Cuba and the Latin American Left: 1959 – present

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Abstract

This article is an analysis of the emergence and evolution of Cuba's formal and informal networks and foreign policy instruments to support and influence the guerrilla movements in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the first section I sketch the function and significance of the 'Departamento América', the liaison apparatus with the Latin American and Caribbean insurgency between the 1960s and 1975; afterwards it (also) represented 'the Party' in Cuba's diplomacy. I make a distinction between the 1960s (the decade of revolutionary fervour) and the 1970s-80s (when Cuba ruptured its diplomatic isolation imposed by the United States and tried to unify insurgent movements in umbrella organisations). After the implosion of the Soviet system a third 'Special Period' began, of austerity and drastic changes in its foreign policy. It continued in the twenty-first century, based on soft power and peace facilitating.

Key Words: Cuba, Latin American and Caribbean Guerrilla, Departamento América, Active Support Instruments, Soft Power Policy

Resumen

En este artículo analizo el surgimiento y la evolución de redes e instrumentos formales e informales de política exterior de Cuba para apoyar e influir en los movimientos guerrilleros en América Latina y el Caribe. En la primera sección investigo la función y el significado del 'Departamento América', el aparato de enlace con la insurgencia latinoamericana y caribeña entre 1960 y 1975; después (también) representó 'el Partido' en la diplomacia cubana formal e informal. Utilizo una distinción entre la década de los sesenta (el tiempo de efervescencia revolucionaria) y la de los años setenta - ochenta

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(cuando Cuba logró romper el aislamiento diplomático impuesto por los EEUU y trató de organizar los movimientos guerrilleros en organizaciones unitarias). Después de la implosión del sistema soviético empezó un tercer 'Período Especial' de austeridad y cambios drásticos en su política exterior que siguió en el siglo XXI, basada en su poder blando y su papel de facilitador de (negociaciones de) paz.

Palabras Claves: Cuba, Guerrilla latinoamericana y caribeña, Departamento América, Instrumentos de apoyo activo, Política de poder blando

Introduction

The Cuban Revolution is intimately related to the history of the Latin American and Caribbean political Left. [1] Cuba's successful insurgency campaign and its swift change to a socialist economy and society inspired similar revolutionary movements in the entire region. The Cuban Revolution triumphed in one of the most heated periods of the Cold War.[2] It roughly coincided with the beginning of the new military dictatorships of these years. Exiled intellectuals, politicians and revolutionaries were welcomed in Cuba. The Cuban leadership announced its revolutionary intentions with respect to the Caribbean dictatorships and other island-states of foreign statehood, with respect to the "semi-independent" Latin American countries, and with respect to the "colonized and underdeveloped" entire Third World. In fact, Cuba was training small incipient rebel moments and advising their leadership. It also acted as a kind of general hospital for the refugees and wounded. Cuba's military support was mostly directed to Africa.[3] But its ideological influence is even traceable to the Armed Left in the Middle East, Europe and Asia.[4]

In this article, I will explicitly analyse the emergence and evolution of Cuba's formal and informal networks to support and influence the guerrilla movements in Latin America and the Caribbean. Most of this article is an interpretation of the modus operandi and its consequences. I will accentuate the consecutive institutional structures and contextualise Cuba's support policies towards the Armed Left in the region. As will be shown, these networks highly depended on personal choices of the Cuban leadership and long-term personal relationships between the Cuban, Latin American and Caribbean actors directly involved. First, I present the creation, function and significance of succeeding organisations collectively known as the 'Departamento América'. It was the liaison instrument with the Latin American and Caribbean insurgency but its task evolved after 1975 also in 'representation of the Party', broadly interpreted. Then I analyse two distinct phases in Cuba's intense relations with the regional revolutionary movements. The time span covers the period between 1959 and 1989. A third phase was

initiated with the implosion of the Soviet system when Cuba's "Special Period" began, in fact a period of austerity and drastic changes in its foreign policy that continued in the twenty-first century, based on soft power and facilitating peace.

Departamento America

The crucial instrument of revolutionary extension was a small but efficient organisation called "section M", hidden in the corridors of the Ministry of the Interior (MININT).[5] Previously, it had operated under other names since early 1959.[6] M" had several sections such as "M-A, M-B". M-OE was reserved for "Special Operations" (M – *Operaciones Especiales* in Spanish), the paramilitary unit that trained many future guerrilla members. Section M (and its successor institutions) always operated quite autonomously because it was created with the consent of Fidel Castro, who wanted a swift and agile organisation without bureaucracy. Until his retirement in 1992, its chief was the charismatic Manuel Piñeiro Losada, a close personal friend and *confidant* of Fidel.

Departamento America was an elite organisation and its members were hand-picked by Piñeiro. Many of the officers were veterans of the insurgency campaign. Others were of the next age cohort who had fought as militia members or young soldiers during the Bay of Pigs invasion. The formal protocol at the department was "convince, not command". Another formal code of conduct was strict neutrality in ideological disputes. However, that did not mean that Cuba refrained from influencing guerrilla movements. Cuba's leadership had its own preferences. It could also privilege some movements or be restrictive with respect to others.

For instance, Cuba did not actively support the Trotskyist or Maoist Armed Left in Latin America, but certainly wanted to know about their intentions and activities. The Cubans remained oriented to the Soviet Union and the COMECON, and also all their international (labour, youth, women, press, sport, culture) organisations were incorporated in the world federations with a Marxist-Leninist ideology. It also had results for preferences within the Latin American and Caribbean guerrilla. The Trotskyist movement of Hugo Blanco in the Peruvian La Convención was neglected. Support given to the Colombian Maoist ELP (see below) was limited to the context of a united block headed by M-19 during the peace negotiations in the late 1980s.[7]

"Working together with Piñeiro" did not always mean working within the department. Piñeiro had antennae tuned to other Cuban organisations and institutions: the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (MINFAR), the other institutions coordinated by the MININT, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

(MINREX), and the ICAP (the International Friendship Institute). Piñeiro had personal and direct access to Fidel and that meant that he could align with all Party and State institutions. But his network was much larger: it included Cuba's academic and research institutions, youth organisations, labour unions, the women's federation, the journalists' union, the writer's union, the mass media, and the medical and other missions that traveled abroad and returned to Cuba. Then there were the numerous '*amigos de Cuba*': visitors, journalists, politicians and researchers interested in the Cuban Revolution. Piñeiro, a workaholic with a passion for nitty-gritty details, always found time for a personal conversation.

During the first years of the 1960s, the Cuban government collaborated with and trained many individually operated guerrilla organisations. Sometimes they even belonged to competing groups operating within the same country at the same time. Ideological frictions coincided sometimes with personal feuds. Perhaps the comment of a member of the '*comandancia general*' of the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN), the unified guerrilla movement during the Salvadorian civil war, is true for other organisations: "We were transformed into sects—political sects. And it was worse, because we were Marxists. So we were even more sectarian than before. These were years of division and dispersion".[8] Not before the early 1970s did the Cubans explicitly aim at unified national movements.

The Cuban Revolution, Phase I: Revolutionary Fervour (the 1960s)

Cuban volunteers initiated a failed guerrilla movement in Haiti and Panama. Inspired by the Cuban example, two small guerrilla groups operated in Paraguay and were crushed by dictator Stroessner's army. A small Nicaraguan colony of exiles was established in Havana. Dominican and Cubans volunteers sailed from Cuba to start a rebellion against dictator Trujillo; they were massacred; a second guerrilla group was decimated in 1963.[9]

Soviet Vice-Premier Mikoyan visited Cuba and negotiated a profitable agreement; diplomatic relations with Moscow were re-established in 1960. The Soviet Union began to train and equip the Cuban Armed Forces. The already strained relations of the United States with Cuba were suspended, and then ruptured. In 1960 and 1961 severe assaults on Cuban civilian targets took place: economic sabotage, bombings, and assassinations. Washington prepared an invasion plan by anti-Castro paramilitary forces; Cuban intelligence was quickly aware of the preparations. When the invasion took place in the Bay of Pigs in 1961, they were confronted by the Cuban army and the newly created militias. In 1962 the Missile Crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. Cuba was diplo-

matically isolated by exclusion from the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1962, under pressure from the United States.[10] But after the Missile Crisis, relations with the Soviet Union became strained as well. The years 1966-1970 constituted a period of relative frost. Relations improved during the Brezhnev years.[11] In 1972 Cuba became a full member of COMECON.

Part of these uneasy relations can be explained by the rivalry about the control over the Latin American and Caribbean Left. The impact of Fidel, Che and the other young Cuban revolutionary heroes resulted in splits within the Latin American communist, socialist, anarchist and Catholic youth movements. Those who sided with the Cuban Revolution were young, radical students influenced both by the iconic figures of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara and by Catholic Liberation Theology. Others who joined the rows of the guerrilla movements in Latin America were young urban workers and peasants, dissident members of the Communist Youth, and disillusioned young army officers who opted for armed insurgency.

In Cuba, clear sympathy existed for the first guerrilla campaign in Guatemala in the early and mid-1960s. Former Guatemalan President Arbenz, ousted by a CIA coup in 1954, stayed on the island. He consulted with disillusioned Guatemalan lieutenants Yon Sosa and Turcios Lima who initiated guerrilla movements. Piñeiro's officers provided support: clandestine transition routes for arms. The Guatemalan guerrilla of the 1960s was modest in terms of significance and results. The small columns did not coordinate, neither in Guatemala City nor in their region of operations: the south-eastern mestizo departments. The Guatemalan army also started a counterinsurgency offensive with the support of US military advisors and militias recruited from the local population. In the late 1960s, the guerrillas were crushed, the leadership was either killed or managed to escape to Mexico or other countries. Younger cadres went to Cuba for training. Later, in the mid-1970s a resurgence of the Guatemalan guerrilla movement started in the western Maya region.

As in Guatemala, the first guerrilla leaders in Venezuela were officers after a revolt. The guerrilla was reinforced when the youth wing split from the government party, inspired by the Cuban example. Other movements were created, headed by former Communist Youth members or ex-military officers. At a certain moment, around twenty Frentes operated in many Venezuelan departments, but without a unifying strategy. The government launched counteroffensives. Cuba had provided support with training and access to the island's medical services. Now the guerrilla leaders asked for military assistance on Venezuelan soil. In 1966 a small contingent of the Cuban military joined the remaining guerrilla unit. In May 1967, another Cuban-Venezuelan team disembarked at Machurucuto

beach. Quickly they were assaulted by the army. Cuba's military intelligence later established that the head of their cartography institute had sold them out to the CIA.[12]

Also the first Brazilian guerrilla leaders were disillusioned army officers. In September 1963, non-commissioned officers revolted. The Cuban leadership denied them guerrilla training because of existing diplomatic relations with Brazil. However, after the coup in 1964, relations were ruptured. Leonel Brizola founded a resistance movement and sent some of his associates to Cuba where they were trained together with the Brazilian sergeants. He planned three parallel guerrilla-focos.[13] In October 1966, eleven *guerrilleros* settled in the hills of Caparaó. They spent five months there, isolated and with only erratic contact with the population. Eventually the *guerrilleros* were arrested by the military police. In 1967 new Brazilian politico-military movements emerged. Carlos Marighella, a veteran member of the Communist Party founded an urban guerrilla group. In 1969 this movement, with young students and other young combatants, fused with the resistance group of ex-army Captain Carlos Lamarca. Between 1968 and 1971, four *exércitos* ('armies', in fact small units of 20-25 persons) were trained in Cuba.[14] Yet, here, too, Cuba's efforts failed. Marighella was killed in action in 1969; Lamarca in September 1971. The high number of captured, tortured and killed members of all revolutionary movements not long after their return to Brazil, makes it probable that that these movements were infiltrated by the Brazilian intelligence service.

Uruguay had a tradition of democratic, bipartisan and welfare governance; the parties of the Left represented ten percent of the electorate.[15] In the 1960s, an economic crisis profoundly affected the national economy and society; it caused a radicalisation process. In 1962, several politico-military groupings established an umbrella structure: the Coordinador, the direct predecessor of Uruguay's most prominent guerrilla movement, the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional-Tupamaros (MLN-T) which evolved in 1966. The movement developed a clandestine cell structure in Montevideo and in other parts of the country. One of the leaders, Raúl Sendic, went to Cuba for military training together with other militants, mostly students and also young members of the labour unions, the Communist and Socialist Youth, and other leftist parties. They operated mainly in the urban ambience. The Cubans welcomed the leaders of five (competing) Uruguayan movements. Eventually, they all were unsuccessful. Military intelligence and anti-communist death squads captured or killed most combatants. In fact, before the coup in 1973, the guerrilla movement in Uruguay was already largely eliminated.[16]

Colombia was also a country with a strong bipartisan tradition. In 1948, after the assassination of presidential candidate Gaitán in Bogotá, confrontation

between rival political parties caused an estimated death toll between 100,000 and 200,000. The most frightening period of slaughter (1948-1953) ended with a de facto government under General Rojas Pinilla, who decreed amnesty. But the Communist Party refused to disarm the peasants. The Colombian army, assisted by American support, started a 'pacification' campaign in 1959. Small revolutionary detachments went to the countryside and started independent guerrilla operations. The next years saw an appearance of three guerrilla movements, the '*guevarista*' *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN, 1962), the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia–Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC-EL or FARC, 1964) and the *Ejército Popular de Liberación* (EPL, 1967).[17] The first fifteen members of the ELN were trained in Cuba. Back in Colombia they initiated a rural foco. Several members were priests, nuns, former seminarists or radicalised Catholics.[18] In the early 1970s the leadership (especially Fabio Vásquez) instigated a reign of terror within the ELN with executions of 'dissenters' and 'enemies'. Military offensives gravely harmed the fighting capacity of the then 200 combatants. Vásquez, seriously disturbed, went to Cuba and directed the ELN by radio-telephone. The crisis within the guerrilla movement deepened; the active membership was reduced to 30-40 persons. Only when a Spanish-Colombian priest, Manuel Pérez, and the very young Nicolás Rodríguez Bautista (nom de guerre Gabino) assumed the combined leadership of the guerrilla movement in the second half of the 1970s, did they succeed in reviving the ELN.[19]

Politically, Che Guevara's guerrilla campaign in Bolivia was the most important Cuban involvement in Latin America in this decade; it was also the most dramatic. Guevara's first independent operation was in in the heart of Africa, the Congo. The Cuban leadership had sent 140 veteran combatants with him, until then the largest expeditionary force. But eventually his dream of a continental revolution ended in misfortune and the Cuban guerrilla force had to be saved.[20] When still in Cuba, he had overseen several of Piñeiro's interconnected expeditions: one to Argentina (Operation *Sombra*) and several to Peru (Operation *Matraca*).

They were launched from Bolivia, the most central and land-locked country of Latin America with many indigenous ethnicities. Operation *Sombra* was headed by Guevara's Argentinian friend, the journalist Jorge Masetti. The plan was that Guevara would join the guerrilla movement later. Piñeiro sent trusted and high-ranking officials (one of them was the future minister of MININT) to prepare the mission; they had also worked with Guevara in the Congo. A liaison was established with the Peronist Left. By the end of 1962, a group of around 25 Argentinean and Cuban *guerrilleros* plodded through the jungle. The region was thinly populated, the inhabitants poor. Armed propaganda did not attract sympathisers. But it alerted the *Gendarmeria Nacional*. They assaulted the camp. Masetti split up the group; the members of one group were wounded

and arrested. Some died of hunger and were found later on. Masetti and one of his men disappeared and were never seen again.

Operation *Matraca* was prepared for Peru.[21] In 1961 and 1962 a large number of Peruvians received training on the island.[22] Ideological divergence and lack of personal trust prevented coordination. The lukewarm support, and even distrust, of the leadership of the communist parties in Bolivia and Perú was evident. But after crossing the Bolivian-Peruvian border, already the first combatants were killed in action. For many of the initial combatants, it was a voyage destined to failure and death. It was the indigenous population who had informed the army about them.[23]

Guevara's Bolivian Campaign was Che's new effort after his failed campaign in the Congo. Fidel Castro convinced him, recovering in Prague, that he had to return to Cuba to prepare his new mission. Piñeiro's team initiated the logistics for his new mission. Che was already 39 years old, and he felt "much urged by his increasing age".[24] The members of his column were experienced veteran combatants, selected by Che and discussed with Fidel. It was the only Cuban operation in Latin America where the majority of the guerrilleros was Cuban, not local nationals. Training and preparation took months. The team had already begun to learn Quechua. Yet, strangely, the Cuban advance party had selected a base encampment in inhospitable Ñancahuazú, in a Guaraní and not a Quechua speaking environment.[25]

This expedition was another ill-fated voyage. Once started, Che and his Cuban group, reinforced with Bolivians and Peruvians, were operating alone. The promised backing of the Communist Party was half-hearted[26]; support from the local population was meagre at best. Quechua speaking Bolivian dictator Barrientos had made a pact with the indigenous leadership. Communications with Cuba were disrupted, and those with La Paz disturbed. After some successful initial skirmishes, the incipient guerrilla force was quickly spotted and substantial counterinsurgency operations started, with American logistical support. The military acquired detailed knowledge from a captured liaison officer, and later from deserters. The guerrilla group was split into parts that tried to find one another. Bolivian army units encircled the largest remaining guerrilla column. Che was captured, then murdered in La Higuera on 9 October 1967. A million Cubans went to the Plaza de la Revolución to listen to the farewell address by Fidel Castro.

In retrospect, Che Guevara's campaign and death in Bolivia had an enormous impact. In a strictly military sense, the guerrilla operation was relatively insignificant. The political significance, however, was enormous. Instantly, Che Guevara was transformed from a guerrilla hero into a revolutionary martyr, and to a greater extent a kind of civil saint. It is impossible to think of a Latin

American guerrilla movement (with the exception of the Maoist Shining Path movement in Peru) after this for which Guevara's life and death were not a source of inspiration.

The Cuban Revolution Phase II: The Mature Years (the 1970s and 1980s)

The death of Che Guevara generated an internal discussion and a reassessment of Cuba's revolutionary politics. There was also a more domestic reason for a political recalibration. By the late 1960s it had become clear that Cuba's economy could not be built on revolutionary spontaneity alone. Cuba's economic development stagnated and its growth depended more and more on external supplies and subsidies by the Soviet Union. Realignment with Moscow, accompanied by "ideological realism", was thus unavoidable.[27] The Cuban leadership imported Soviet experts on a massive scale. The number of Soviet specialists increased from 1,000 in the early 1960s to 6,000 by 1975; of those, 50 percent were military specialists.[28]

Soviet financing had made Cuba heavily dependent on continuous COMECON imports and subsidies. By and large, the 1970s and the 1980s were years of relative prosperity. The Cuban armed forces (FAR) strongly benefitted from Soviet support with the most sophisticated weaponry and military technology at the time. By the end of the 1970s and during its Africa campaigns, the FAR had between 470,000 and 510,000 members.[29] The influence of Soviet ideas on domestic ideology and culture and even the Party structure was huge as well. Soviet experts and old Cuban Communists loyal to Moscow advised on State and Party reforms. Cultural expressions in the broadest sense were more controlled. The first half-decade of the 1970s was the period of the '*Quinquenio Gris*' (the grey five-years) of strict monitoring on orthodoxy.[30] But whatever influence the Soviet Union had, Fidel Castro maintained a relatively independent course with respect to Latin America and the Caribbean. Fidel Castro was never an orthodox follower of Soviet politics, as Soviet intelligence officials observed.[31] In 1972, when senior officials of the *Departamento America* asked the Minister of MINREX about Cuba's politics vis-à-vis the United States, he was outspoken: "If Fidel instructs me to explain Cuba's policy (…), don't worry too much. Here, [even] the members of the Politburo do not know what our policy is about. We're going to give you instructions and you follow what Fidel and I tell you to do. Because here, [the two] who handle it, are Fidel and me."[32] But it was also clear that Castro himself provided instructions and Piñeiro had day-to-day access to Fidel.

The 1970s and 1980s were the period of Dependency Theory at universities and Liberation Theology in churches. The student generations and the faithful Catholics were not terribly interested in membership with the old Communist Parties. But they were influenced by the anti-imperialist arguments of the dependency theorists. Liberation Theology was even more influential in the hearts and minds of considerable segments of the Latin American population. The influence of the new theology on radicalising groups of the Argentinean, Uruguayan, Colombian and Central American revolutionary movements is undeniable.

In general, Cuba actively supported guerrilla movements that opposed military dictatorships. Now the *Departamento América* was explicitly in charge of trying to create politico-military umbrella organisations. It did so in Argentina, trying to mediate between the Montoneros and the Trotskyist-Guevarist ERP. In post-Allende Chile they also tried to generate a united guerrilla movement between the MIR and the *Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez* (FPMR), then the armed branch of the *Partido Comunista de Chile* (Chilean Communist Party PCCh).[33] The effort failed and many guerrilleros died. The *Departamento América* put considerable effort into trying to forge a unitary multi-party political front against Pinochet. Another example is Argentina under Peron's presidency and thereafter. Repeatedly, Cuban embassy members tried to convince the ERP leaders to take a less radical stance and cease or at least diminish the assassination of (former) military officers, expressing their fear of a military coup. They also tried to contribute to mutual cooperation between the two guerrilla movements.[34] Support for the ERP was originally given and then withhold. After the coup in 1976, Argentina maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba and delivered strategic goods to the island. According to Mattini, the last comandante of the ERP, he tried to convince Fidel Castro to support him after the devastating counterinsurgency campaign of the Argentinian armed forces, but Castro declined his pleas with an expression of which the essential message was: "Donde se come no se caga" (Where you eat you don't shit).[35]

In the 1960s, the United States had forced Cuba into a diplomatic quarantine in the region but in the early 1970s these efforts began to dwindle. In some countries more progressive governments took office. It coincided with Cuba's turn towards a more pragmatic diplomacy, creating alliances not only with the Armed Left but also with other nationalist-reformist forces. Cuba's representatives abroad described themselves in the early 1970s as no longer "revolutionaries of impulse" but rather "revolutionaries of the heart and mind".[36] In the 1970s, many of Cuba's political alliances with leftist movements and its leaders were based on personal friendships with Fidel: in the Caribbean with the leaders of Jamaica, Granada, Guayana, and Surinam. He also became close with Chile's president

Allende, Panama's leader General Torrijos and the political team of Peruvian president General Velasco. He also chose Cuban diplomats who would probably be appreciated by these leaders and would become 'friends of the president', even before the establishment of formal bilateral relations. Cuba managed to resume diplomatic relations with various Latin American countries: Chile (November 1970), Peru (July 1972), Ecuador (August 1972), Panama (August 1974) and Argentina (May 1973) after the return of Perón. Venezuela reinstated its embassy in Havana in December 1974, and Colombia in March 1975.

Once it re-established diplomatic relations, Cuba retracted direct support to the Armed Left. The most significant country where this rule applied was Mexico, Cuba's diplomatic lifeline. Diplomats and visiting officials of the *Departamento América* had to explain to insurgent groups that Cuba could not be of assistance. Diplomatic relations with Colombia had been resumed in March 1975. The new Cuban ambassador in Bogotá had the delicate task of informing the Colombian president that Fabio Vásquez, leader of the ELN, was living in Havana and was receiving medical treatment there. Then he had to explain to the new Colombian ELN leadership, which was slowly rebuilding the organisation, that "Cuba, given the new circumstances, could not continue supporting [them] as in previous years".[37] In 1986, the Chilean Christian Democrats, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party formed an alliance, after discussions in Cuba. The following year the FPMR and the PCCh ruptured. Cuba made a judgement of Solomon: to attend both the PC and the FPMR. But the *Departamento América* told the guerrilleros of the FPMR about Fidel Castro's promise to the Christian Democrats that, after Pinochet's eventual demise, Cuba's relationship with the Chilean left would only be 'humanitarian'. Indeed, the Departamento América maintained good relations with the FPMR and the PC, but in 1990 it broke off all relations.[38]

In the 1970s and 1980s, Central America was the theatre of complicated civil wars with involvement of the then two superpowers. Nearly all Central American guerrilla leaders visited Cuba, as exiles and for military training, political consultation or medical treatment. Young guerrilla leaders and recruits were trained in Cuba. The *Departamento América* had a prominent role. In the case of Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala it decisively contributed to the unification of national umbrella organisations of the various politico-military organisations. In Central America, Liberation Theology was of enormous influence. Half of the circa forty Nicaraguan comandantes were recruited by radicalised priests. Thousands of Church Based Communities supported the guerrilla organisations in El Salvador. In Guatemala Jesuit and Maryknoll priests were organising Mayan communities. Many young military and civilian leaders were previously engaged in the Central American student movement.[39]

The guerrilla movement in Honduras was smaller and of lesser significance.[40] In the mid-1960s, members of the Communist Party (PCH) formed a local guerrilla movement, but they were easy prey for the Army. Meanwhile, the nascent Salvadoran American guerrilla movement *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos* (PRTC, also a relatively small guerrilla group) had already formed a Honduran wing of circa 90 insurgents (PRTC-H). From excisions of the PCH, two new insurgent movements emerged. There was an effort to unify all armed movements in a *Directorio Nacional Unificado* (Unified National Directorate), but the Honduran army crushed most of the combatants in 1983 and 1984.

In the case of Nicaragua, Fidel and Piñeiro, who worried about the fragmentation, were essential to the unification of the three Sandinista factions that for one reason or another had split.[41] A team of the *Departamento América* travelled on and off for six months. In February 1979, the formal unification was celebrated in Havana in a meeting between Fidel Castro and Piñeiro, and the Sandinista leadership. Castro had built a coalition of Costa Rican, Cuban, Panamanian and Venezuelan chiefs of government, providing arms to the Southern Front in Nicaragua with roughly 1,000 Sandinista guerrilleros, headed by Humberto Ortega.[42] It was reinforced by Argentinean, Cuban-Chilean, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Uruguayan and other Latin American insurgents: the "International Brigade" with artillery officers, headed by a Cuban whose nom de guerre was Alejandro.[43]

After the triumph of the Sandinistas in July 1979, Cuba immediately sent a prominent medical brigade by plane. When the Sandinista government launched a literacy campaign, 2,000 Cuban teachers arrived to join the tens of thousands of Nicaraguan volunteers. In the first months, Cuban airplanes maintained a kind of airlift.[44] Army matters were negotiated with Humberto Ortega (Minister of Defence). Officers were also trained in Cuba by the hundreds when the Contra War began and the counterrevolutionary – fighters trained in Honduras first by the Argentineans and then by the CIA – acquired superiority.[45] Police, Intelligence and Security affairs were coordinated with Tomás Borge (Minister of the Interior, MINTER). Nicaragua's MINTER was, in a certain sense, 'adopted' by the Cuban MININT. Cuba's Director General of State Security Escalante Font became Borge's senior adviser. Intelligence and counterintelligence were to a certain degree handled by the Cubans. Furthermore, Ramón Montero, a Cuban officer-made-Nicaraguan comandante, headed the foreign intelligence and the counter-intelligence office in Managua, operating directly under Lenin Cerna, Borge's Vice Minister in charge of Security.[46]

In El Salvador, the most important guerrilla movement, the *Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Nacional Farabundo Martí* (FPL), with roughly 80 percent of the membership of all insurgent organisations, was a splinter group of the Com-

munist Party.[47] Its leader was Salvador Cayetano Carpio (comandante Marcial), its former secretary-general. The movement was organised in a military and a civilian wing (labour unions and peasant organisations). In the years to come three other organisations with a comparable structure were formed, initially tiny politico-military organisations but with growing memberships. As in Nicaragua, Fidel and Piñeiro strongly insisted on the necessity of an umbrella organisation; it took the Cubans an entire year. During the war years, the FMLN and Cuba maintained warm relations. The FMLN depended not only on Cuban assistance. It raised war taxes and it could rely on gifts from solidarity committees, and on the sustained support from the Sandinista government during the entire decade of the 1980s. Cuba trained new recruits and provided military training to guerrilla (especially artillery) officers when the guerrilla units in the mid-1980s reached the strength of military battalions. The Salvadoran leadership had a kind of father-son relationship with Fidel Castro, whose advice was sought on decisive matters. The respect for Fidel was such that in 1988 and 1989, during the preparations of the final offensive on San Salvador, the five members of the FMLN leadership presented their war plans to Castro and discussed them.[48]

With only one exception, from 1954 to 1985, all presidents of Guatemala were military officers. After their failure in the 1960s, the guerrilla had disappeared but was not evaporated. In exile in Mexico and Cuba, three nearly independent movements appeared: the EGP (*Ejército Guatemalteco de los Pobres*), the ORPA (*Organización del Pueblo en Armas*) and the FAR (*Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes*). They were joined by a small detachment of the PGT (*Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajadores*), the Communist Party.[49] In the 1970s, these four organisations operated independently. The leaders of the EGP, the FAR and the ORPA had an antagonistic relationship; Rolando Morán of the EGP was in a certain sense the primus inter pares. The Cuban leadership had a preference for this organisation; their first combatants were trained on the island and it was the largest insurgent movement with firm roots in the indigenous region, Western Guatemala. The EGP created a system of FIL (*Fuerzas Irregulares Locales*), unarmed and untrained Mayan supporters. But in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the Army command organised brutal counterinsurgency campaigns, the guerrilla left the peasants defenceless. Furthermore, the army established a system of 'self-defence patrols' (*Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil*, PACs) wherein 1.2 million indigenous men were incorporated, of an estimated national population of 9 million persons. The army campaigns defeated the guerrilla movements. From the early 1980s onwards, the guerrilla retired to remote rural zones. In 1982, strongly advised by the Cubans, the four organisations finally agreed to form an umbrella structure – the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemaletca* (URNG). The leadership

had moved to faraway Mexico City. Only years later, in 1986, priority issues like logistics were unified. Official negotiations started in 1991 and lasted until December 1996. During the negotiation process, both the United Nations and Cuba had a crucial role in the peace and reconciliation process.

The Cuban Revolution Phase III: The "Special Period" and the Aftermath (1990s, 2000s and 2010s)

By the end of the 1980s, the implosion of the Soviet Union radically changed the East-West relations worldwide. It meant dramatic alterations in terms of the Cuban standard of living, military position, reliance on its defence capabilities and possibilities of external intervention. These changes seriously affected Cuba's relations with the Latin American and Caribbean Left. Cuba's military was also hit hard by the downfall of the Socialist Block. Delivery of new weapons and spare parts was very difficult, and the FAR's only possibility to maintain operational condition was cannibalising older equipment. The FAR's personnel was officially halved; a similar process occurred within the MININT's military structures and the intelligence previsions.

The Cuban leadership declared a "Special Period in Peacetime", to survive while its economy and society were transfigured into a Spartan system of austerity and socio-political tightening. The government prevented starvation by distributing packages of essential food and clothing. The export of nickel, medical tourism (eventually the financial compensation for medical brigades to other countries) and an emerging tourist sector provided foreign currency. The still increasing Cuban diaspora produced urgently needed dollar remittances. It was then (1993) that the *Asociación de Combatientes de la Revolución Cubana* (Association of Combatants of the Cuban Revolution, ACRC) was established, organising all military veterans with experience in warfare and all 'civilian internationalists', the spinal column of the old cadres. The role of the military was amplified as managers in the state enterprises. Generals had always been moved to cabinet functions; now they also administered 'civilian' ministries.

The political re-arrangement in the early 1990s also had consequences for the *Departamento América*. In 1992, Piñeiro resigned as Chief after more than 30 years of leading the department and its institutional predecessors. Piñeiro was identified with nurturing revolutions. His successor was Arbesú, his senior deputy, who remained in charge of the department until his retirement in 2013. Cuba's foreign policy became that of soft power, emphasizing peace building and sending abroad civilian missions instead of military advisers. The *Departamento América* also began to get involved with peace negotiations in the late

1980s and thereafter. Fidel Castro tried to convince the leaders of the Colombian *Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar* (CGSB) to search for a political rather than a military solution. The *Departamento* even organised meetings between the CGSB and the Salvadorian FMLN in order to facilitate peace dialogues. Cuba displayed a leading role in the peace process in Colombia and in Guatemala, two countries where guerrilla movements were still fighting in the last decade of the twentieth century.

In Guatemala, Norway and Cuba facilitated peace. In March 1996, Cuba's good offices were employed to organise a three-day session of reconciliation between the army and the guerrilla; Fidel and Raúl Castro were the guests.[50] The peace negotiations were successfully ended after the Havana session and Cuba's relationship with Norway on matters of peace in Latin America would continue throughout the larger period of the Colombian peace talks in the 1990s and 2000s. At the explicit request of both the Colombian government and the guerrilla movements FARC-EP (and ELN), Fidel Castro in person and the *Departamento América* dedicated much time to rounds of peace talks and periods of temporary cease-fire.[51] Through the good offices of Norway and Cuba, bilateral negotiations started in Havana in 2012. In November 2016, the final peace agreement was signed. In February 2017, formal peace talks were initiated between the Colombian government and the ELN in Ecuador. Much of the preparatory efforts had taken place in Havana.

Cuba's internationalism, in previous years mainly expressed by backing guerrillas in Latin America and the Caribbean and significant military operations in Africa, had now turned into humanitarian assistance. According to Kirk "in all, over 135,000 medical professionals from Cuba have worked [in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia]. Between 1960 and 2014, there were some 50,000 of them (including 25,000 doctors) worked in over 60 developing countries".[52] In 1998, Fidel Castro launched the idea of a special Medical School for Latin American students, the *Escuela Latinoamericana de Ciencias Médicas* (ELAM). Similar medical schools were established in Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela. A second instrument of international aid was that of literacy campaigns. Cuban teachers implemented literacy programmes in Angola, Nicaragua, and in other countries in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa. In 2000 the instrument was standardised in an audiovisual programme called 'Yo, sí puedo' (Yes, I can). Meanwhile, Cuba had successfully rolled out adapted versions of 'Yes, I can' in thirty countries.[53]

At the turn of the century, Cuba gained a remarkable friend that fortified both its economy and its international aspirations. Even before Hugo Chávez was elected president of Venezuela, he and Fidel Castro had developed a personal and political friendship. In 2000, Chávez and Castro cemented their relationship by

a mutually beneficial agreement: Cuban doctors and educational experts went to Venezuela. Cuba accumulated a substantial provision of oil at preferential rates. By the late 2000s, around 40,000 Cuban experts were employed in Venezuela; in 2013, the year of Chávez's death, that number increased to 50,000.

After the creation of the ALBA (*Alianza Bolivariana para los pueblos de Nuestra América*) between Cuba and Venezuela, Chávez became its financier. He also generously co-financed Cuba's civilian internationalism abroad. Other countries joined the alliance: Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and six Caribbean states. Cuba provided medical and literacy assistance and Venezuela delivered oil under concessionary financial agreements. Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez had mutual political like-minded ideas about joint revolutionary projects in the region.

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century the Cuban and Venezuelan leadership could seriously consider socialist expansion across the Caribbean, Central America and the entire South American subcontinent.[54] With the support of friendly governments in such important countries as Argentina (under the presidency of the Kirchners, 2003-2015) and Brazil (under the presidency of Lula, 2003-2011) it felt as if the social democratic and socialist Left could determine the future of the entire region.

Discussion

Cuba influenced nearly all Latin American and Caribbean insurgent movements. In the 1960s it provided assistance to all individual organisations that came to the island for help. Guevara's (and Castro's) ideas about guerrilla warfare were a kind of secular bible for the guerrilla comandantes. But the theory about the revolutionary rural foco did not withstand the proof of practice. In not even one of the insurgency campaigns did the guerrilleros achieve victory. Time and again, regular armies defeated rural guerrilla movements, generally after barbaric counterinsurgency campaigns. With the wisdom of hindsight, it is easy to pinpoint the tepid support of the (Soviet-oriented) Communist Parties in Latin America. In most countries where guerrilla movements erupted, the Communist Parties exhibited political deafness. But there is more: Cuba did not have a significant indigenous population. Even the illiterate guajiros who joined their first guerrilla columns spoke and understood Spanish. But in the 1960s, the reality in other Latin American countries was different. In Central America and in the Andean countries, huge contingents of indigenous peoples were monolingual in non-Spanish languages. Centuries-old segregation, communal land tenure, poverty and backwardness all made it difficult to facilitate

contact with strangers who suddenly appeared, without deep knowledge of the indigenous societies, aspirations and culture.

If there was one institution whose members were more or less familiar with the indigenous masses (from which they recruited their soldiers), it was the army. The indigenous peoples knew the army officers, but also the army doctors and nurses, and the army engineers. The army was the State in remote and underdeveloped areas. It was not uncommon for former enlisted men, trained and literate after military service, to become community leaders. The highly committed guerrilleros of that period, coming from the outside, were strangers operating in an unknown environment.

From the early 1970s to the late 1980s, Cuba continued its role in revolutionary politics – less assertive perhaps, but always significant. Cuba depended on subsidies and military equipment provided by the Soviet Union. But the island sustained its relative independence with respect to its standing and acting in Latin America and the Caribbean: it did this by training, advising, facilitating and using the island's infrastructure and resources for anti-dictatorship coalitions, insurgent movements and guerrilla rebels. In one case, that of Nicaragua, it led to a triumph in 1979.

The Cuban leadership succeeded in overcoming the political isolation of the 1960s and rebuilt diplomatic relations with most countries in the region. Cuba continued to support guerrilla anti-dictatorial coalitions and insurgent movements when it perceived it to be convenient. There is, however, a difference from the 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Cuban leadership operated more pragmatically and explicitly emphasized the necessity of revolutionary unity. Previously, the *Departamento América* had trained all varieties of insurgents. Now it predominantly urged political pacts within the Armed Left, and the achievement of national umbrella organisations within each country. A second differentiating factor in comparison with the 1960s was the extension of Cuba's medical services to all revolutionary combatants of the region and the growing importance of the medical brigades, sent to friendly countries or to countries affected by natural disasters. It is without a doubt the most selfless contribution of Cuba to all insurgent movements.

In the 1970s, Fidel had befriended progressive president-generals in Peru (Velasco) and Panama (Torrijos). This friendship was not only based on pragmatism and political convenience, but also on shared values and interests as reform-minded soldiers. The most important alliance in this respect was the one with Hugo Chávez. All these military presidents were thinking in terms of the 'indivisible unity between people and the armed forces', patriotism and a 'revolutionary calling'. Fidel and Raúl Castro and many Cuban revolutionary *compañeros* were also soldiers, who admired characteristic soldiers' virtues and

heroism. There is no doubt that the military mystique of the two Castro brothers contributed to their life-long maxim of revolutionary unity and to the calling of the revolutionary vanguard to lead the Cuban nation to its destiny.[55]

However, the political panorama changed after 2010. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, during the Pink Tide, Cuba counted on the sympathy of the presidents of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela and in general with heads of government and states in the Caribbean. The presidents of Brazil (Lula), Bolivia (Morales), El Salvador (Sánchez Cerén), Nicaragua (Daniel Ortega) and Venezuela (Chávez, Maduro) had all been involved in Cuban friendship over several decades.

But already during Chávez's last years in government and even more obviously under Maduro's administration, Venezuela was a house divided. Economic malaise, galloping inflation, a sharp decrease in world oil prices and growing opposition brought the Venezuelan economy to the brink of a breakdown. In 2015, after elections in Argentina, a president of the Right came to power, as it had in Peru in July 2016. And in May 2016 Brazilian president Rousseff left the presidential palace after an impeachment procedure; the new government now follows a neo-liberal route. On the other hand, in 2015, diplomatic relations with the United States were re-established, formally ending an era of more than fifty years of antagonism and hostilities.

Fidel Castro died in 2016, symbolising the closure of a long period of government or at least the end of the symbolic presence of a revolutionary iconic leader.[56] However, at the end of the funeral ceremony, his brother Raúl, his political successor, solemnly swore to maintain Cuba's revolutionary ethos and to defend its socialism. During more than 55 years, Cuba displayed a role in the region that is incomparable to any other country in the region with the same or more inhabitants. It developed its own foreign policy with respect to the region notwithstanding pressures of the then two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. It created a special organisation, the *Departamento América*, that during the entire period covered in this article, was the liaison with the Armed Left and, after 1975, with the entire Latin American and Caribbean gamma of political parties and social movements.

One can discern three remarkably distinct phases: that of revolutionary fervour in the 1960s when Cuba offered assistance and training to a large variety of smaller and larger guerrilla movements. In the period of the 1970s and 1980s it broke the diplomatic isolation that the United States had imposed after the Missile Crisis in 1962. When diplomatic relations were re-established, Cuba considerably diminished direct support to insurgent movements. Where several guerrilla movements fought separately against dictatorship, Cuba tried (and generally created) umbrella organisations. After the implosion of the Soviet

Union, when the affluent Soviet assistance ended, Cuba continued its socialist trajectory but changed its military assistance in a civilian cooperation. At the same time, it offered its good offices and mediation to initiate and sustain a peace agreement. It decisively influenced the national political arena in many African, Latin American and Caribbean countries. Cuba did and does matter, in the region and in the Third World.

Notes

1 I thank Tanya Harmer and Alberto Martín Álvarez for their valuable comments and suggestions.

2 This article draws on research published as Dirk Kruijt, *Cuba and Revolutionary Latin America*. *An Oral History* (London: Zed Books, 2017). The research is based on primary and secondary sources. There are two primary sources: first, 31 interviews with members of the Cuban the guerrilla campaign in the Sierra Maestra and of the urban resistance groups between 1953 and 1959 (in summary published as José Bell Lara, Tania Caram León, Dirk Kruijt and Delia Luisa López García, *Combatientes* [Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2014]; second, 48 interviews with members of the so-called *Departamento América* (the liaison organisation with the Latin American Armed Left), and with other significant persons of the 'extended institutional family' of the *Departmento* covering the more 'civilian component' of Cuba's internationalism and development assistance (in summary published as Luis Suárez Salazar and Dirk Kruijt, *La Revolución Cubana en Nuestra América: El internacionalismo anónimo* [Havana: RUTH Casa Editorial, e-book, 2015]). Secondary sources are the manifold testimonial publications based on interviews with testimonial publications from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Central America, Chile, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. I also interviewed or re-interviewed former guerrilla leaders and peace negotiators in Colombia and Central America (mentioned in Dirk Kruijt, *Guerrillas: War and Peace in Central America* (London: Zed Books, 2008).

3 See Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*. *Havana, Washington, and Africa* (*1959 – 1976*) (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002, and Ian Liebenberg, Jorge Risquet and Vladimir Shubin (eds.), *A Far-Away War*: *Angola 1975-1989* (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2016).

4 See for instance Alberto Martin Álvarez and Eduardo Rey Tristán (eds.), *Revolutionary Violence and the New Left*: *Transnational Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

5 Until 1961 the Ministry of Government.

6 I use the entire text '*Departamento América*' as the only reference to institutions that evolved from G2 in M in Vice *Ministerio Técnico* (VMT) of the MININT, *Dirección General de Inteligencia* (DGI), *Dirección General de Liberación Nacional* (DGLN), all operating within the MININT, and then *Departamento América*, after 1975 operating under responsibility of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Eventually the *Departamento América* was incorporated in the *Departamento de Relaciones Internacionales* of the Central Committee.

7 Interview with Enrique Flores, one of the members of the *Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar* (CGSB) (Bogota, 20 February 2013).

8 Interview with Eduardo Sancho (*Resistencia Nacional*) and one of the *comandancia general* of the FMLN (San Salvador, 23 August 2005).
9 For details, see Eudald Cortina Orero. 2014. 'Proyectos revolucionarios. Casos nacionales y coordinación regional', in Oikión Solano, Verónica, Eduardo Rey Tristán and Martín López Ávalos (eds.), *El estudio de las luchas revolucionarias en América Latina* (*1959-1996*). *Estado de la cuestión* (Zamora and Santiago de Compostela: El Colegio de Michoacán and Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 2014), pp. 409-30.
10 Canada (until 1990 only an observer of the OAS) and Mexico never interrupted their diplomatic relations with Cuba.
11 See Yuri Pavlov, *Soviet – Cuban Alliance*: 1959 – 1991 (New Brunswick: North – South Center of the University of Miami and Transaction Publishers, 1994), pp. 55 ff., and Mervin J. Bain, *Soviet – Cuban Relations 1985 to 1991. Changing Perceptions in Moscow and Havana* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), pp. 27 ff.
12 "Of course, the captain was arrested, tried and shot,", said a high-ranking MININT official who wanted to remain anonymous (Havana, 2011; the author has a taped version of this interview).
13 Denise Rollemberg, *O apoio de Cuba à luta armada no Brasil. O treinamento guerrilheiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Mauad, 2001), p. 23.
14 The total number of people trained between 1967 and 1970 was 92 (Jean Rodrigues Sales, *A luta armada contra a ditadura militar. A esquerda brasileira e a influencia da revolução cubana* (São Paolo: Editora Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2007), p. 68.
15 Eduardo Rey Tristán, *A la vuelta de la esquina. La izquierda revolucionaria uruguaya 1955-1973* (Montevideo: Editorial Fin del Siglo, 2006), pp. 63 ff., 129-130.
16 Interview with Fernando Ravelo Renedo (Havana, interview 17 October 2011).
17 See CNMH, ¡*Basta ya*! *Colombia*: *Memorias de guerra y dignidad. Informe general* (Bogota: Centro Nacional de la Memoria Histórica, 2013), p. 123.
18 One of them was Father Camilo Torres Restrepo, a radical theologian and sociologist and one of the first Liberation Theologists. He broke with the Catholic Church and joined the ELN as a guerrilla recruit, after a public message in December 1965, only to die in combat. After his death, he became a revolutionary icon, like Che Guevara.
19 Interview with Luis Eduardo Celis Méndez (Havana, 13, 14 and 15 December 2011).
20 Interview with Osvaldo Cardenas (Havana, 18 January 2012) and Ulises Estrada (Havana, 21 October 2011).
21 See Jan Lust, *Lucha revolucionaria. Perú, 1958 - 1967* (Barcelona, RBA Libros, 2013), by far the most detailed analysis of the Peruvian guerrilla movements in the 1960s.
22 The two guerrilla movements were the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR) and the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN).
23 General Jorge Fernandez Maldonado, one of the authors of Velasco's *Plan INCA* and between 1968 and 1976 an influential cabinet member of the reformist military government, quoted in Dirk Kruijt, *Revolution by Decree. Peru 1968-1975* (Amsterdam and West Lafayette, IN: Thela Publishers and Purdue University Press, 1994), p. 55.
24 Manuel Piñeiro in an interview with Luis Suárez Salazar, et al. 1997. "'Mi modesto homenaje al Che'. Entrevista exclusive al comandante Manuel Piñeiro Losada", *América Libre* 11, número temático *Ernesto Che Guevara-30º Aniversario* (1999), p. 32.
25 For a critical analysis of Che's campaign, see Gary Prado Salmón, *La guerrilla inmolada: la campaña del Che en Bolivia: testimonio y análisis de un protagonista* (Santa Cruz: Editorial Punto y Coma, 1987). General (then captain) Gary Prado Salmón was the leader of the army unit that captured Che Guevara.

26 At least, this is the Cuban version. Fidel Castro says, with hindsight: "I think that Che should have made a greater effort in the interest of unity; that's my opinion. His personality led him to be very frank (…). Monje was ambitious and his aspirations were rather ridiculous; he wasn't prepared to lead a guerrilla" (Ignacio Ramonet, *In Conversation with Fidel* (Havana: Cuban Council of State Publications, 2008), p. 339.

27 See James G. Blight and Philip Brenner *Sad and Luminous Days: Cuba's Struggle with the Superpowers after the Missile Crisis* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002) for a detailed analysis.

28 W. Raymond Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba*. *Interests and Influences* (New York: Praeger, 1985), pp. 87 ff., 101).

29 Brian Latell, *The Cuban Military and Transition Dynamics* (University of Miami, Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies, 2003), p. 11. Latell, once the US intelligence supervisor for Cuba, writes about the FAR: "It was the largest military force in Latin America and vastly bigger than those countries of Cuba's size anywhere in the world. Furthermore, man for man during the 1970s and 1980s, it may have been the best and most experienced fighting force of any small nation, with the single exception of Israel".

30 See Fornet, Ambrosio, "El quinquenio gris: Revisando el tiempo", *Casa de las Américas* 246 (2007), pp. 3 – 16.

31 Pavlov, *Soviet – Cuban Alliance*, pp. 97 ff.

32 Interview with Osvaldo Cárdenas (Havana, 18 January 2012); at that moment, Cárdenas was head of the Caribbean section.

33 See Luis Rojas Nuñez, *De la rebelión popular a la sublevación imaginada*. *Antecedentes de la historia política y militar del Partido Comunista de Chile y el FPMR 1973 – 1990* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones LOM, 2011). The Cuban authorities, however, initially had reservations about an early guerrilla detachment in the 1970s; see Harmer, Tanya, "The View from Havana: Chilean Exiles in Cuba and Early Resistance to Chile's Dictatorship, 1973-1977", *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 96: 1 (2016), pp. 109-46.

34 Interview with Fernando Ravelo Renedo (Havana, 17 October 2011); Ravelo was the official of the *Departamento América* at the embassy.

35 Interview with Arnold Kremer (Luis Mattini), the last comandante of the ERP before its dissolution (Buenos Aires, 22 and 25 April 2017).

36 Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapell Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

37 Interview with Fernando Ravelo Renedo (Havana, 17 October 2011); Ravelo was the newly appointed ambassador.

38 Interview with Luis Rojas Nuñez (Havana, 20 January 2012); Rojas was the representative of the FPMR.

39 Kruijt, *Guerrillas*, pp. 44-47.

40 Although the first (Guevarist) guerrilla organisation in Honduras (*Frente Revolucionario Francisco Morazán*) was formed and trained in Cuba in 1962 and 1963.

41 Interview with Julio López Campos (Managua, 2 June 2011). López was the head of the Sandinista Department of International Relations until 1990.

42 Cuban intelligence could intercept telephone conversations among officers of the National Guard, especially Major Bravo – commander of the Guard force that contested the Sandinista Southern Front. Bravo first called his wife and then his lover in Managua. The information was transferred to the Sandinista command (interview with Fabian Escalante Font, Havana, 21 December 2011); Escalante was a high-ranking Cuban State Security

general; he wrote his memoirs about Nicaragua (Fabian Escalante Font, *Nicaragua Sandinista* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2009).

43 Interview with the Chilean-Cuban artillery officer Luis Rojas Nuñez (Havana, 20 January 2012). The Chilean contingent, formed by exiled former medical students of the Chilean Communist Party in Cuba, was headed by a Chilean whose nom de guerre was Salvador.

44 Even until the end of the 1980s, Cuban pilots flew the military and civilian airplanes to far-away regional centres.

45 Interview with Joaquín Cuadra Lacayo, Nicaragua's Chief of the General Staff, quoted in Kruijt, *Guerrillas*, p. 106.

46 Interview with Fabián Escalante Font (Havana, 21 December 2011). Montero also became an adviser of Humberto Ortega. About the abundant military and technical assistance that Cuba provided to Nicaragua, see Prevost, Gary, 'Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship?', Latin *American Perspectives* 66, 17: 3 (1990), pp. 120-37.

47 See Alberto Martín Álvarez, "Del partido a la guerrilla. Los orígenes de las Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí FPL)", in Juárez Ávila, Jorge (ed.), *Historia y debates sobre el conflicto armado salvadoreño y sus secuelas* (San Salvador: Universidad de El Salvador and Fundación Friedrich Ebert, 2013), pp. 55-62.

48 Kruijt, *Guerrillas*, pp. 75-76.

49 The EGP was headed by Ricardo Ramírez de León (nom de guerre Rolando Morán), the ORPA was commanded by Rodrigo Asturias (nom de guerre Gaspar Ilóm), the FAR was directed by Pablo Monsanto (nom de guerre of Jorge Soto), the PGT had Ricardo Rosales (nom de guerre Carlos González) as its leader.

50 Interview with Ramiro Abreu (Havana, 25 October 2011 and 22 February 2015); Abreu was office head of the Central American Section of the *Departamento América* from 1975 to 2010; for his memoirs, see Ramiro Abreu, *Memorias al viento* (Havana and Guatemala: Ruth Casa Editorial and Estrella Publicidad S.A., 2013).

51 Castro even allowed a book publication, with excerpts of confidential diplomatic reports, accounts by officers of the *Departamento América*, and taped conversations between Castro and guerrilla leaders in Havana and elsewhere; see Fidel Castro Ruz, *La paz en Colombia* (Havana: Editora Política, 2009).

52 John M. Kirk, *Healthcare without Borders*: *Understanding Cuban Medical Internationalism*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), pp. 1, 6.

53 For a detailed analysis, see Mark Abendroth, *Rebel Literacy: Cuba's National Literacy Campaign and Critical Global Citizenship (Sacramento: Litwin Books, LCC, 2009)*.

54 See George Lambie, *The Cuban Revolution in the 21st Century* (London: Pluto Press, 2010).

55 About the Cuban and Venezuelan military mystique, see also Dirk Kruijt, "L'armée vénézuélienne, le peuple et la mystique révolutionnaire", *Le Monde diplomatique* (décembre 2016), https://www.mondeplomatique.fr/2016/12/KRUIJT/56962.

56 Also the revolutionary generation is slowly diminishing. In October 2017 (after reviewing the third draft of this article) already eight members of the 79 interviewed veterans had passed on.

Annex - Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACRC	Asociación de Combatientes de la Revolución Cubana (Asociation of Combatants of the Cuban Revolution)
CGSB	Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar (Guerrilla Coordination Simon Bolivar) (Colombia)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (United States)
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Socialist Block)
DA	Departamento América del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba (America Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba)
EGP	Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (Guerrilla Army of the Poor) (Guatemala)
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army) (Bolivia)
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army) (Colombia)
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army) (Perú)
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army) (Colombia)
ERP	Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (Revolutionary People's Army Argentina) ERP Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army) (El Salvador)
FAR	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (Revolutionary Armed Forces) (Cuba)
FAR	Fuerza Áerea Rebelde (Rebel Air Force) (Cuba)
FAR	Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (Rebel Armed Forces) (Guatemala)
FARC-EL or FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes de Colombia – Ejército Popular (Rebel Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army) (Colombia)
FIL	Fuerzas Irregulares Locales (Local Irregular Forces) (EGP, Guatemala)
FMLN	Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN (Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation) (El Salvador)
FPL	Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Nacional (People's National Liberation Forces) Farabundo Martí (El Salvador)
FPMR	Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez (Patriotic Front Manuel Rodríguez) (Chile)
FSLN	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista Front for National Liberation) (Nicaragua)
ICAP	Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos (Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples)
M or Departamento M	Departamento M initial denomination of the VMT (MININT), DGLN, Departamento América (MININT, Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba)
DGI	Dirección General de Inteligencia (Directorate General of Intelligence) (MININT) (Cuba)
DGLN	Dirección General de Liberación Nacional (Directorate General of National Liberation) (MININT) (Cuba)
M – OE	Special Operations section of M (Cuba)
MINFAR	Ministerio de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (Ministry of Defence) (Cuba)
MININT	Ministerio del Interior (Ministry of the Interior) (Cuba)
MINREX	Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) (Cuba)
MINTER	Ministerio del Interior (Nicaragua)

MIR	Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Movement of the Left) (Chile)
MIR	Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Movement of the Left) (Peru)
MIR	Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Movement of the Left) (Venezuela)
ORPA	Organización del Pueblo en Armas (People's Armed Organisation) (URNG)
PCCh	Partido Comunista de Chile (Chilean Communist Party)
PCH	Partido Comunista de Honduras (Communist Party of Honduras)
PRCT	Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (Revolutionary Party of the Central American Workers) (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras)
PRTC-H	Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos de Honduras (Honduran wing of the PRTC)
URNG	Unión Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity)
VMT	Vice Ministerio Técnico (Technical Vice Ministry) (MININT) (Cuba)