by other countries: it is spending no less than 500 billion dollars this year on weapons," he said. Perez Roque said he was certain Venezuela would come to Cuba's defense if it was attacked. (*Reuters*, 5/11/05)

## NATIONAL DEFENSE

**March 8:** Cuba is invulnerable from the military point of view and is able to withstand a US aggression, Fidel Castro stated addressing a festive meeting devoted to International Women's Day. "Cuba cannot be intimidated" by the new threats, which some officials of the US administration had recently voiced. He assured the meeting in the course of his almost 6-hour speech that the aggressor would sustain tremendous losses if he dared attack Cuba. They will be comparable only to the losses the United States had sustained during "its aggression against Vietnam", Castro stressed. He spoke very highly about the combat readiness of the Cuban army, noting that the country's military command had achieved notable successes in its preparations to rebuff a possible foreign attack. An aggressor "will never be able to occupy the country's capital," he stressed. (*Itar Tass*, 9/3/05)

**April 6:** Fidel Castro stressed his country is ready to ward off any enemy, while highlighting the nation's military readiness at a meeting on the results of a recent military strategic exercise, Bastion 2004. Castro highlighted that the nation's security level is increasing because of the control over the enemy and awareness of its strength. Castro also considered that it was impossible to seize Havana, after the perfection achieved by Cuban troops in the handling of weapons. If Cubans do what they have to do, Castro said, there will be less risk of military aggression. The meeting also included the participation of Army General Raul Castro

and the main leaders of the Cuban Communist Party, Government and Armed Forces. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/4/05)

**May 11:** Cuba carried out military exercises in the western region, as part of troops' regular training, according to a press release from the Revolutionary Armed Forces. The communiqué says that for that reason, troops will be deployed in the region and explosions will be heard in some areas in the provinces of Havana and the City of Havana. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/5/05)

**May 13:** Cuba's Armed Revolutionary Forces Minister, Army General Raul Castro, rated as successful the military drills in the western region, which he attended along with other top-ranking chiefs, *Granma* daily reported. The two-day maneuvers allowed practicing new ideas in the military theater of operations, the daily noted. "I feel very happy for having corroborated our real capabilities and how much we have advanced. I am convinced the enemy can be defeated," *Granma* quoted Raul Castro as saying. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/5/05)

**July 18:** The Cuban army is staging military exercises to mark the 52nd anniversary of the attack on the Moncada barracks on July 26, 1953, considered the start of the revolution. The three-days exercises are taking place in Havana province. Tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery and anti-aircraft units are participating in the manoeuvres. Reconnaissance, engineering, communications and special operations units are also taking part in the exercises, as well as fighter planes and helicopters, Cuban media reported. (*EFE*, 20/7/05)

**December 11:** Hundreds of thousands of Cubans took part in training drills under the island's "The War of All the People" defense strategy to face a possible military aggression by the United States. The Defense Councils were activated at the local and national levels to discuss plans to carry out in the case of an invasion. The training exercises included evacuation drills and maintaining the internal order, in which Civil Defense and Ministry of Interior authorities played the lead role. The training exercises were supervised by Pedro Saez Montejo member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party and President of the Provincial Defense Council; Alvaro López Miera, a three star general and deputy defense minister and chief of staff of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces; and other high ranking military officers. (*Granma*, 12/12/05)