

The First Ambassadors: Cuba's Contribution to Guinea-Bissau's War of Independence*

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Abstract. As the rebels of Guinea-Bissau fought for independence from Portugal, Cuban military instructors stood by their side and Cuban doctors treated their wounds. Joining the rebellion in 1966, and remaining through the war's end in 1974, this was the longest Cuban intervention in Africa before the despatch of troops to Angola in November 1975. It was also the most successful. As the Guinean paper *Nô Pintcha* declared, 'The Cubans' solidarity was decisive for our struggle'. Cuba's contribution to Guinea-Bissau's war of independence is an important and revealing example of Cuban policy in Africa.

As the rebels of Guinea-Bissau fought for independence from Portugal, Cuban military instructors stood by their side and Cuban doctors treated their wounds. Joining the rebellion in 1966, and remaining through to the war's end in 1974, this was the longest Cuban intervention in Africa before the despatch of troops to Angola in November 1975.¹ It was also the most successful. As the Guinean paper *Nô Pintcha* declared, 'The Cubans' solidarity was decisive for our struggle'.² Nevertheless, the literature on the war in Guinea-Bissau virtually overlooks the Cuban contribution.³

The Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde

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¹ I went to Cuba six times between November 1993 and July 1996 for a total of six months to research Cuban policy towards Africa from the early 1960s to 1978. I interviewed sixty-three Cuban protagonists, and I had access to the archives of the Central Committee (hereafter ACC), the *Instituto de Historia de Cuba*, the *Centro de Información de la Defensa de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (hereafter CID-FAR), and the *Ministerio para la Inversión Extranjera y la Colaboración Económica*, and to documents from private collections. I have photocopies of all Cuban documents cited in this essay.

² *Nô Pintcha* (Bissau), 2 Apr. 1986, p. 7. To avoid confusion, throughout this essay I use 'Guinean' to refer only to natives of Guinea-Bissau, not Guinée.

³ 'Policy Planning Memorandum No. 1', p. 9, enclosed in Department of State (hereafter DOS) to All African Diplomatic Posts, Lisbon, London, Paris, Rome, 2 Dec. 1971, FOIA 1982/0426. See also Bennett (Lisbon) to DOS, 3 Apr. 1968, FOIA 1982/0392; Bennett (Lisbon) to SecState, 16 July 1969, FOIA 1983/0449; DOS, Bureau of Intelligence and Research (hereafter INR), 'Portuguese Guinea: Talks About Talks', 3 Mar. 1970, FOIA 1982/1049; 'Portuguese Guinea: Guidelines for Policy', enclosed in Irwin to Amembassy Lisbon, 2 Oct. 1970, FOIA 1982/1879.

(PAIGC) was ‘the most effective of the liberation organizations in the Portuguese African territories’, US reports stressed time and again.⁴ Launching armed struggle in January 1963 after three years of intense political work in the countryside, the PAIGC guerrillas controlled a third of the country by 1965 and posed a significant challenge to some 20,000 Portuguese troops.

Guinea-Bissau was an unlikely place for the most successful guerrilla movement of Portuguese Africa. It was a tiny country (14,000 square miles) wedged between Senegal to the north and Guinée to the east and the south, with a population estimated at 540,000 in 1960. Like Angola and Mozambique, it was inhabited by diverse tribes that lacked the sense of belonging to a common nation and were often hostile to one another. The PAIGC, however, was the most adept of the rebel movements in the Portuguese colonies ‘in its prosecution of a people’s war. It was most successful in achieving nationalist unity, in carrying out political mobilisation and in establishing new political structures in the liberated areas.’⁵ Its leaders were outstanding, above all Amílcar Cabral, the secretary general. ‘Amílcar Cabral is a very unusual breed of political exile: everyone respects him’, the Cuban ambassador in Ghana wrote in 1963.⁶ While he was influenced by Marxism, he was not a Marxist. ‘He came to view Marxism as a methodology rather than an ideology’, his foremost biographer, Patrick Chabal, has remarked. ‘When useful in analyzing Guinean society it was relied upon. When it was no longer relevant, it was amended or even abandoned.’⁷ Cabral ‘was no

⁴ The best studies on the war of independence in Guinea-Bissau are Lars Rudebeck, *Guinea-Bissau: A Study of Political Mobilization* (Uppsala, 1974); Patrick Chabal, *Amílcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People’s War* (Cambridge, 1983); Mustafah Dhada, *Warriors at Work: How Guinea Was Really Set Free* (Niwot, Colo., 1993). Of the many accounts by journalists, the most important are Basil Davidson, *No Fist Is Big Enough to Hide the Sky: The Liberation of Guinea and Cape Verde* (London, 1981); Romano Ledda, *Una rivoluzione africana* (Bari, 1970); Gérard Chaliand, *Lutte armée en Afrique* (Paris, 1967) and Al J. Venter, *Portugal’s Guerrilla War: The Campaign for Africa* (Cape Town, 1973). The first three are sympathetic to the rebels, the last to the Portuguese.

⁵ Patrick Chabal, ‘People’s War, State Formation and Revolution in Africa’, *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* (Nov. 1983), p. 112.

⁶ Armando Entralgo to Raúl Roa, 13 Dec. 1963, in ‘Ayuda brindada por la República de Cuba al Partido Africano por la Independencia de Guinea y las Islas de Cabo Verde (PAIGC)’, p. 5, CID-FAR (hereafter ‘Ayuda brindada’).

⁷ Chabal, *Amílcar Cabral*, p. 169. ‘Although Cabral’s thought was grounded in Marxism, it is clear that he was not beholden to any contemporary political or economic interpretation of the doctrine. He believed, rightly or wrongly, that Marx’s legacy was his independent and critical approach to the analysis of the society in which he lived. He therefore felt free to develop his own analysis of Guinean society without concern for prevailing political theories.’ (*Ibid.*, p. 186). See also Ronald Chilcote, *Amílcar Cabral’s Revolutionary Theory and Practice: A Critical Guide* (Boulder, 1991), pp. 23–88 and Jock McCulloch, *In the Twilight of Revolution: The Political Theory of Amílcar Cabral* (London, 1983).

communist', agreed a Cuban intelligence officer who knew him well. 'He was a progressive leader with very advanced ideas and an extreme clarity about Africa's problems.'⁸

The PAIGC directed the war from Conakry, the capital of Guinée, whose president, Ahmed Sékou Touré, supported the guerrilla movement and offered an essential haven to it from 1963 on. Amílcar Cabral and other top PAIGC leaders had their headquarters in Conakry. Cabral, writes Chabal, 'was the undisputed commander and tactician of the war and, crucially, he kept an unusual degree of control over its conduct... He kept in constant touch with his military commanders in the interior and he was directly responsible for all important decisions concerning the organisation of the armed forces, their deployment and the coordination of operations being carried out.'⁹

Contact between the PAIGC and the Cuban embassies in Algeria, Guinée and Ghana began in early 1963. In August 1963, the PAIGC asked whether five of its members could receive 'military and political instruction in Cuba for 5–6 months', the Cuban chargé in Conakry reported. Havana said yes, but did nothing. (Cuba was not focusing on sub-Saharan Africa in those early years.) 'The PAIGC is still waiting for us to make good on our promise to train its members', the Cuban ambassador in Accra complained several months later. 'If we don't help them now, we won't be able to complain in the future.'¹⁰ But it is unclear whether the five PAIGC members ever got to Cuba, and through 1964 Cuba did nothing else to help the PAIGC.

It was Che Guevara's three-month trip to Africa in December 1964 that signalled Cuba's quickening interest in the continent, and forged the real link between the PAIGC and Havana. 'While in Conakry', the Bissau newspaper *Nô Pintcha* reported, 'Che Guevara asked to meet our leaders, and he even delayed his departure from Guinée in order to wait for our Secretary General.' On 12 January 1965, he met Amílcar Cabral.¹¹

In late April, 'Operación Triángulo' began as the largest ship of Cuba's merchant navy, the *Uvero*, left Matanzas to fulfil some of the commitments that Che had made on his African journey. Aboard were nine military instructors for Congo Brazzaville, weapons for the Cuban column that was preparing to enter Zaïre from Tanzania, and food, arms and medicine for the PAIGC. The *Uvero*'s first stop was Conakry.¹² 'A ship without a

⁸ Interview with Ulises Estrada.

⁹ Chabal, *Amílcar Cabral*, p. 98.

¹⁰ 'Ayuda brindada', pp. 2–6. Quotations are from 22 Aug. 1963 cable by Chargé José Carballo and 13 Dec. 1963 cable by Ambassador Armando Entralgo.

¹¹ *Nô Pintcha*, 9, Oct. 1975, p. 5.

¹² This account is based on documents in two folders labelled 'Operación Triángulo', ACC; interviews with Estrada, the intelligence officer who oversaw the operation, and

manifest has unloaded 315 crates for our national defence’, stated the customs form.¹³

In July, a handful of Cape Verdeans who had been studying in Europe left Algiers for Havana on a Cuban ship. The PAIGC was fighting for the independence of both Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde islands, some 600 km west, but armed struggle had not yet begun on the islands. The Cape Verdeans (eventually their number grew to thirty-one) were going to Cuba for military training. The PAIGC’s plan was that they would ‘then return home to start guerrilla warfare in the Cape Verde islands’, and that several of their Cuban instructors would accompany them.¹⁴

Conversations between Cuban intelligence officers and Cabral about further aid were underway in late 1965.¹⁵ In January 1966, Cabral made his first trip to Cuba, when he led the PAIGC delegation to the Tricontinental Conference in Havana. He made a powerful impression on his Cuban hosts. ‘His address to the Tricontinental was brilliant’, remarks a senior Cuban official. ‘Everyone was struck by his great intelligence and personality. Fidel was very impressed by him.’¹⁶

After Cabral’s speech, he and Castro spoke at great length. They were alone, except for Oscar Oramas, a foreign ministry official who had been accompanying Amílcar Cabral during his stay in Cuba, and who took notes.¹⁷ ‘Amílcar explained the history of our independence struggle’, wrote Luís Cabral, Amílcar’s half-brother and close aide.

Fidel became increasingly aware of...the problems we faced. When Amílcar spoke of our need for artillery, Fidel understood that we would also need instructors; when Amílcar spoke of life in the liberated regions...the Cuban leader understood that we had to have doctors. And he understood that our armed forces needed adequate means of transportation to be more effective: Cuba

Manuel Agramonte, Rafael Moracén and Osvaldo Fuente Veitía, three of the military instructors on the *Uvero*.

¹³ ‘Entreprise nationale de transport routier, de transit et de consignation maritime’, no. 009814, 14 May 1965, ‘Operación Triángulo’, ACC.

¹⁴ Luís Cabral, *Crónica da Libertação* (Lisbon, 1984), pp. 251–2 (quoted); interviews with Víctor Dreke, a Cuban officer who headed the special unit that was in charge of training, and with Manuel Monteiro Santos, one of the Cape Verdeans. Two of the Cape Verdeans wrote about their experiences in the local newspaper. See Agnelo Dantas, ‘O primeiro juramento dos combatentes cabo-verdianos’, *Voz di Povo* (Praia, Cape Verde), 16 Jan. 1988, p. 5 and Júlio de Carvalho, ‘Nunca é desejável que a intervenção policial sea repressiva’, *Voz di Povo*, 30 Jan. 1988, p. 6. See also ‘15 de Janeiro, um marco importante da nossa história’, *Voz di Povo*, 16 Jan. 1988, p. 11; Humberto Cardoso, *O partido único em Cabo Verde* (Praia, 1993), pp. 18–19.

¹⁵ See ‘Ayuda brindada’, pp. 7–8.

¹⁶ Interview with Jorge Risquet. For Cabral’s speech at the Tricontinental, see Amílcar Cabral, *Guinée ‘Portugaise’: le pouvoir des armes* (Paris, 1970), pp. 41–62.

¹⁷ Interviews with Oramas and Vasco Cabral, who was a member of the 5-man PAIGC delegation.

would send us both the vehicles and the men to teach our fighters how to use and maintain them.

And so Castro pledged to send doctors, military instructors and mechanics. ‘Everything was simple in Amílcar’s talks with the top Cuban leader’, marvels Luís Cabral.¹⁸ At the end of the conversation, ‘Fidel told Amílcar, “Come with me, I’ll take you to the Escambray [mountains].”’ He asked Oramas to accompany them. A car took them from Havana to Trinidad, from there they proceeded in a jeep and, in some places, on foot. The trip lasted 2–3 days. During it, Amílcar Cabral asked Castro to appoint a new ambassador to Conakry who would serve as a liaison with the PAIGC.¹⁹ (Cabral ‘has a low opinion of our chargé in Conakry’, a Cuban intelligence officer had remarked a few months earlier.) At Cabral’s request, Castro appointed Oramas.²⁰

Amílcar Cabral returned to Conakry, where he informed Sékou Touré of his conversations with Castro. In Conakry, two Cuban intelligence officers hammered out the details of the aid that Castro had promised. ‘Sergio Fidel and I’, wrote one of them in his report to Havana, ‘met with Amílcar Cabral and we gave him the revolvers and the money that Alejandro [Fidel Castro] had sent.’ Cabral asked

that we send him three mechanics to teach his men how to drive and repair the trucks....

He asked that we send ten mortar experts...and that they be blacks or dark mulattoes so that they would blend in with his people. They should instruct his men in the use of the mortars and participate in the fighting. The PAIGC needs them very urgently because they are planning to take the...[fortified camp] of [Madina de] Boé... Amílcar asked if we could send these instructors by plane, because the operation is on hold until they arrive.

There should be nine doctors, as was agreed there [in Havana]. He told us that he does not have any doctors. He urgently needs three (one clinician, one surgeon and one orthopaedist) for the hospital [in Guinée] near the border [with Guinea-Bissau]. He would like us to send these three by plane. The other six will go to Guinea-Bissau...and can come by ship.

Cabral also provided a detailed list of supplies he wanted to receive: tobacco, cotton fabrics, 500 tons of sugar, uniforms, twelve trucks with spare parts, ammunition, and other military supplies.²¹

In March 1966 Oramas flew to Conakry to deliver a message from Castro to Sékou Touré, ‘informing him that we had decided to give the PAIGC a substantial amount of aid and asking for his support’. The message also said that Castro wanted to appoint Oramas ambassador to Guinée.²²

¹⁸ Cabral, *Crónica*, p. 251.

¹⁹ Interview with Oramas.

²⁰ X to M [late 1965], quoted in ‘Ayuda brindada’, p. 7; interview with Oramas.

²¹ ‘Ayuda brindada’, pp. 12–14.

²² Interview with Oramas.

At the beginning of the 1960s, Guinée and Cuba had seemed destined to become close friends. The former faced the hostility of France (in 1958 Touré had defied de Gaulle, which had propelled French efforts to wreck the country's economy and to overthrow Touré) and the latter of the United States; both spoke eloquently in favour of African liberation; as a Cuban daily stated, 'Our revolutions are like sisters'. On 14–16 October 1960, Touré went to Havana. It was the first visit of an African chief of state to Cuba.²³

The following year Cuba's foreign aid programme to Third World governments began when fifteen students from Guinée arrived in Havana to attend the university or technical institutes. Cuba paid all expenses, including the students' pocket money.²⁴

But a strong friendship did not develop, in part, perhaps, because Cuba was not yet concerned with sub-Saharan Africa, but also because Touré developed cordial relations with the Kennedy administration, and during the Missile Crisis of October 1962 refused permission to Soviet planes en route to Cuba to refuel in Conakry.²⁵ From 1963 on Cuba had only a chargé in Guinée. It was Cuba's decision to help the PAIGC that breathed new life into the relationship. Touré responded favourably to Castro's message, and Oramas presented his credentials as ambassador in late April 1966.²⁶

In Cuba, meanwhile, a group of volunteers had been undergoing intensive military training for the mission.²⁷ Among them was Lieutenant Armando Galarza, a veteran of the Sierra Maestra. 'I had frequently told my superiors that if we sent men to fight for the liberation of other peoples, I wanted to go. And so in 1966 when they asked me whether I was willing to go on an internationalist mission, I immediately said yes.' He was told to inform his family that he would be attending a course in Kiev, and he was not told how long the mission would last.²⁸

²³ See *Revolución* (Havana), 14 Oct. (p. 16 quoted), 15 and 17 Oct. 1960, *passim*.

²⁴ Interview with Dabo Bangaly, who belonged to the group. See also Republic of Guinée, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et de la Coopération, 'Memorandum sur la Coopération entre la République de Guinée et la République de Cuba', Conakry, July 1994, p. 3, Foreign Ministry Archives, Republic of Guinée.

²⁵ On Sékou Touré's foreign policy see: Walter Leimgruber, *Kalter Krieg um Afrika: Die amerikanische Afrikapolitik unter Präsident Kennedy 1961–1963* (Stuttgart, 1990), pp. 213–57; Sylvain Soriba Camara, *La Guinée sans la France* (Paris, 1976), pp. 115–18, 130–252; Claude Rivière, 'La politique étrangère de la Guinée', *Revue française des études politiques africaines* (Aug. 1971), pp. 37–68; Rajen Harshe, 'Non-Alignment and Francophone Africa: A Case Study of Guinea', *The Non-aligned World* (New Delhi) (July/Sept. 1983), pp. 371–85; William Attwood, *The Reds and the Blacks: A Personal Narrative* (New York, 1967), pp. 11–132.

²⁶ Interview with Oramas; *Horoya* (Conakry), 3 May 1966, p. 1.

²⁷ 'Ayuda brindada', pp. 14–15.

²⁸ Interview with Galarza.

‘At the repeated request of the PAIGC leadership’, two artillerymen and three doctors flew ahead of the group, arriving in Conakry on 8 May. Then, on the 21st, the merchant ship *Lidia Doce* left Cuba, reaching Conakry on 6 June.²⁹ ‘The first Cuban technicians had arrived’, writes Luís Cabral, ‘and with them came the important aid that had been promised: cigars, the dark sugar that would become so prized by our people, olive green uniforms and other equipment for our armed forces, vehicles, etc. The promises made by Fidel to Amílcar had been rigorously honoured.’³⁰

There were thirty-one volunteers in all: eleven artillery specialists, eight drivers, one mechanic, ten doctors (five surgeons, three clinicians and two orthopaedists), and an intelligence officer, Lt. Aurelio Ricard (Artemio), who was the group’s leader.³¹

Amílcar Cabral wanted the Cuban military presence to remain a secret. That was why, writes his brother, ‘he asked Fidel that the technicians be blacks... But it soon became public knowledge that the men who were driving the PAIGC trucks were Cubans; they were the only people in Conakry who smoked cigars!’³² It wasn’t only the cigars that gave away the Cubans. The PAIGC fighters in Guinea-Bissau soon knew that Cubans were operating their artillery. One of the Cubans wrote in his diary that Amílcar Cabral himself told a group of PAIGC combatants, ‘“Meet the Cubans,” and he asked us to introduce ourselves. He then explained that we had come from a distant country, a revolutionary country, that we would play a very important role in their struggle, and that we had foregone the advantages of the Cuban revolution to join them.’³³ Furthermore, on several occasions the PAIGC captured Portuguese soldiers, held them in camps in which there were Cubans, and later freed them. And, as Galarza points out, ‘our ships docked openly in Conakry with supplies and combatants – there was no way people wouldn’t see every Cuban ship’.³⁴ Accordingly, in February 1967, Portuguese military communiqués began mentioning that Cuban advisers were operating with the guerrillas. And a month later the CIA wrote that ‘At least 60 Cubans... are reportedly engaged in PAIGC training at the present time’.

²⁹ ‘Ayuda brindada’, p. 15 quoted; interviews with Heriberto Salavarría who was on the plane, and with Galarza, Alfonso Pérez Morales (Pina) and Luis Peraza, who were on the *Lidia Doce*. ³⁰ Cabral, *Crónica*, p. 252.

³¹ ‘Ayuda brindada’, pp. 14–17.

³² Cabral, *Crónica*, p. 252.

³³ Erasmo Vidiaux, ‘Diario de Vera’, entry of 18 Mar. 1967, private collection, Havana (hereafter PCH). ‘Vera’ was Vidiaux’s *nom de guerre*.

³⁴ Interviews with Galarza (quoted), Oramas, Dreke (head of mission, 1967–8) and Enrique Montero (head of mission, 1969–70). For the PAIGC’s release of Portuguese prisoners, see *Dakar-Matin*: 16 Mar. 1968, p. 3; 13 Dec. 1968, p. 1; 28 Dec. 1968, p. 1; *El Moudjahid* (Algiers), 19 Aug. 1969, p. 1; *Le Monde*, 20 Aug. 1969, p. 5.

However, even though the secret was out, US officials did not respond. As Robinson McIlvaine, the US ambassador at Conakry from October 1966 to August 1969, remarked, ‘the State Department was not particularly concerned with the Cuban presence. It was not a big preoccupation for us’. This complacency, which contrasts starkly with the US reaction to even the rumour of Cuban combatants in Latin America, characterised Washington’s reaction to Cubans elsewhere in Africa. US officials were confident that a handful of Cubans could not be effective in distant, alien African countries. This belief was strengthened by the failure of Guevara’s column in 1965 to save the rebels in Zaïre. In discussing Communist subversion in Africa, the CIA barely mentioned Cuba.³⁵

The Cuban Military Mission in Guinée and Guinea-Bissau (MMCG), which handled Cuban assistance to the PAIGC, was indeed a small mission, but it had a very important military role: it was the PAIGC’s only artillery. It was headquartered in Conakry, in a house provided by Sékou Touré, and it reported directly to Cuban intelligence (M) in Havana, and in particular to Ulises Estrada, the head of M’s *Dirección 5*, which covered Africa and Asia.³⁶ The head of the mission, Artemio, was its major weakness. He was respected by neither the Cubans who served under him nor the PAIGC. ‘Artemio was not up to the job’, one of the Cubans, Pina, said diplomatically. He was ‘arrogant and impulsive’, observed a PAIGC commander. ‘He was a poor choice’, concluded Oramas.³⁷

Artemio sought to defend himself in a letter to his successor, Víctor Dreke. He stressed ‘how difficult my task had been: I had been placed at

³⁵ Quotations from CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, ‘Cuban Meddling in Africa’, 24 Mar. 1967, p. 4, FOIA 1996/605 and interview with McIlvaine. See also CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, ‘Some Aspects of Subversion in Africa’, 19 Oct. 1967, p. 9, National Security File Country File (hereafter NSFCF): Union of South Africa, box 78, Lyndon B. Johnson Library (hereafter LBJL); CIA, National Intelligence Estimate, ‘The Liberation Movements of Southern Africa’, 24 Nov. 1967, National Security File, NIE, box 8, LBJL; Knight (Lisbon) to DOS, 19 Oct. 1971, p. 2, FOIA 1982/1889; ‘Policy Planning Memorandum No. 1’, enclosed in DOS to All African Diplomatic Posts, Lisbon, London, Paris, Rome, 2 Dec. 1971, FOIA 1982/0426; Knight (Lisbon) to DOS, 7 Jan. 1972, FOIA 1982/2672. On US officials and the Cuban presence in Zaïre in 1965, see Piero Gleijeses, ‘“Flee! The White Giants Are Coming!” The United States, the Mercenaries, and the Congo, 1964–1965’, *Diplomatic History* (Spring 1994), pp. 220–1.

³⁶ In 1972 the armed forces took charge of the mission. Particularly useful on relations between the MMCG and Havana were interviews with Dreke, who headed the MMCG in 1967–8, and two of his successors, Erasmo Vidiaux and Enrique Montero, with Ambassadors Oramas and Manuel Agramonte (who replaced Oramas in 1973), with Estrada and with Oscar Cárdenas, head of the section in M’s *Dirección 5* that included Guinée and Guinea-Bissau.

³⁷ Interviews with Pina, Arafam Mané and Oramas. Artemio was probably chosen because M wanted an intelligence officer to head the group. (Interview with Dreke.)

the head of a complex and important mission without ever having been in combat myself...I was a junior officer and I had to lead a group that included at least twenty officers of my rank, or just one rank below.' Dreke answered sternly: 'One's authority, particularly in time of war, does not depend on military rank, but on one's conduct at every moment.'³⁸

On 11 November 1966, 350 PAIGC combatants attacked the important fortified camp of Madina de Boé. (This was the major operation mentioned by Amílcar Cabral in his conversations with the two M officials several months earlier.) The attack was a serious setback: the PAIGC failed to take the camp and suffered heavy casualties. Among the dead was its senior military commander, Domingos Ramos. 'Ramos's death was a heavy blow', remembers a PAIGC leader.³⁹

This setback spurred Castro into action. He 'suggested that we do more to help', recalls Oramas. 'Amílcar accepted our offer to increase our aid with great pleasure.'⁴⁰

Castro sent for Víctor Dreke, veteran of the war against Batista and Guevara's right-hand-man in Zaïre in 1965. 'He was, throughout our stay, one of the pillars on which I relied', Guevara wrote after they left Zaïre in November 1965. 'The only reason I am not recommending his promotion is that he already holds the highest rank.'⁴¹ After returning from Zaïre, Dreke headed the UM [Unidad Militar] 1546, the unit in the Ministry of Interior that oversaw the military training of foreigners and of Cubans preparing to go on military missions abroad. 'Fidel told me: "You must take charge of the military mission in Guinée."' He also urged Dreke to take some of the men who had been with him in Zaïre, 'the best'.⁴² A few days later, Dreke called on one of them, Erasmo Vidiaux, who was in charge of the UM 1546 training camp in Baracoa. "'How are you doing?" Dreke asked me', Vidiaux recalls. "'Fine", I answered. [Dreke:] "'And your mother?" [Vidiaux:] "'Fine too." [Dreke:] "'We've got a little mission for you; you've got to get ready."''⁴³

The next day Vidiaux flew to Santiago to say goodbye to his mother. 'I told her I was going to another course in the Soviet Union.' (He had

³⁸ Aurelio Richard [Artemio] to Moya [Dreke], Havana, 8 May 1967, p. 3, PCH and Moya to Artemio, Conakry, 30 May 1967, PCH.

³⁹ Interviews with Mané (quoted), and with the Cubans Salavarría and Estrada (all of whom participated in the attack); Ministerio de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (hereafter MINFAR), 'Las misiones internacionalistas desarrolladas por las FAR en defensa de la independencia y la soberanía de los pueblos', n.d., p. 20, archives of the Instituto de Historia de Cuba. (Hereafter 'Las misiones'.)

⁴⁰ Interview with Oramas.

⁴¹ Che Guevara, 'Evaluación del personal a mis ordenes', [Dar-es-Salaam, late 1965], PCH.

⁴² Interview with Dreke (quoted); 'Las misiones', p. 21.

⁴³ Interviews with Vidiaux and Dreke.

said the same when he had gone to Zaïre.) ‘Our families were used to sudden departures.’⁴⁴

In February 1967 he flew to Conakry with Dreke, Pablito Mena (another veteran of Zaïre), and Reynaldo Batista. Batista was a member of the UM 1546 and Dreke’s driver. Three decades later, he recalled how Dreke invited him to go to Guinea-Bissau. ‘One night, around 9 or 10 pm, when we were at the traffic light between 23rd and 26th in the Vedado [downtown Havana], Dreke told me: “I need someone to come with me on an internationalist mission. Are you interested?” I said, “Of course! You know I’ve been wanting to go for ages!”’⁴⁵

Unlike Artemio, Dreke was a *comandante*, a member of the Central Committee, and ‘a man who already knew Africa and guerrilla warfare’. Moreover, he inspired enormous confidence and respect. ‘Dreke has always been a role model’, recalls Batista. ‘Very simple, very austere.’⁴⁶ The power of his example and his quiet charisma were evident when I interviewed the Cubans who had served under him, thirty years earlier, in Zaïre and Guinea-Bissau. And they were evident when I went to Bissau. Time and again, I heard the same words of respect, warmth and admiration for him. ‘We learned a great deal from Moya [Dreke’s *nom de guerre*],’ remarked Arafam Mané, a PAIGC commander. ‘Moya was an exceptional leader’, remembered the president of Guinea-Bissau, Nino, who had become the senior PAIGC military commander during the war.⁴⁷ For their part, the Cubans were impressed with the commitment and the discipline of the PAIGC. ‘We, who had had a bitter experience in the Congo [Zaïre], encountered a completely different situation in Guinea-Bissau’, Dreke observed.⁴⁸

Under Dreke the MMCG increased in size, and by April 1967 there were almost sixty Cubans in Guinea-Bissau, including several who had been in Zaïre with Che Guevara. Dreke himself spent half his time in Conakry and half at the front.⁴⁹ He was in Conakry when, in October

⁴⁴ Interview with Vidiaux.

⁴⁵ Interviews with Batista (quoted), Dreke, and Vidiaux. See also ‘Ayuda brindada’, p. 20.

⁴⁶ Quotations from interviews with Pina and Batista.

⁴⁷ Interviews with Mané and João Bernardo Vieira (Nino).

⁴⁸ Interview with Dreke.

⁴⁹ ‘Ayuda brindada’, pp. 18, 20; interview with Dreke. In April 1967 one hundred and eight Cubans were attached to the MMCG, thirty-eight of whom had come to train the militia of Guinée at Touré’s request. ‘We thought there might soon be a military coup against Sékou Touré and if he were overthrown, the PAIGC would lose its rearguard.’ The project, however, was shortlived: the mercurial Touré soon lost interest, and in 1968 the Cuban instructors returned to Havana. (Interviews with Dreke [quoted], Oramas, Vidiaux, Estrada and Augusto Veranes, who was one of the instructors. See [MMCG] ‘Plan de trabajo’, 27 Oct. 1966, PCH; Moya to [Reinerio] Jimenez [late spring 1967], PCH; MINFAR, ‘Grupos y lugares donde se desarrolla la instrucción de milicia en la república de Guinea’, 28 Feb. 1968, PCH.)

1967, Guevara was murdered in Bolivia. ‘My dear brother in the struggle’, Dreke wrote to Estrada,

by means of this letter I am sending you a strong embrace... I imagine how you and all the others must be feeling about Che’s death... This has been a very heavy blow for all of us here, but we all know very well that we will achieve nothing with tears or acts of desperation and my advice to all the *Compañeros* has been to remain calm and to redouble their efforts.

You know what Che means for all of us... But I know that right now we need to be calm and resolute, because every one of us is needed to continue the work that Che began.⁵⁰

By the time Dreke returned to Cuba in late 1968, the PAIGC’s position in Guinea-Bissau had improved significantly. A report by the US ambassador in Dakar provided eloquent testimony to this effect:

The war in Portuguese Guinea... has gone from bad to worse for the Portuguese during the past three years. During this period, despite an increase in Portuguese troop strength from 20,000 to 25,000, the Portuguese have lost increasing areas of the hinterland to rebel control. There is only one major road still open... Other main roads cannot be used because of the twin dangers of mines and ambushes. The rebel PAIGC forces control large areas of the country, perhaps 60%, or at least deny access to them to the Portuguese. This situation applies, however, only to the countryside. All major towns and communication centers throughout the country remain in Portuguese hands, as do all forty-two Portuguese administrative posts. Supply of Portuguese military outposts is achieved by air or by sea...

The Portuguese are correct when they assert that they control most of the population and that there is no area of the country in which they do not continue to hold all major towns. On the other hand, the rebels are not too far from the truth when they claim... that two-thirds of the country is theirs, and that in these regions they have set up their own administration... The areas of rebel control, like inkblots, spread over the country and ever closer to the Bissau region itself.⁵¹

Portuguese General Arnaldo Schultz, who had arrived in Bissau in 1964 predicting ‘the war in Portuguese Guinea would be over within six months’, was ‘sadly disillusioned’ when he left four years later.⁵² A highly respected officer, General António de Spínola, replaced him as governor and commander-in-chief in May 1968, a time when ‘the military situation for the Portuguese was clearly deteriorating’. After noting that his presence had given ‘a marked boost to the morale of the Portuguese civilians and military’, the US ambassador in Dakar concluded: ‘It remains to be seen whether the infusion of new spirit on the Portuguese side achieved by Spínola’s arrival can be translated into concrete military

⁵⁰ Moya to Ulises [Estrada], 16 Oct. 1967, PCH.

⁵¹ Brown (Dakar) to DOS, 3 Jan. 1969, pp. 2–3, FOIA 1983/1205. The United States had no representatives in Guinea-Bissau. Information on the war was gathered primarily by the US embassies in Lisbon and Dakar.

⁵² Venter, *Portugal’s Guerrilla War*, p.15.

and political gains, and whether the steady decline in the Portuguese position can be arrested.⁵³

Spínola promised ‘the greatest generosity toward those who repent and surrender their weapons...and the greatest severity toward those who persist in the criminal rebellion’.⁵⁴ Reinforced from Portugal, he engaged in ‘a vigorous military campaign’ that stressed helicopter-borne attacks on so-called free-fire zones (the liberated areas) ‘where the colonial troops were free to destroy villages and crops, to kill civilians and generally to terrorize the population’.⁵⁵ At the same time, he set in motion a massive political, social, economic and psychological campaign in the zones he controlled to gain the support of the population. ‘He wanted to deprive the fish of the water’, remarked a PAIGC commander.⁵⁶ Spínola’s policy of ‘smiles and blood’⁵⁷ met with some initial success, but eventually the rebels recovered by improving their mobilisation, training, equipment (particularly artillery), and planning. The PAIGC ‘has been increasingly ready to stand and fight when engaged by the Portuguese, reflecting improved leadership and troop discipline’, noted the US ambassador in Lisbon in late 1971.⁵⁸ PAIGC training, guerrilla tactics and arms were ‘first class’, a Portuguese colonel told a visiting South African journalist in April 1971. ‘There are times when I sincerely wish I had some of their young leaders with me in the field’, he added. The PAIGC, a captain told the same journalist, “‘was in a class of its own.’” The men in the field, those guerrillas at present in operation against his men, had been well trained....When they made contact, they stood and fought, blow for blow. Their tenacity impressed the Portuguese captain. It frightened his men at times’.⁵⁹

In a desperate attempt to weaken the PAIGC, Spínola launched a commando attack on Conakry on 22 November 1970, seeking to bring down Touré and ‘replace him with a government which would be

⁵³ Brown (Dakar) to DOS, 3 Jan. 1969, pp. 4, 9, FOIA 1983/1205.

⁵⁴ *Diário de Notícias*, 30 Nov. 1969, p. 15.

⁵⁵ Quotations from Hughes (INR) to SecState, ‘Portuguese Guinea; Peace Talks in the Offing?’ 25 Mar. 1969, p. 1, FOIA 1982/1027 and from Chabal, *Amílcar Cabral*, p. 94.

⁵⁶ Pedro Pires, ‘Os antigos chefes spinolistas mantiveram contactos com os conspiradores’, *Expresso* (Lisbon), 5 Apr. 1975, pp. 8–9.

⁵⁷ Amílcar Cabral, quoted in John Woollacott, ‘A luta pela libertação nacional na Guiné-Bissau e a revolução em Portugal’, *Análise Social*, vol. 19 (1983), p. 1136.

⁵⁸ Knight (Lisbon) to DOS, 19 Oct. 1971, p. 3, FOIA 1982/1889. ‘The PAIGC has around 7,000 well-armed, well-trained effectives and receives extensive Soviet support. Cubans are involved in PAIGC insurgency activities.’ (‘Policy Planning Memorandum No. 1’, p. 9, enclosed in DOS to All African Diplomatic Posts, Lisbon, London, Paris, Rome, 2 Dec. 1971, FOIA 1982/0426). According to Cabral’s deputy Aristides Pereira, the number of PAIGC guerrillas hovered around 5–6,000. (Pereira, quoted in José Pedro Castanheira, *Quem mandou matar Amílcar Cabral?* (Lisbon, 1995), pp. 159–60.)

⁵⁹ Venter, *Portugal’s Guerrilla War*, pp. 49, 80.

sympathetic to Portugal's colonial policy and forbid all PAIGC activity in the country'. (It was expected 'that Sékou Touré and Amílcar Cabral would be killed', writes a senior Portuguese officer.)⁶⁰ 'We face a watershed in the life of this province', Spínola told the Portuguese Prime Minister a few days before launching the operation. 'Either we use all the means at our disposal to eradicate the enemy's sanctuaries or we lose Guinea [-Bissau] irrevocably.'⁶¹

The operation was a fiasco. After a few hours of fighting, the attackers withdrew in haste, having failed to kill either Touré or Cabral, who was out of the country. 'This ill-considered affair has thoroughly aroused Africans of all political persuasions and has ... strengthened Sékou Touré's regime', noted the US ambassador to the United Nations, Charles Yost.⁶² Still, the United States abstained, together with France, the UK and Spain, as the UN Security Council condemned Portugal for the invasion, even though Yost conceded that the United States had 'no reason to question' the UN report that placed responsibility for the attack on Portugal. The United States must abstain, Yost explained, because the resolution created 'presumptions about our [the Security Council's] future action in a very broad range of situations which are not warranted at this time'.⁶³ The State Department's analysis, the *New York Times* noted, was 'out-of-date and out-of-joint'.⁶⁴

Even though the governments of Britain, France and West Germany steadfastly assisted the Portuguese war effort in Africa, the PAIGC was able to garner popular support in many countries of Western Europe. 'The tragedy is that the so-called issue of the so-called "Guinea-Bissau" should mobilize considerable segments of public support in almost every country of Europe', a South African writer lamented in January 1974.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Quotations from 'Quem invadiu e como a Guiné Conakry,' *Expresso*, 3 Jan. 1976, p. 8 and Carlos Fabião, 'A descolonização na Guiné-Bissau,' in *Associação 25 de Abril, Seminário 25 de Abril: 10 anos depois* (Lisbon, 1984), p. 308. Alpoim Calvão, the Portuguese officer in charge of the operation, confirmed that had Cabral been in Conakry, 'he would definitely have been killed'. (*Público* [Lisbon], 21 May 1991, p. 19). See also Alpoim Calvão, *De Conakry ao M.D.L.P.: Dossier secreto* (Lisbon, 1976), pp. 51–86.

⁶¹ Spínola to Caetano, 11 Nov. 1970, in José Freire Antunes, ed., *Cartas particulares a Marcello Caetano* (Lisbon, 1985), vol. I, p. 149.

⁶² Yost to SecState, 8 Nov. 1970, p. 2, FOIA 1982/2654.

⁶³ The resolution warned Portugal that 'in the event of any repetition of armed attacks against independent African States, the Security Council shall immediately consider appropriate, effective steps in accordance with the relevant provision of the Charter of the United Nations.' For the text of the resolution, see United Nations, Security Council Official Records, 1,562nd meeting, 7 Dec. 1970, p. 6; for Yost's statement, see *ibid.*, 1,563rd meeting, 8 Dec. 1970, pp. 5–7.

⁶⁴ NYT (ed.), 10 Dec. 1970, p. 46.

⁶⁵ Richard Pattee, 'Portuguese Guinea: A Crucial Struggle', *South Africa International* (Jan. 1974), p. 139.

Even in the United States there was some sympathy and respect for the PAIGC. US officials were impressed by Amílcar Cabral. After a two-hour unofficial conversation with him, the US deputy assistant secretary for African Affairs reported: ‘Cabral made his points calmly and politely, and listened well, apparently willing to consider others’ views even when he did not agree with them.’ After Cabral’s death, the US ambassador to Guinée from 1963 to 1965 wrote, ‘I came to know Amílcar Cabral... I knew him as a passionate fighter for the rights of his people but also as a reasonable man with no animosity toward the American people.’⁶⁶

This did not, however, affect US policy. ‘We attempt to straddle the fence by distinguishing between Portugal (Europe) and Portugal (Africa)’, the US ambassador at Lisbon wrote.⁶⁷ From the Kennedy through the Nixon administrations, US officials firmly proclaimed that US weapons were given to Portugal only on condition that they are not used in Africa. How the United States should respond to Portuguese violations of this policy was settled in mid-1963 during a sharp debate within the Kennedy administration about Portugal’s use of US planes in Guinea-Bissau. Adlai Stevenson, the US ambassador to the UN, was the most forceful spokesperson of the minority view. ‘I am greatly concerned’, he cabled Secretary of State Dean Rusk,

with the presence and use of eight US-supplied F-86 aircraft in Portuguese Guinea... I have previously known nothing about this and have always understood that nothing of this sort had gone to any African territory. Presence of these aircraft in Guinea and their use for military purposes cannot remain unknown indefinitely.... We have repeatedly stated here at UN that equipment we supply Portugal is for defense of Europe and not for use in Portuguese African territories. We have said we oppose such use and take measures to insure that such equipment has not been diverted to Africa.

After listing a litany of statements by the Kennedy administration to that effect (including some he had made at the United Nations), Stevenson concluded:

Now I learn that Portugal has had eight F-86s in Guinea since ‘at least September 1961,’ that this was reported at time of original transfer... and that they are currently used in combat role.... If attention of the [UN] SC [Security Council] or GA [General Assembly] is drawn to uncorrected presence of US-furnished aircraft in Portuguese Guinea, as no doubt in time it will be, this revelation will greatly reduce, if not completely destroy, the credibility of US claims of being able to keep a check on US-furnished equipment as well as credibility of ‘assurances’ from Portuguese government.... And if, finally, this diversion having been revealed, we are not in position to honestly state that every effort has

⁶⁶ Quotations from DOS, MemoCov (Cabral, Smith, et al.), 26 Feb. 1970, p. 2, FOIA 1982/1048 and from James Loeb, letter to the editor, *NYT*, 14 Feb. 1973, p. 40.

⁶⁷ Bennett (Lisbon) to DOS, 3 Apr. 1968, p. 6, FOIA 1982/0392.

been made to have Portuguese government withdraw aircraft from use in Portuguese territories, sincerity of US position on entire question of Portuguese territories will be shattered.

The Kennedy administration complained to Lisbon, but not too harshly, for Portugal was a valued ally, and the planes stayed in Guinea-Bissau.⁶⁸ ‘Portugal’s diversion and continued use of vast amounts of U.S. MAP [Military Assistance Program] equipment in Portuguese Africa are embarrassing to us in our relations in Africa and at the UN’, Assistant Secretary Mennen Williams lamented, as the F-86s continued their combat role in Guinea-Bissau. From Conakry, the US ambassador added: ‘Our position is indefensible’.⁶⁹ Stevenson had written Kennedy in June 1963 that the Africans wanted to know whether the United States stood ‘for self-determination and human rights’ or whether ‘we will give our Azores base...priority’.⁷⁰ Despite Kennedy’s uneasiness and the strong opposition of a few US officials, the administration’s policy was clear: priority would be given to the base in the Azores. In the final analysis, as a German scholar concludes, ‘What worried the [Kennedy] administration was not Portugal’s use of the arms in Africa, but the danger that it become public. In fact the administration’s stance became increasingly untenable, because it continued to deliver weapons to Portugal.’⁷¹

Subsequent administrations followed Kennedy’s lead, claiming that the Portuguese were using the weapons supplied by the United States only in Europe. But, as Tanzanian officials pointed out, ‘US and other arms given Portugal under NATO arrangements, however restricted, at the very least free other military and economic resources for use by Portugal in Africa’,⁷² and, of course, the Portuguese continued to divert the weapons

⁶⁸ Quotations from Stevenson to SecState, no. 257, 26 July 1963, pp. 1–2 of Section 1 and pp. 1–2 of Section 2, Stevenson Papers (hereafter SP), box WH-1, John F. Kennedy Library (hereafter JFKL). See also Amembassy Lisbon to SecState, 11 July 1963, National Security File, box 154, JFKL; Stevenson to SecState, no. 256, 26 July 1963, SP, box WH-1, JFKL; Stevenson to SecState, Aug. 1, 1963, *ibid.*; Hughes (INR) to SecState (‘Focus on Portuguese Guinea’), 16 Aug. 1963, p. 11, *ibid.*; Elbrick to DOS, 17 Aug. 1963, National Security File, box 154a, JFKL; Rusk to Amembassy Lisbon, 3 Dec. 1963, FOIA 1976/0657.

⁶⁹ Williams to Tyler, 8 Apr. 1964, p. 1, Mennen Williams Papers, box 12, RG 59, National Archives, and James Loeb to Williams, Conakry, 19 June 1964, p. 2, *ibid.*, box 28; see also Williams to Loeb, 30 June 1964, *ibid.*, box 12.

⁷⁰ Stevenson to Kennedy, 26 June 1963, p. 2, National Security File, box 154, JFKL.

⁷¹ Leimgruber, *Kalter Krieg*, p. 105. For Kennedy’s Portuguese policy, see *ibid.*, pp. 92–127; Richard Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa* (New York), 1983, pp. 187–222, 304–14; John Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: The Anatomy of an Explosion (1950–1962)* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), pp. 181–7, 268–77; José Freire Antunes, *Kennedy e Salazar: O leão e a raposa* (Lisbon, 1991). Thomas Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation: The United States and White Rule in Africa, 1948–1968* (Columbia, Missouri, 1985), pp. 61–125, covers both the Kennedy and Johnson years.

⁷² Amembassy Dar-es-Salaam to SecState, 21 Apr. 1969, FOIA 1983/1209.

to their African territories. ‘We would have been fools not to have done so’, remarked a Portuguese general who had commanded in Mozambique and Angola. ‘Now and then the Americans would grumble’, he added. ‘It was all for show.’⁷³ Under President Richard Nixon, US policy developed an even more pronounced pro-Portuguese bent, consistent with the administration’s support for white-ruled Africa. The most notorious manifestation was the December 1971 executive agreement that gave Portugal \$436 million in credits for the use of the Azores base until February 1974. It was, noted the *New York Times*, ‘one of the largest economic assistance packages negotiated in many years in exchange for foreign base rights’, and it would ‘prop up the Lisbon Government’s floundering economy’, exhausted by a decade of colonial wars.⁷⁴ The amount, an American scholar pointed out in a letter to the *New York Times*, ‘is about triple the current annual level of U.S. credits to all of Africa’. More to the point, Amílcar Cabral told the UN Security Council in Addis Ababa the following February, ‘Portugal would not be in a position to carry out three wars against Africans without the aid of her allies’.⁷⁵

By the time of the Azores agreement, however, the PAIGC had fully recovered from the initial setbacks inflicted by Spínola, and the best the latter could hope for, relying on his control of the air, was an uneasy stalemate. That the PAIGC fought so well was due primarily to Amílcar Cabral, his commanders in the field, and their guerrilla troops. Part of the credit, however, goes to the Cubans.

‘We want no volunteers’, Amílcar Cabral told a British journalist in 1967. ‘Foreign military advisers or commanders, or any other foreign personnel, are the last thing we shall accept. They would rob my people of their one chance of achieving a historical meaning for themselves: of reasserting their own history, of recapturing their own identity.’⁷⁶ Cabral was being disingenuous: the Cubans were already there, at his request. What he said, however, reflected his deepest convictions. This was the Guineans’ war, and it offered them the opportunity to forge a nation out of separate tribes through shared sacrifice. (‘Ten years ago we were Fulas, Manjacos, Mandingas, Balantas, Papéis and others [members of other tribes]. Now we are a nation of Guineans’, he told a group of African Americans in 1972.)⁷⁷ ‘Amílcar did not want foreign fighters to join us’,

⁷³ General Francisco Costa Gomes, quoted by José Freire Antunes, *Nixon e Caetano: promessas e abandono* (Lisbon, 1992), p. 110.

⁷⁴ *NYT*, 11 Dec. 1971, p. 16 and 18 Dec. 1971, p. 18 (ed.).

⁷⁵ Waldemar Nielsen, letter to the editor, *NYT*, 29 Dec. 1971, p. 30; Cabral quoted in *NYT*, 2 Feb. 1972, p. 11. The best study on Nixon and Portugal is Antunes, *Nixon e Caetano*.

⁷⁶ Davidson, *No Fist*, p. 62.

⁷⁷ Quoted in *Nô Pintcha*, 12 Sept. 1977, p. 1.

muses a PAIGC commander. ‘He used to say: “We have to free our own country.” But we needed specialists who knew how to use long range weapons.’⁷⁸

Cabral limited foreign participation in two ways. First, he turned only to the Cubans. Throughout the war, they were the only foreigners who fought in Guinea-Bissau.⁷⁹ Second, he limited their number to the minimum necessary. Thus when Jorge Risquet, who headed the 250-man Cuban force in Congo Brazzaville, told Cabral in September 1966 that his men would soon be returning to Cuba and offered, ‘If you want, I can ask Fidel to send them to Guinea-Bissau instead’, the offer was declined.⁸⁰ The following year Cabral again refused when Dreke suggested that Cuba send 200–300 men to beef up the attacks on the Portuguese strongholds.⁸¹ Over the years, the number of Cubans attached to the MMCG averaged 50–60; a handful were in Conakry; the rest were in Guinea-Bissau.⁸²

And yet, despite their small numbers, their military contribution was, in the words of President Nino, who had been the senior military commander of the PAIGC, ‘of the utmost importance’.⁸³

There was, first of all, ‘the boost to our morale’, remarks a PAIGC commander. ‘Here were men who had crossed the ocean to come to our aid; they lived with us; they shared in our sacrifices.’ The Cubans, said another, ‘were brave; they endured everything; they ate what we ate; we did everything together’.⁸⁴

Amílcar Cabral had invited the Cubans because, as Nino recalled, ‘Our people were not proficient in the use of mortars and other types of artillery’.⁸⁵ Throughout the war, the weapons that the PAIGC received from the Soviet Union grew more sophisticated. The gunners had to shoot at targets they could not see through the thick forest. This required

⁷⁸ Interview with Antonio Borges.

⁷⁹ All the PAIGC officials whom I interviewed confirmed this. The Bissau newspaper *Nô Pintcha*, which began publication in August 1975, ran well over one hundred retrospective articles on the war over the next decade. Many refer to the Cuban military presence in Guinea-Bissau; none mentions any other foreign presence.

⁸⁰ Interview with Risquet. Cabral had gone to Brazzaville for a meeting of the *Conférence das Organizações Nacionalistas das Colónias Portuguesas (La Semaine [Brazzaville], 4 Sept. 1966, p. 5).*

⁸¹ Interview with Dreke.

⁸² This figure is approximate and is calculated on the basis of the data in ‘Ayuda brindada’ and ‘Protocolo de asistencia técnica entre el partido comunista de Cuba y el Partido Africano por la Independencia de Guinea Bissau y Cabo Verde’, Conakry, 27 May 1972, appendix 1, CID-FAR and in interviews with the participants.

⁸³ Interview with Nino. The five paragraphs that follow are based on interviews with these senior PAIGC officials: Leopoldo Antonio Alfama (Duky), Borges, Fidelis Cabral, Mané, Nino, Joseph Turpin, Vasco Cabral.

⁸⁴ Quotations from interviews with Duky and Mané.

⁸⁵ Interview with Nino.

a degree of knowledge that very few PAIGC fighters even approached. In order to direct the fire without seeing the target, for example, the battery chief needed to know calculus. In Cuba, battery chiefs were sergeants or second-lieutenants and all had completed at least high school. Almost all of the volunteers who went to Guinea-Bissau were officers and sergeants, and almost all were artillerymen.⁸⁶ In 1966 they were both battery chiefs and gunners. As time went by, the PAIGC combatants took over the role of gunners, but the battery chiefs – those who made the calculations and directed the gunners – were, to the end, almost always Cubans.

There was one exception to this rule: the Cape Verdean students who had been sent to Cuba by Cabral in 1965 to be trained for a guerrilla war on the islands ended up in Guinea-Bissau. In the fall of 1967 Amílcar Cabral had decided that the prospects for a successful guerrilla war in Cape Verde were minimal: there was almost no water, there were no natural hideouts, no animals to eat, and the population was not ready. ‘We Cubans disagreed, but we did what Amílcar wanted’, remarks Dreke. ‘When I went to Cape Verde years later I realized that Amílcar had been right and that a guerrilla war there would have been a disaster!’ And so the thirty-one Cape Verdeans went to Guinea Bissau in late 1967. There they performed various functions: ‘Some of us joined the [PAIGC] navy, most joined the guerrillas on land, others were assigned to political and diplomatic duties, etc.’ Several of them fought with distinction in the artillery.⁸⁷

The Cuban contribution was also critical to military planning both in Conakry, where Amílcar Cabral developed the strategy, and at the front, where it was implemented. The PAIGC had divided the country into three fronts (south, east and north). ‘The leader of the Cubans in each front was told to stay glued to the PAIGC chief and to be his adviser’, Dreke explained. ‘Therefore, the MMCG tried hard to put their best men in charge of the Cubans at every front.’⁸⁸

The Cubans were also the specialists in laying mines and, remarks a PAIGC commander, ‘they taught us how to use the infantry weapons we received. This was very important: they trained us on the spot. We called our first bazookas “Cubans”. They were made in the United States, but it was the Cubans who gave them to us and taught us how to use them.’⁸⁹

⁸⁶ For the military ranks of the volunteers: Dreke to Vice-Ministro para el Trab. Pol., 8 Dec. 1969, PCH; Moya to Vice-Ministro J’ Dir. Política, ‘Informe’, 14 Aug. 1970, PCH; ‘Ayuda brindada’; interviews with volunteers.

⁸⁷ Quotations from interview with Dreke and from Dantas, ‘O primeiro juramento’; interview with the Cape Verdean Monteiro Santos; Cabral, *Crónica*, pp. 254–5, 281–3; Cardoso, *O partido*, pp. 18–19; ‘15 de Janeiro um marco importante de nossa história’, *Voz di Povo*, 16 Jan. 1988, p. 11.

⁸⁸ Interview with Dreke.

⁸⁹ Interview with Duky.

Amílcar Cabral's style 'was not necessarily our own', comments Enrique Montero, who headed the MMCG in 1969–70.⁹⁰ While he kept a tight reign on military strategy, he spent most of his time out of the country – in Conakry or travelling in search of foreign support. 'The PAIGC's search for heavy weapons had begun as early as 1962... And it formed part of a larger diplomatic campaign to procure humanitarian aid, drugs, medical equipment, doctors, medical technicians, scholarships for training technical manpower, educational material and consumer goods, needed for the PAIGC's campaign for statehood.' Amílcar Cabral was the key protagonist of this diplomatic campaign. According to a PAIGC official: 'Amílcar was a great diplomat. If we were able to make people throughout the world aware of our existence, it was because of him. We would go to international conferences with maps of Guinea-Bissau: "You see," we would say, "this is Guinea-Bissau!" No one knew about our country. Amílcar kept telling me: "We must be everywhere, we must listen even if we don't want to, we must laugh even when we don't feel like it."⁹¹ He did not direct the military operations in person. His diplomatic activities kept him from the front. 'This concerned us. Our training and our experience taught us that the leader had to be at the front.' Furthermore, Amílcar Cabral waged a war of attrition which minimised losses and risks. He was not interested in big operations in which the PAIGC might suffer heavy casualties or even a defeat, and he remembered 'the bloody and bitter lesson' of the November 1966 attack against Madina de Boé.⁹² He believed that the Portuguese would be unable to withstand the strain of a long war and would be forced to negotiate. 'We would have preferred a more aggressive strategy, but we adapted', Dreke recalled. 'It was their country and their war. I would make suggestions to Amílcar; he would listen without saying yes or no, and eventually he made his own decision. Sometimes he followed my advice, sometimes he didn't.'⁹³

On more than one occasion, Cabral asked the Cubans to help with a special operation, only to cancel it at the last moment. In 1967, for example, he asked Cuba to send a group of explosives experts to blow up the bridge of Ensalma which connected Bissau with the interior. 'I told him, "Amílcar, we're ready. We only need the [PAIGC] guide,"' Dreke

⁹⁰ Interview with Montero.

⁹¹ Quotations from E. D. Valimamad, 'Nationalist Politics, War and Statehood: Guinea-Bissau, 1953–1973', St Catherine's College, Oxford, 1984, p. 137, and from interview with Francisca Pereira. The best overview is Mustafah Dhada, 'Guinea-Bissau's Diplomacy and Liberation Struggle', *Portuguese Studies Review*, vol. 4 (Spring–Summer 1995), pp. 20–39.

⁹² Quotations from interview with Dreke and 'Diário de Vera' [entry of mid-1968].

⁹³ Interview with Dreke.

recalls. ‘Amílcar said: “Wait two or three days.” Two or three days went by, and then two or three more, and two or three more and two or three more. Finally Amílcar told me: “We’re not going to blow up the bridge: if we do, Bissau will be isolated but when the war is over we’ll have to wait until we get help from the Soviet Union, or Cuba or someone else before we will be able to rebuild the bridge.” The operation was cancelled.’⁹⁴

Some Cubans grumbled, but virtually all, from Fidel Castro to the successive chiefs of the MMCG, and their subordinates, accepted their role: this was Amílcar’s war, they were there to help, to offer advice and to follow the PAIGC’s lead. To some extent, this was due to Cabral’s prestige among the Cubans and to the impressive performance of the PAIGC in the field, but it was also characteristic of Cuba’s behaviour in Africa.⁹⁵

Had the Cubans behaved with less humility, the proud PAIGC commanders who talked to me about Cuba’s contribution would, I suspect, have expressed their gratitude with less warmth. Had the Cubans behaved with less humility, the cooperation between Cuba and the PAIGC would have been less smooth and successful. Back in 1965–6, Amílcar Cabral had decided that Cuba, and Cuba alone, should send its fighters to Guinea-Bissau. He chose Cuba in part because he felt some cultural affinity with the Cubans and because they had African roots. Above all, he chose Cuba because ‘We greatly admired the struggle of the Cuban people. The Cubans were a special case because we knew that they, more than anyone else, were the champions of internationalism’, muses a PAIGC leader. Nothing suggests that Amílcar Cabral ever regretted his decision. ‘Cuba made no demands, it gave us unconditional aid.’⁹⁶

This help was not merely military; it was also medical.

‘The medical care of our combatants and of the people in the liberated areas entered a completely new phase with the arrival of the first Cuban doctors in 1966’, writes Luís Cabral. There were no native doctors. ‘The colonial administration had trained some good nurses and nurses’ aides in Bissau. But being a nurse was quite a prominent position... so very few of them left their jobs in the colonial administration to join the freedom fighters.’ Therefore the arrival of the Cuban doctors ‘was, without any doubt, of utmost importance for our struggle, not just because of the lives

⁹⁴ Interview with Dreke.

⁹⁵ See Piero Gleijeses, ‘Cuba’s First Venture in Africa: Algeria, 1961–1965’, *Journal of Latin American Studies* (Feb. 1996), pp. 159–95 and Piero Gleijeses, ‘Truth or Credibility: Castro, Carter, and the Invasions of Shaba’, *The International History Review* (February 1996), pp. 70–103; Piero Gleijeses, ‘Cuban Policy in Africa, 1959–1976’, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* (Dec. 1996).

⁹⁶ Interviews with PAIGC leaders Vasco Cabral and Turpin.

they saved, but even more because of the boost they gave our movement'.⁹⁷ Once the Cubans came, explains Nino, the guerrillas 'knew that their wounds need not be fatal and that their injuries could be healed'.⁹⁸

A veteran of the struggle against Batista, Luis Peraza, a doctor in the UM 1546, was one of the first to go to Guinea-Bissau. 'Cuba has decided to help a national liberation movement', the head of medical services in the UM 1546 told him in early 1966. 'If you're interested, go to army headquarters.' He did. Like the others, he was told to tell his family that he was going to study in the Soviet Union. 'But I told my wife, "I'm going on an internationalist mission. Don't tell anyone. I don't know where I'm going or how long I'll be away, but I'll say in touch."' A few days before leaving, he was told that he was going to Guinea-Bissau, but he still did not know how long the mission would last. 'All I knew about Africa was the Tarzan movies'.⁹⁹

He left in the *Lidia Doce*. 'We didn't bring any food with us because we expected to eat whatever the guerrillas ate. Once we go there we discovered that there was almost no food in the jungle; I lost 40 pounds in three months.' His group included ten doctors but no nurses; the first nurses (all males) arrived in December 1967 with the second group of doctors. 'Havana learned from our experience', Peraza recalled. 'They decided to send an equal number of doctors and nurses, working as a team, and to send food from Cuba.'¹⁰⁰

When heavy fighting was expected, the doctors accompanied the combatants. Otherwise they stayed behind in makeshift hospitals of two or three huts: one hut would be an operating room, the others were for patients.¹⁰¹ 'Whether they were with our guerrilla units at the front, or in our field hospitals, the Cuban doctors ... won the hearts of our fighters and our people', writes Luís Cabral. 'They taught our health care workers, who had received minimal training abroad, how to serve our people better. The Cuban doctors and nurses ... fulfilled all our hopes.'¹⁰²

Throughout the war, all but one of the foreign doctors in the liberated zones of Guinea-Bissau were Cubans. The exception was a Panamanian, Hugo Spadafora. After graduating from the University of Bologna in November 1964, Spadafora went to Cairo. 'He was young; he heard about

⁹⁷ Cabral, *Crónica*, pp. 253 *et seq.*

⁹⁸ Interview with Nino.

⁹⁹ Interview with Peraza.

¹⁰⁰ Interviews with Peraza (quoted) and Rubén Pérez de León (who was with the second group of doctors).

¹⁰¹ Interviews with the Cuban doctors Peraza, Milton Hechavarría, Raúl Candebat, Pablo Pérez Capdet and Pérez de León. For a vivid description of one such hospital, see Renato Sesana, *Liberate il mio popolo. Diario di viaggio di un prete tra i guerriglieri della Guinea-Bissau* (Bologna, 1974), pp. 126–9.

¹⁰² Cabral, *Crónica*, p. 253.

us in Cairo. He started to write to Amílcar volunteering his services', recalls PAIGC leader Fidelis Cabral. 'He wrote so many letters that Amílcar finally decided to let him come. At that time we didn't have any doctors.' Spadafora arrived in Conakry on 10 February 1966 and was sent to the village of Boké, in Guinée (near the border with Guinea-Bissau), where the PAIGC had recently opened a hospital, staffed only by a few nurses. 'With my limited professional experience I had a hard time running the hospital', wrote Spadafora. But within a few weeks the first Cuban doctors arrived, bringing a 'large supply of medicine, surgical and medical equipment and supplies... [and] the quality of the hospital's care increased exponentially'. Spadafora left Boké in July for Guinea-Bissau, where he worked for nine months. In May 1967, he returned to Panama. His photo hangs in President Nino's office. 'Had other foreign doctors volunteered to come to Guinea-Bissau, Amílcar would have allowed it', muses Fidelis Cabral.¹⁰³ It is impossible to say, based on the available evidence, whether others volunteered. What is certain, however, is that during the war Spadafora and the Cubans were the only foreign doctors in the liberated areas of Guinea-Bissau.¹⁰⁴

In Guinée there were non-Cuban doctors at the two PAIGC hospitals in Boké and Koundara, two villages near the border with Guinea-Bissau. At Boké, there were only Cubans until 1969, when a new, well-equipped hospital, built with Yugoslav money, was opened and became the flagship of the PAIGC medical services. Its staff included one or two Cuban doctors, one Yugoslav (Ivan Mihajlovic, a surgeon who was the hospital's director) and 3–4 Yugoslav medical technicians.¹⁰⁵ The smaller hospital at Koundara was staffed for several years by Dr Binh, a Vietnamese professor from the University of Hanoi. 'Only a great people like the Vietnamese would have offered us a doctor when they themselves were enduring one of the longest and cruellest wars', writes Luís Cabral. PAIGC health personnel who worked at Koundara remember Binh with great warmth. 'He was an extremely intelligent man, a great surgeon. I learned so much from him', says Ernesto Lopes Moreira, who was then a physician's assistant. 'And he was also very simple, he didn't mind living in very poor conditions, sharing our sacrifices.'¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Quotations from interview with Fidelis Cabral and from Hugo Spadafora, *Experiencias y pensamiento de un médico guerrillero* (Panama City, 1980), pp. 47, 50.

¹⁰⁴ Interviews with PAIGC officials Fidelis Cabral, Nino, Armando Ramos, Vasco Cabral, Francisca Pereira and Arlette Cabral and with the Guinean doctors and physician's assistants listed in n. 112 below.

¹⁰⁵ Interviews with the following Cuban and Guinean health personnel who worked at the Boké hospital: Pérez Capdet, Venancio Furtado, Paulo Medina, Gaudêncio de Sousa Carvahlo, Paulo Alves; see also Cabral, *Crónica*, p. 329.

¹⁰⁶ Cabral, *Crónica*, p. 371 (quoted) and interviews with Lopes Moreira (quoted) and Alves.

The PAIGC also had a small hospital in southern Senegal, in the town of Ziguinchor, just ten miles north of the border. It was staffed by only one doctor, at various times Portuguese, French, Angolan or Dutch. If a surgeon was needed, writes Luís Cabral, ‘the [Cuban] surgeon Mariano Sixto or another Cuban doctor would come across the border at night’. Special care was necessary because the Dakar government barred all Cubans from entering Senegal. ‘I myself went to get them’, Cabral continues, ‘and they accepted the risk of entering Senegal just as they accepted all the other risks of the war... I would take them back to the border very early in the morning.’¹⁰⁷

Between 1966 and 1974 there were, on average, 15–20 Cuban doctors and nurses in Guinea-Bissau and Boké. Overall, approximately 30 Cuban doctors, most of whom were in the military, served in Guinea-Bissau and at Boké, among them orthopaedists, surgeons and general practitioners.¹⁰⁸ By contrast, throughout the war some eight to twelve non-Cuban foreign doctors served in the PAIGC’s medical services at Boké, Koundara and Ziguinchor and none, with the exception of Spadafora, served in Guinea-Bissau.¹⁰⁹

During the war, the PAIGC understated the role of the Cuban doctors (just as it denied the presence of Cuban military personnel). Its official publications stressed that by 1972 there were eighteen Guinean doctors and twenty-three foreign doctors (including a few Cubans) in the liberated areas of Guinea-Bissau, an assertion that the few scholars who have written about the medical services of the PAIGC have accepted as fact.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Cabral, *Crónica*, pp. 297–8, 336–7, 341 (quoted); interviews with Hechavarría (Mariano Sixto), Francisca Pereira, Duky, Borges; Sesana, *Liberate*, pp. 37, 71–2.

In 1969, Dakar temporarily closed the hospital and arrested several PAIGC officials. ‘the PAIGC had to evacuate over one hundred wounded... over 400 miles of very poor roads to Koundara.’ (Suzanne Lipinska, ‘Deux semaines dans le maquis de la Guinée Bissao,’ *Africasia*, 25 May 1970, p. 13 (quoted); interview with Duky; *NYT*, 8 July 1970, p. 10.)

In the early 1960s, Senegal’s President Léopold Sédar Senghor was very hostile to the PAIGC and Cabral (whom he suspected of being a communist), but during the war his opinion changed to one of high respect for Cabral and limited support for the PAIGC. See Chabal, *Amílcar Cabral*, pp. 84–5 and Antunes, *Nixon e Caetano*, pp. 91–6.

¹⁰⁸ Interviews with Peraza, Hechavarría, Candebat, Pérez Capdet and Pérez de León. ‘Ayuda brindada’ gives only two exact figures: ten doctors went in 1966, and there were eight doctors and seven nurses in the spring of 1972. The May 1972 military protocol between Cuba and the PAIGC stated that Cuba would maintain a medical mission of 17 members, including eight doctors. (‘Protocolo de asistencia técnica entre el partido comunista de Cuba y el Partido Africano para en Independencia de Guinea Bissau y Cabo Verde’, Conakry, 27 May 1972, appendix 1, CID-FAR.)

¹⁰⁹ At Boké, two or three (Spadafora, Mihajlovic and possibly a third); one or two at Koundara; possibly half a dozen at Ziguinchor.

¹¹⁰ Chabal, *Amílcar Cabral*, pp. 120–1; Rudebeck, *Guinea-Bissau*, pp. 186–201 (the best discussion of PAIGC medical care). According to Dhada, by 1972 the PAIGC had eleven native doctors and twelve foreign doctors; unlike Chabal and Rudebeck, he

To set the record straight, and to assess accurately the importance of the thirty Cuban doctors' contribution, it is important to find out how many Guinean doctors the PAIGC really had, and how many were in Guinea-Bissau alongside their Cuban colleagues.

When I asked PAIGC officials in Bissau about this, however, I gathered only fragments – there had been one Guinean doctor in such and such a place, or was he a physician's assistant? – that did not add up to a comprehensive picture. So I decided to interview the protagonists themselves.

Early one Sunday morning, I went to the house of Dr Paulo Medina, A Guinean who I knew had been a doctor during the war. I hoped, through him, to learn how many native doctors there had been in the PAIGC, when they had completed their training and started practising, and where they had worked. This would help me assess the relative importance of the Cuban role.

Dr Medina was candid and straightforward and did not try to embellish his role. He had graduated in 1969 from Moscow's Patrice Lumumba University, he explained, and the PAIGC had sent him to Boké, not to Guinea-Bissau, where he worked with Cubans and Yugoslavs until 1972. He then went to Belgrade to further his medical training, and he was there when the war ended in 1974.

Medina told me that during the war eight Guineans (including himself) had received their medical degrees, all from Patrice Lumumba University; there were also, he added, four physician's assistants and one dentist. Three of the doctors and one of the physician's assistants had died, but the others were still alive and in Bissau.

By the time I left Bissau, I had interviewed two of the doctors, the dentist, and two of the physician's assistants. They were impressive people: unassuming, pleasant (with one exception) and, like Medina, unwilling to embellish their past. Three told me flatly that they had not practised in Guinea-Bissau during the war; the claims of the two who said they had were confirmed by the others. With one major difference – there were five, not four physician's assistants – they all corroborated Medina's account.¹¹¹

The PAIGC had no native doctors until 1968, when the first two

gives a total number of Cuban doctors who served with the PAIGC: from 1965/6 to 1973, he writes, Cuba sent 'a dozen volunteer doctors'. (*Warriors*, pp. 61–72, 95, 115, 185 [quoted], 187–96).

¹¹¹ The next four paragraphs are based on interviews with two of the doctors (Paulo Medina, Venancio Furtado), the dentist (Gaudêncio de Sousa Carvahlo) and two of the physician's assistants (Ernesto Lopes Moreira and Paulo Alves), as well as the *Curriculum Vitae* of Dr Furtado.

qualified. Two more received their degrees the following year, one in 1970, two in 1971 and one in 1972. Upon graduating, they all returned to PAIGC headquarters in Conakry.

The PAIGC was in no hurry to send them to Guinea-Bissau. ‘At the beginning of the war, we had no doctors, so we sent our people abroad to become doctors’, explains a senior PAIGC official. ‘When they returned we thought that they should first gain some experience in good conditions – in Boké, in Koundara.’¹¹² Accordingly, only one of the first four doctors to graduate was sent to Guinea-Bissau; the other three went to Boké. In January 1972, they were all sent to Europe to pursue their specialisations and all four were in Europe when the war ended. Of the remaining four doctors, all of whom qualified between 1970 and 1972, two went straight to Guinea-Bissau upon graduating; the other two and the dentist went to Boké and Koundara. The experience of the five physician’s assistants was similar. After graduating in 1968–70 from institutes in Kiev and Sofia, they were sent to Boké and Koundara. Later, two went to Guinea-Bissau and two returned to Europe to pursue their medical studies.¹¹³

To conclude, before 1968 there were no native Guinean doctors; between 1968 and 1974 eight doctors, five physician’s assistants and one dentist received their degrees in the Soviet Union or Bulgaria. Of these fourteen, only five went to Guinea-Bissau (for varying lengths of time), and five returned to Europe for further training.¹¹⁴ This was PAIGC policy: Amílcar Cabral was planning for the future, when the war would be over. Such farsightedness was possible only because, year after year,

¹¹² Interview with Duky.

¹¹³ I have no exact figure for the number of Guinea nurses in 1974. According to Rudebeck, there were twenty-five fully trained nurses and 215 nurses’ aides in 1972 (Rudebeck, *Guinea-Bissau*, p. 199). Two years after the war, *Nô Pintcha* reported that there were 38 nurses and 254 nurses’ aides in the country (*Nô Pintcha*, 19 Oct. 1976, p. 8).

¹¹⁴ Their abbreviated CVs: **Domingos da Silvas**. MD (Moscow, 1968); in Boké (1968–72); in Belgrade (1972–4). **Silvano Lopes Rodrigues**. MD (Moscow, 1968); in Guinea-Bissau (1968–72); in Belgrade (1972–4). **Paulo Medina**. MD (Moscow, 1969); in Boké (1969–72); in Belgrade, (1972–4). **Fernando Cabral**. MD (Moscow, 1969); in Boké (1969–72); in Sweden (1972–4). **Venancio Furtado**. MD (Moscow, 1970); in Guinea-Bissau (1971–4, except for eight months in Boké). **António Tamba Nhaque**. MD (Moscow, 1971); in Koundara and Boké (1971–4). **Jaime Nandaia**. MD (Moscow, 1971); in Guinea-Bissau (1971–4). **Sabino José Dias**. MD (Moscow, 1972); in Koundara (1972–4). **Gaudêncio de Sousa Carvahlo**. Dentist (Sofia, 1971); in Boké (1971–4). **Ernesto Lopes Moreira**. Physician’s assistant (Kiev, 1969); in Koundara (1970); in Guinea-Bissau (1971–2); in Donietsk (1973–9). **Paulo Alves**. Physician’s assistant (Sofia, 1969); in Boké and Koundara (1970–2); in Sofia (1972–9). **Eduardo Kokane**. Physician’s assistant (Kiev, 1969); in Koundara (1970–4). **Paulo Mendes**. Physician’s assistant (Sofia, 1970); in Koundara (1971); in Guinea-Bissau (1972–4). **Juana Inacia Gomes**. Physician’s assistant (Kiev, 1969); in Boké (1970–4).

Cuban doctors bore the brunt of the effort in Guinea-Bissau. ‘Many of our comrades are alive today only because of the Cuban medical assistance’, observes Francisca Pereira, a senior PAIGC official. ‘The Cuban doctors really performed a miracle. I am eternally grateful to them: not only did they save lives, but they put their own lives at risk. They were truly selfless.’¹¹⁵

The members of the MMCG – doctors and soldiers – had a great deal in common. All were volunteers, picked one by one.¹¹⁶ Until 1972 M, in collaboration with the armed forces, chose who would be asked; thereafter the armed forces made the selection. The overwhelming majority of the men who were chosen were very dark-skinned blacks.¹¹⁷ Before seeing any racist tinge to this policy, however, one must remember that Amílcar Cabral had specifically urged that the instructors be black, so that they would blend in, and that while the rank and file were black, so too were their leaders.

Many of the volunteers had previously expressed their eagerness to participate in an internationalist mission. ‘Some of us who worked in the armed forces and the Ministry of Interior’, remarks Montero, ‘would learn of operations that were being planned or were already underway, and we would try to find a way to join.’¹¹⁸

Others did not know about specific operations, but had friends who were in the thick of things. ‘People who knew I worked with [intelligence head Manuel] Piñeiro’, recalls Oscarito Cárdenas, who for many years was in charge of West Africa within M, ‘kept telling me, “Please, if you hear anything, if you get a chance, get me in.” Some bugged me for years.’¹¹⁹ Others, who had no such contacts, wrote letters to Fidel or Raúl Castro. ‘Compañero Raúl’, said one, ‘I am writing to tell you about my desire to fight against the imperialists anywhere in the world.’ Another wrote, ‘Compañero Fidel, I want to let you know that I am eager to fight anywhere in the world, anywhere a liberation movement may need me. I want to help those who are now fighting against the common enemy of all mankind: imperialism.’¹²⁰

Many left important positions in the Cuban government to join a guerrilla war. Pedrito Rodríguez Peralta, for example, a senior official in

¹¹⁵ Interview with Francisca Pereira.

¹¹⁶ In my interviews, I asked all the Cubans who participated in missions abroad about the issues discussed here. In order to avoid long, repetitive notes, I identify the interviewee only when there is a direct quote or when I am dealing with an arcane issue.

¹¹⁷ After realising that there were many mulattoes as well as white-skinned Cape Verdeans in Guinea-Bissau, the Cubans relaxed the policy somewhat.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Montero.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Cárdenas.

¹²⁰ Lieutenant Radames Sánchez Bejerano to Raúl Castro, Havana, 23 Oct. 1965, PCH; Félix Barriento to Fidel Castro, Havana, 7 Feb. 1967, PCH.

the Ministry of Interior, would not rest until he was accepted as a volunteer in Guinea-Bissau.¹²¹

What motivated them? There was the mystique of guerrilla war. ‘We dreamed of revolution’, muses Estrada. ‘We wanted to be part of it, to feel that we were fighting for it. We were young, and the children of a revolution.’¹²² There was altruism; there was a spirit of adventure; there was the desire to help Cuba. Fighting abroad, they would defend the revolution at home. ‘I was convinced that Cuba’s unavoidable fate was to disappear in a clash with the United States’, Cárdenas remarked in 1993. ‘In all those years we believed that at any moment they [the United States] were going to strike us; and for us it was better to wage the war abroad than in our own country. This was the strategy of “Two or Three Vietnams”; that is, distracting and dividing the enemy’s forces. I never imagined then that I would be sitting here [in a living room in Havana] talking about it now – we all assumed we were going to die young.’¹²³

The volunteers received no public praise in Cuba. They left ‘knowing that their story would remain a secret’.¹²⁴ They won no medals or material rewards. Once back they could not boast about their deeds, because they were bound to secrecy.

Among the Cubans who went to Guinea-Bissau was one woman, Concepción Dumois (Conchita), who spent four or five months there in 1967. Conchita, who worked in M with Ulises Estrada, was haunted by the death of her companion, Jorge Masetti, an Argentine who had lived in Cuba and was killed in 1964 leading the guerrillas in Argentina. ‘She kept asking to be allowed to join a guerrilla war; she kept insisting.’ As soon as Dreke became the head of the MMCG, Estrada asked him if Conchita could go to Guinea-Bissau. ‘I knew Conchita and I respected her’, Dreke remembers. ‘I said yes.’¹²⁵

The volunteers were instructed to tell their families that they were going to the USSR to attend courses. ‘There were about 7,000–10,000 Cubans on various forms of scholarships in the Soviet Union’, Dr Milton Hechavarría explains. ‘So there was nothing strange if someone said he was going to study there.’¹²⁶

Mail was routed through a special zip code in Havana which in theory led, via diplomatic pouch, to the Soviet Union, but in fact led to M and

¹²¹ Interview with Montero.

¹²² Interview with Estrada.

¹²³ Interview with Cárdenas.

¹²⁴ Interview with Dreke.

¹²⁵ Interviews with Dreke and Estrada. Conchita was her *nom de guerre* in Cuba. A second woman, the Argentine Isabel Largaía – ‘a very brave woman, strong and dedicated’ – visited Guinea-Bissau in March–April 1967 as part of a three-person team from the Cuban film institute that was making a documentary on the war (‘Diario de Vera’, entries of 15 Mar., 22 Mar. [quoted] and 1 Apr. 1967; Isabel to Vera, 3 May 1967, PCH).

¹²⁶ Interview with Hechavarría.

then to Africa. ‘We get mail, but with a three to four month delay’, wrote Vidiaux in Guinea-Bissau.¹²⁷ M officials in Havana screened the letters from the volunteers. ‘If there was anything that could give away where they were or what they were doing, we would hold onto them.’¹²⁸ Some volunteers pretended that they were in the USSR – ‘Sometimes we’d get together and someone who had been in the Soviet Union would help us put in authentic touches’.¹²⁹ Others never mentioned where they were or what they were doing.

Back home many believed that the volunteers were in the USSR; some were not sure; and some were sure that they were not in the USSR. ‘My dear Moya’, Conchita wrote to Dreke upon returning from Guinea-Bissau, ‘Tell all the *compañeros* ... that the first Sunday after my return to Havana I had lunch with all their wives and children and we laughed a lot, always saying that you’re in the USSR, but I don’t think that even Zobeida [Dreke’s four-year-old daughter] believes it. But they are all very discreet, and no one asks any questions.’¹³⁰ While some may have wanted to avoid problems with the authorities, most seem to have shared the values of those who had gone and respected the need for secrecy.

The Cuban ships that came to Conakry brought canned food, rice, sugar, beans, oil and coffee for the volunteers; moreover the MMCG had also some money to buy fresh food. ‘Comrade Vera’, the acting chief of mission wrote to Vidiaux, who was in charge of the Cubans on the southern front, ‘along with this note I am sending you 24,700 [Guinée] francs so that you can buy the necessary food [in Boké]. You must guard these francs with the greatest care; within a few days we will send you the supplies from the ship; therefore you will be able to keep the money in reserve for unforeseen circumstances.’¹³¹ But when the food arrived it was never enough because the Cubans shared it with their PAIGC comrades. ‘Once’, remembers a Cuban volunteer, ‘I had a can of beef. I didn’t want to share it. The PAIGC fighters near me were Moslems. I told them it was pork. “It doesn’t matter,” they said, “Allah doesn’t see through these thick trees.” I gave them the meat.’¹³²

The volunteers who went to Guinea-Bissau in 1966 knew only that they would be gone for a minimum of five years. In 1967 Dreke proposed that the volunteers remain in Guinea-Bissau for only one year. ‘I decided that

¹²⁷ ‘Diario de Vera’ [entry of late 1967].

¹²⁸ Interviews with Estrada (quoted), Montero, and Cárdenas.

¹²⁹ Interview with Batista.

¹³⁰ Conchita to Moya, Havana, 8 Aug. 1967, PCH.

¹³¹ Horacio to Vera, 31 Mar. 1967, PCH. Between June 1966 and June 1972 nine Cuban ships arrived at Conakry, at approximately eight-month intervals. (See ‘Ayuda brindada’, p. 15 and *passim*.)

¹³² Interview with René Hernández Gatorno.

we shouldn't keep people there indefinitely when it was possible to replace them with relative ease. I proposed one year because the climate was very harsh, parasites and malaria were endemic, and there was very little food. There were times in Guinea-Bissau when we ate only rice.'¹³³

Havana never formally agreed, but the principle was accepted and, on average, the volunteers remained in Guinea-Bissau about eighteen months.¹³⁴ The head of the MMCG was expected to safeguard the psychological and physical well being of his men. 'If they were suffering from malaria, we treated them in country', remarks Montero. 'If it was something severe, we sent them back in one of the Aeroflot flights from Conakry through Prague or Moscow.'¹³⁵ Similarly, 'if we learned that back in Cuba a volunteer's family had serious problems that required his presence, we sent him back'.¹³⁶

There was no provision that the Cubans in Guinea-Bissau leave for R&R, but those in the southern and the eastern regions would occasionally go to Boké in order 'to breathe a little – to refresh ourselves a little out there'.¹³⁷ Boké was then a small village of 2,000–3,000 people, not the large, bustling town that I visited in 1996. 'At night it was lit by a few streetlights, but for those of us coming from Guinea-Bissau it seemed like Paris!' remembers Montero. He arrived one night, by truck, after a long trek from eastern Guinea-Bissau. 'In the distance we could see some small lights; for us, on the truck, it was as if we were looking at the Champs Elysées!'¹³⁸ Things were more difficult for the Cubans in the north: for them the rearguard was Senegal, where no Cubans were allowed to go.¹³⁹

Following a system that had been established when the first Cuban medical mission had gone to Algeria in 1963, before leaving Cuba the volunteers signed a document in which they specified whether the Cuban government should pay their salaries to their families or deposit it in a bank until their return. The amount was exactly the same as they would have earned had they remained in Cuba.

The members of the MMCG also received a monthly stipend of \$30 for the officers and \$20 for the others. The stipend was kept for them at

¹³³ Interviews with Dreke (quoted), Vidiaux and Montero; Dreke to 1st Lt. Ullis, 12 Dec. 1969, PCH.

¹³⁴ See enclosure in Dreke to Vice-Ministro para el Trab. Pol., 8 Dec. 1969, PCH; interviews with volunteers.

¹³⁵ Interview with Montero. Two of the volunteers I interviewed returned to Cuba for health reasons: Eduardo Torres Ferrer, who was gravely ill, in 1967 and Luis Mario Burgos, who had been seriously wounded, in 1968.

¹³⁶ Interview with Dreke. ¹³⁷ Interview with Darío Urrea.

¹³⁸ Interview with Montero.

¹³⁹ Interviews with Hechavarría, Pina, and Torres Ferrer, Cuban volunteers who served in the north.

Headquarters in Conakry – money was not used in the liberated areas of Guinea-Bissau.¹⁴⁰ When the time for their return to Cuba approached (they were withdrawn in large groups by boat or plane), the volunteers were told to write a list of things they wanted to buy – ‘people wanted to get small presents for their wives, their children, themselves’. Headquarters then appointed two or three people to drive to Freetown in Sierra Leone to buy the presents because the prices were lower and the selection much broader.¹⁴¹

‘It was a disaster to be on one of those committees’, muses Melesio Martínez Vaillant. ‘It was impossible to please everyone. People would criticize whatever you bought. They’d say: “Buy me a pair of pants!” but they wouldn’t tell you the size! Always complaints! No one was satisfied.’¹⁴²

When they returned to Cuba, the volunteers were told to say that they had been in the Soviet Union. This could be awkward. ‘Why aren’t any of the presents from there?’ Pina’s wife asked him. There were other problems, too. ‘I lost 60 pounds in Guinea-Bissau’, recalls Dr Hechavarría. ‘My family was amazed. “Where were you? Why did you lose so much weight?”’¹⁴³

Some, like Hechavarría, maintained the cover story. (Only after the despatch of Cuban troops to Angola in 1975 did he tell his family that he had been in Guinea-Bissau.) Others ‘told a few family members and close friends in the army or ministry of interior, but not the entire neighbourhood!’ In any case, people ‘were discreet in these matters – they didn’t ask many questions’.¹⁴⁴

Between 1966 and 1974, nine Cubans died in Guinea-Bissau.¹⁴⁵ One, Captain Pedro Rodríguez Peralta, who was head of the Cubans in the southern region, was wounded and taken prisoner on 18 November 1969. ‘A Cuban officer has been captured in Guinea-Bissau’, blared the Lisbon daily *Diário de Notícias*. ‘The presence of Cuban instructors among the guerrillas of that terrorist movement had been known for a long time and

¹⁴⁰ Until 1971 they received no monthly stipend but when their mission was over they received presents worth \$50–60. Those Cubans who were assigned to the MMCG in Guinée received their stipend every month from the outset.

¹⁴¹ Quotation from interview with Pina. When the prices were lower, the committee went to Las Palmas in the Canary Islands to buy the presents. They would fly, and their purchases would be brought to Conakry by one of the Cuban fishing ships off the coast of Mauritania.

¹⁴² Interview with Martínez Vaillant; confirmed by interviews with Cosme Mesa Barrero, Félix Veliz Hernández and Batista, all of whom had served on the committees.

¹⁴³ Interviews with Pina and Hechavarría.

¹⁴⁴ Quotations from interviews with Montero and Pérez de León.

¹⁴⁵ MINFAR, list of dead with biographical notes, n.d., ACC. One doctor, the surgeon Miguel Angel Zerquera, died of malaria in Guinea-Bissau in April 1971.

is now definitely confirmed.¹⁴⁶ Shortly after Rodríguez Peralta's capture, the chief of the MMCG wrote to his predecessor: 'We know that these things happen in war, but we never expect them to happen to us... Oh well, I am beginning to recover from the shock – which was really very profound at first. We revolutionaries are more tough than our enemies, and we will make them pay for this, you can be sure of that.'¹⁴⁷

Rodríguez Peralta told the Portuguese that he had joined the PAIGC on his own, without any involvement of the Cuban government. He was tried and sentenced to ten years and one month. 'The prosecutor was unable to prove that the defendant... had been sent to Portuguese Guinea on orders from the Cuban authorities', wrote the *New York Times*.¹⁴⁸

His capture was not made public in Cuba; only his family was told. 'We had to explain to them why he had been in Africa, and stress that it was a state secret', recalls an M official.¹⁴⁹ Rodríguez Peralta's name first appeared in the Cuban press on 10 September 1974, four months after the collapse of the Portuguese dictatorship, when *Granma* mentioned, out of the blue, that the Portuguese government had announced that 'our countryman Rodríguez Peralta will be freed any moment now'. (Another article, six days later, mentioned that he had been captured in 1969 in Guinea-Bissau.) Rodríguez Peralta returned to Cuba on 16 September 1974. In a front-page three-column article, *Granma* described his arrival at the airport where Fidel Castro was waiting for him, provided a long list of other top Cuban officials who were there, told of Rodríguez Peralta's suffering at the hands of his captors, and said not one word about Cuba's aid to the PAIGC.¹⁵⁰

This secretiveness was consistent with Cuban policy in Africa. The despatch of Cuban troops to Angola, which began in November 1975,

¹⁴⁶ *Diário de Notícias*: 21 Nov. 1969, pp. 1–2 quoted; 24 Nov. 1969, p. 5 and 28 Nov. 1969, p. 5; 'Las misiones', p. 22. The previous July the Portuguese secret police (PIDE) had lamented, 'we have long had information about the presence of Cubans among the terrorists of the PAIGC, but until now it has not been possible to capture one of them'. (PIDE report of 10 July 1969, in Castanheira, *Quem?*, p. 60).

¹⁴⁷ Falcón [Montero] to Vera [Vidiaux], 3 Jan. 1970, PCH. No other Cubans were captured in Africa until early November 1975 in Angola.

¹⁴⁸ *NYT*, 27 Apr. 1971, p. 13. For Rodríguez Peralta's own account, see Juan Carlos Fernández (ed.), *Varios Testimonios Policiales* (Havana, 1980), pp. 162–85. See also 'Pedro Peralta: a história de um processo', *Expresso*, 14 Sept. 1974, pp. 5–6.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Cárdenas. My research confirms the silence of the Cuban press. Rodríguez Peralta's sister, Elsa, spent several months in Portugal visiting her brother in jail; her expenses were paid by the Cuban government (*Diário de Notícias*, 23 Apr. 1971, p. 4; *Granma*, 17 Sept. 1974, p. 1). The government also sent Cuba's foremost orthopaedic surgeon, Julio Martínez Paez, to operate on Rodríguez Peralta's arm, which had not recovered from a wound, but the Portuguese authorities refused permission for the operation (*Granma*, 16 Sept. 1974, p. 6).

¹⁵⁰ *Granma*, 10 Sept. 1974, p. 1 (quoted); 11 Sept. 1974, p. 1; 16 Sept. 1974, p. 6; 17 Sept. 1974, p. 1.

could not be kept hidden for long, because thousands were going. But the Cuban government remained silent about the earlier operations, including Guinea-Bissau. For example, in January 1977 Rodríguez Peralta flew to Bissau as a guest of the Guinean government. *Granma* printed two short articles about his trip, saying that he had been received by President Luís Cabral, that he had been awarded the Amílcar Cabral medal (the country's highest distinction), and that Luís Cabral had referred to 'the disinterested aid that Cuba has given to Guinea-Bissau from the time of our war of independence to the present'. *Granma* did not explain Cabral's statement, it did not mention that Rodríguez Peralta had fought in Guinea-Bissau, and it did not say why he had received the prestigious medal.¹⁵¹ The Bissau newspaper, *Nô Pintcha*, on the other hand, published several long articles on Peralta's visit and printed the full text of Cabral's speech. 'We know', he said,

that we were able to fight and triumph because other countries and people helped us... with weapons, with medicine, with supplies... But there is one nation that in addition to material, political and diplomatic support, even sent its children to fight by our side, to shed their blood in our land together with that of the best children of our country.

This great people, this heroic people, we all know that it is the heroic people of Cuba; the Cuba of Fidel Castro; the Cuba of the Sierra Maestra, the Cuba of Moncada... Cuba sent its best children here so that they could help us in the technical aspects of our war, so that they could help us to wage this great struggle... against Portuguese colonialism.

One of the sons of Cuba who fought and shed his blood in our land is here among us: our brother and *companheiro* Pedro Rodríguez Peralta, who was wounded and captured... on November 18, 1969 and spent five years in Portugal in the prison of Caxias.

On this day in which we honour our heroes and our martyrs... the government of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau has decided to give our comrade Comandante Pedro Rodríguez Peralta the Amílcar Cabral medal of bravery.¹⁵²

It is only recently that the Cuban authorities have begun to lift the veil of secrecy about their policy in Africa before 1975. They have done so tentatively, almost reluctantly, even though it is a policy of which they have much to be proud. 'It is our phobia about publicity', Cárdenas told me in December 1993. 'We thought it would be much more dignified if the people we had helped talked about it', added Risquet.¹⁵³ Above all, it is the reticence of a government, and of a people, who have lived so long under siege by an implacable foe: the United States.

In May 1972, Castro went to Africa for the first time: he stopped in

¹⁵¹ *Granma*, 24 Jan. 1977, p. 6 and 25 Jan. 1977, p. 1.

¹⁵² *Nô Pintcha*, 22 Jan. 1977, pp. 4–6. See also *Nô Pintcha*: 20 Jan. 1977, p. 1; 27 Jan. 1977, p. 6; 1 Feb. 1977, p. 2.

¹⁵³ Interviews with Cárdenas and Risquet.

Guinée and Algeria on his way to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. ‘Guinée and Algeria were two key countries for us’, explains Risquet.¹⁵⁴ Guinée was desperately poor and by 1972 it enjoyed little prestige abroad, even in the Third World, but it was the PAIGC’s indispensable rearguard. Not only was Guinea-Bissau the only place in the world in which Cubans were actually fighting in 1972, but the rebels were steadily gaining ground. Furthermore, the war in Guinea-Bissau could have an impact far beyond its borders. As early as 1963, a US official had observed that ‘whatever Portugal does in Portuguese Guinea will directly affect its capacity to maintain its position in the much more valuable territories of Angola and Mozambique....Portuguese withdrawal under fire would give a boost to African morale and determination. It would also be a severe psychological blow to the Portuguese.’¹⁵⁵ This was precisely the Cuban view, and by 1972 Cuba believed that a Portuguese military collapse in Guinea-Bissau lay in the not distant future.¹⁵⁶

Castro visited Guinée from 3 to 8 May 1972, bearing gifts: economic and military aid. ‘There was not even a hint that our country would have to repay the Cubans’, writes a Conakry official. ‘Guinée occupied a strategic location from which Cuba could lend valuable aid to African National Liberation Movements’ – that is, to the PAIGC. Cuba sent four fishing boats, manned by Cuban fishermen who gave their catch to Guinée and trained local crews.¹⁵⁷ Cuba also granted a large number of scholarships. In August 1972, 133 students left for Havana on a Cuban ship; two other groups, each of slightly over 100, left in 1973 and 1974.¹⁵⁸

Cuba also extended military aid. As their fortunes in Guinea-Bissau deteriorated, the Portuguese might be tempted to strike again at Guinée to deprive the PAIGC of its safe-havens.¹⁵⁹ Guinée had a few MIGs, but

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Risquet. While in Conakry, Castro made a brief unscheduled visit to Freetown at the invitation of Sierra Leone’s President Siaka Stevens. (See *Granma*, 8 May 1972, p. 1 and 13 May 1972, p. 5; and *Daily Mail* (Freetown), 5 May 1972, p. 1 and 9 May 1972, p. 8.)

¹⁵⁵ Hughes (INR) to SecState, ‘Focus on Portuguese Guinea’, 16 Aug. 1963, pp. 7–8, SP, box WH-1, JFKL. ¹⁵⁶ Interviews with Estrada and Cárdenas.

¹⁵⁷ Bah Ibrahima, ‘Relaciones Guinea–Cuba’, Havana, Instituto Superior de Relaciones Internacionales (1991), p. 33; interviews with Oramas and Bangaly, the director of the Western Hemisphere division of the Foreign Ministry of Guinée.

¹⁵⁸ Interviews with Aboukabar Sidiki and Safayo Ba who went in 1972, Moussa Beavogui and Mamoudou Diallo who went in 1973, and Mohamed Sadialiou Sow and Sékou Sylla who went in 1974. The pattern was the same for the three groups; after spending an academic year at the language school of Siboney, in Havana, most went to the university, a few to technical schools. Cuba bore all the expenses: transportation, board, lodging, clothing and a monthly stipend.

¹⁵⁹ Declassified documents from the secret police archives in Lisbon reveal that the Portuguese and French secret services were planning an operation to overthrow Touré. ‘Operation Safira’ was scheduled for June 1974, but the Portuguese

lacked pilots trained to fly them in combat; furthermore it had only one airport (at Conakry), so its airforce was vulnerable to a Portuguese air strike. Following Castro's visit, Cuba sent several pilots for the MIGs and construction workers to build airports near the towns of Kankan and Labbé, to improve Conakry airport, and to build special hangars there to protect the MIGs.¹⁶⁰

Meanwhile the PAIGC had received new weapons, among them surface-to-air missiles from the USSR. In late 1972, Luís Cabral recounts, 'we learned about a Soviet weapon that was light and very efficient for anti-aircraft defence. Amílcar made a special trip to Moscow to explain our needs to the Soviet authorities and urge them to give us that precious weapon.'¹⁶¹ The mission, in December 1972, proved successful. In March 1973, wrote the Portuguese Prime Minister, 'surface-to-air missiles unexpectedly appeared in the enemy's hands in Guinea[-Bissau] and within a few days five of our planes had been shot down'. This meant that 'our unchallenged air superiority, which had been our trump card and the basis of our entire military policy...had suddenly evaporated'.¹⁶² It became very dangerous for the Portuguese to fly. 'The situation deteriorated dramatically... The introduction of the missiles opened, without any doubt, a new phase of the war', writes Spínola.¹⁶³ 'Our planes no longer completely dominated the skies', adds a Portuguese officer who was in Bissau.

That easy and constant cruising of the air space by our DO-27s, T-6s, Fiats,

dictatorship was overthrown the previous April. ('PIDE e SEDEC teriam elaborado as grandes linhas de acção', *Expresso*, 24 Jan. 1976, pp. 14–15.)

¹⁶⁰ Interviews with Bangaly, Oramas and Manuel Medina, deputy commander of the MMCG in 1973–4. The Cubans also began providing some training to the militia, which Sékou Touré had revived after the November 1970 attack (*Granma*, 8 May 1972, p. 1; interviews with Galarza, Martínez Vaillant and Manuel Medina).

In 1973–4, the Portuguese, fearing that Guinée's MIGs might be used on behalf of the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau, purchased Crotals from France and ordered Red-Eye missiles from Israel. (See Colonel Casanova Ferreira in Manuel Bernardo (ed.), *Marcello e Spínola. A ruptura* (Lisbon, 1994), pp. 374–5 and Antunes, *Nixon e Caetano*, pp. 281–304.) This gave birth to the canard that 'Nigerian pilots [on behalf of the PAIGC] flew MIG-17 reconnaissance flights over the colony [Guinea-Bissau] from 1971 onwards'. (Ian Beckett, 'The Portuguese Army', in Beckett and John Pimlott (eds.), *Armed Forces and Modern Counter-Insurgency* (New York, 1985), p. 140.) All the PAIGC officials interviewed for this essay confirmed that there were no Nigerian planes or pilots. The planes were Touré's MIGs and the pilots were Cubans.

¹⁶¹ Cabral, *Crónica*, p. 433.

¹⁶² Quotations from Marcello Caetano, *Depoimento* (Rio de Janeiro, 1974), p. 179 and Fabião, 'A descolonização', p. 310.

¹⁶³ António de Spínola, *País sem rumbo: Contributo para a História de uma Revolução* (Lisbon, 1978), pp. 53–4.

Alouette IIIs, Nord Atlases to gather intelligence, to transport His Excellency [Spínola] and other dignitaries, to provide air cover for our troops, to bomb [the enemy areas], to transport troops and supplies – all this had suddenly become very dangerous. The psychological shock suffered by our pilots was spectacular. ... Within two months six planes ... were shot down and several officers, sergeants and soldiers quickly lengthened the monthly list of obituaries of our armed forces.¹⁶⁴

The only official Portuguese Army report of the war states, ‘With the introduction of the SAMs, the PAIGC reached the apex of its activity, rendering difficult the movement of our air force, and this in turn influenced negatively the course of the ground operations.’¹⁶⁵ In May 1973, the PAIGC launched ‘Operation Amílcar Cabral’ in the south. Forty-one Cubans participated and were in charge of the artillery – including the SAMs.¹⁶⁶ On 25 May the Portuguese abandoned Guiledje, an immense fort and the key to the southern defence. ‘We knew that Guiledje had fallen’, writes a Portuguese officer. ‘We knew that the captain there ... after repeatedly asking Spínola for help and receiving only negative replies ... decided to save himself and his men and abandoned Guiledje on foot, taking only the weapons that his demoralised and defeated men could carry through the jungle.’¹⁶⁷ The offensive continued for one month, inflicting heavy casualties on the Portuguese and downing four of their planes. ‘The operation “Amílcar Cabral” was a complete success’, concluded the Cubans.¹⁶⁸ By then the PAIGC controlled about two thirds of the territory and half of the population.

The PAIGC was also gaining ground internationally. A special mission of the UN Decolonisation Committee visited liberated areas of Guinea-Bissau in April 1972. Its report condemned ‘the devastation and misery caused by Portugal’s actions, particularly the widespread and indiscriminate bombing of villages and the use of napalm to destroy crops’. It stated that ‘Portugal no longer exercises any effective administrative control in large areas of Guinea (Bissau)’, and it stressed ‘that the

¹⁶⁴ Otel Saraiva de Carvalho, *Alvorada em Abril* (Lisbon, 1984), pp. 107–8. (Carvalho served in Guinea-Bissau in 1971–3.)

¹⁶⁵ Estado-Maior do Exército, Comissão para o Estudo das Campanhas de África (1964–1974), *Resenha Histórico-Militar das Campanhas de África* (Lisbon, 1988), vol. I, p. 119.

¹⁶⁶ MINFAR, ‘Realización de la Operación “Amílcar Cabral”’, p. 35 [1974], CID-FAR (hereafter ‘Realización’). For a vivid account by a Portuguese officer of the diversionary offensive in the north, see Salgueiro Maia, *Capitão de abril. Histórias da guerra do ultramar e do 25 de Abril* (Lisbon, 1994), pp. 63–9.

¹⁶⁷ Carmo Vicente, *Gadamael* (Lisbon, 1985), p. 95.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Realización’, p. 90. See also Vicente, *Gadamael*, pp. 93–110 and Richard Lobban, ‘The Fall of Guiledje’, *Africa* (August 1973) pp. 36–7.

population of the liberated areas unreservedly supports the policies and activities of [the] PAIGC'.¹⁶⁹ From late August to mid-October 1972, the PAIGC organised elections in the areas they controlled for a Popular National Assembly. On 14 November the United Nations General Assembly recognised the PAIGC as the only legitimate representative of the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde by 98 votes to 6 with 8 abstentions.¹⁷⁰

The Portuguese turned to other means. On 20 January 1973, Amílcar Cabral was murdered by disgruntled members of the PAIGC who had been urged on by the Portuguese secret police.¹⁷¹ But his assassination did not affect the war in Guinea-Bissau – if anything, the war continued with even more vigour. Cabral's fifteen-year effort had produced a strong military organisation, international support and political mobilisation at home. After the successful conclusion of 'Operation Amílcar Cabral', the PAIGC's second Congress summoned the Popular National Assembly which had been elected the previous year. On 24 September 1973, the assembly proclaimed the independent state of Guinea-Bissau. 'Within three months, more than seventy-five states had recognized our country and placed Portugal in the position of aggressor.'¹⁷²

On 2 November 1973 the young republic achieved what *Nô Pintcha* called 'our greatest diplomatic victory'¹⁷³ when the United Nations General Assembly approved a resolution condemning the 'illegal occupation by Portuguese military forces of certain sectors of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau and acts of aggression committed by them against the people of the Republic'. As the Dutch representative pointed out, an affirmative vote meant *de facto* recognition of Guinea-Bissau. The resolution passed by 93 votes to 7, with 30 abstentions. The seven negative votes were Portugal, the military dictatorships of Brazil and Greece, Franco's Spain, South Africa, Britain and the United States.¹⁷⁴ The US vote was consistent with Washington's policy, if not its rhetoric.

¹⁶⁹ United Nations General Assembly, 'Report of the Special Mission Established by the Special Committee at its 840th Meeting on 14 March 1972', UN document A/AC.109/L.804, 3 July 1972, p. 19.

¹⁷⁰ United Nations General Assembly, Official Records, 27th sess., Plenary Meeting, 14 Nov. 1972, 10:30 am.

¹⁷¹ The murder plot remains murky. For speculative theories see Castanheira, *Quem?* For straightforward accounts on the basis of the existing evidence see Chabal, *Amílcar Cabral*, pp. 132–43 and Antunes, *Nixon e Caetano*, pp. 249–50. Also useful was the secret report of the PAIGC's internal investigation: Fidelis Cabral, 'Relatório-Comissão de Inquerito', Conakry, 9 June 1973, private collection, Bissau.

¹⁷² *Nô Pintcha*, 17 Sept. 1977, p. 5.

¹⁷³ *Nô Pintcha*, Sept. 1976 (special issue), p. 15.

¹⁷⁴ United Nations General Assembly, Official Records, 28th sess., Plenary Meeting, 2 Nov. 1973, 10:30 am, pp. 5–15.

‘Is that Statue of Liberty with its torch a sham?’ the Saudi delegate had enquired during the debate on the draft resolution.¹⁷⁵

By the time he left Guinea-Bissau in August 1973, Spínola had lost all hope. ‘We are getting ever closer to military collapse’, he had informed the government in May; the best that could be hoped was to delay the inevitable. ‘Therefore’, he had urged, ‘the matter of my replacement becomes even more pressing.’¹⁷⁶ In early 1974, a Cuban military analysis concluded that the Portuguese troops had been unable to adapt to the SAMs. After factoring in ‘the international support and prestige currently enjoyed by the PAIGC’, the growing war weariness in Portugal and the rising political cost of supporting Lisbon for its NATO allies, the study concluded: ‘We believe that the Portuguese in Guinea-Bissau would not be able to resist a sustained PAIGC offensive for more than a year, and this would result in the liberation of the country.’¹⁷⁷

It took less than a year. On 25 April 1974, war-weary Portuguese officers overthrew the dictatorship and brought their country’s imperial folly to an end. On 10 September Portugal recognised the republic of Guinea-Bissau.

Many countries had helped the PAIGC in its struggle. Guinée had provided the rearguard. In the West, Sweden began sending economic aid in October 1969. ‘This was the first time ever that a Western industrialized country gave state support to a liberation movement involved in armed struggle against another Western country.’ In 1972–3, Norway, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands followed suit.¹⁷⁸ It was the Soviet bloc, however, whose help was decisive. It provided arms, educational opportunities and other material and political support. The Soviet Union was, by far, the major source of weapons. Cuba, too, gave material help, in the form of supplies, military training in Cuba and scholarships.¹⁷⁹ This

¹⁷⁵ United Nations General Assembly, Official Records, 28th sess., Plenary Meeting, 22 Oct. 1973, 10:30 am, p. 7.

¹⁷⁶ Spínola, *País*, pp. 53–63; quotations from Spínola to Silva Cunha (Ministro do Ultramar), 22 May 1973, *ibid.*, p. 57 and Spínola to Silva Cunha, 9 June 1973, *ibid.*, p. 62. See also Joaquim da Silva Cunha, *O Ultramar, a nação e o 25 de Abril* (Coimbra, 1977), pp. 52–6.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Realización’, p. 92.

¹⁷⁸ Lars Rudebeck, ‘Some Facts and Observations on Relations between the Nordic Countries and the Officially Portuguese-Speaking Countries of Africa’, in Bernhard Weimer (ed.), *Die Afrikanischen Staaten Portugiesischer Sprache: Interne Entwicklungsdynamik und internationale Beziehungen*, (Ebenhausen, 1986), pp. 119–26, p. 123 quoted. See also Cabral, *Crónica*, pp. 333–6.

¹⁷⁹ In 1969 there were thirty-six Guineans studying in Cuba; most had arrived in 1967. (‘Relación de becarios de Africa que cursan estudios en nuestro país’, 4 Dec. 1969, unpaginated, PCH.) Scattered interviews indicate that many others went to Cuba before the end of the war. Twelve went in 1968 (interview with Arlette Cabral, a PAIGC official who was with them on the ship), seventeen went in September 1973 (interview with Félix Mandjam Sambú, a member of the group.)

was a considerable and generous effort for a poor country. But Cuba did much more and its role was unique. Only Cubans fought in Guinea-Bissau side by side with the guerrilla fighters of the PAIGC. As *Nô Pintcha* said, ‘In the most difficult moments of our war of liberation, some of the best children of the Cuban nation stood at the side of our freedom-fighters, enduring every sacrifice to win our country’s freedom and independence’.¹⁸⁰ This aid was given despite the fact that the PAIGC was not a marxist movement and its leaders strove to establish a non-aligned Guinea-Bissau.

This is Cuba’s story. It is the story of the relationship between Cuba and the PAIGC. But for many, particularly North Americans, a question immediately pops up, like a reflex: what about the Soviet Union? Was Cuba acting as a Soviet proxy?

To be sure, when the Soviet, Guinean and Cuban archives are fully opened, it will be much easier to respond. But in the meantime we must make do with what there is. Since no available documents bear directly on the question, I can only offer an informed judgement.

There are two ways to address the question. One is to broaden the context to Cuban policy in Africa in the 1960s and early 1970s and its relationship to Soviet policy. The second is to analyse Cuban motivations.

In Africa, throughout the period under consideration, Cuban and Soviet policies ran along parallel tracks. This was not a given: Cuban and Soviet policies could be at loggerheads – as they were in Latin America through the mid-1960s because of Cuba’s support for armed struggle there. No such clash, however, occurred in Africa. In Algeria, for example, the Soviets had no objection to Cuba’s very close relations with Ahmed Ben Bella’s regime and seem to have welcomed Cuba’s decision, in October 1963, to send a military force to help Algeria rebuff Morocco’s armed attack.¹⁸¹ Similarly, in Zaïre the Soviets must have welcomed Guevara’s column, since they were themselves helping the Zaïrean rebels.

These parallel and often mutually supporting tracks are even more evident in the case of Guinea-Bissau. The Soviets began giving aid to the PAIGC in 1962, well before Cuba did. The Cuban military presence from 1966 on complemented and enhanced the Soviet role, since the Cubans were in charge of the increasingly sophisticated weapons provided by the USSR.

It follows, some will say, that the Cubans were the cannon fodder, but the fact that their policies ran along parallel tracks does not make Cuba an agent of the Soviet Union. In fact Cuba was following its own policy, a

¹⁸⁰ *Nô Pintcha*, 9 Oct. 1976, p. 1.

¹⁸¹ On Cuba and Algeria, see Gleijeses, ‘Cuba’s First Venture’.

policy which dovetailed with that of the Soviet Union. The case of Algeria is illustrative. The Cubans began supporting the Algerian rebels on their own initiative in 1961. Cuba's decision to send the troops in 1963 was taken less than two hours after a direct appeal by Ben Bella, making it unlikely that Castro would have had time to consult the Soviets even if he had wanted to. As in Angola in 1975, it was the Cubans who were pushing the Soviets, not vice versa.¹⁸²

In Zaïre, likewise, Cuban policy was not coordinated with Soviet policy, as is shown by the fact that Che, his men and their weapons arrived in Tanzania on commercial flights even though Soviet ships were docking at Dar-es-Salaam.¹⁸³ This lack of coordination is also evident in 'Pasajes de la guerra revolucionaria (Congo)', the secret manuscript that Guevara wrote upon leaving Zaïre. And certainly the Soviets played no role in the Cuban decision to withdraw. Castro said, 'If Tatu [Guevara] believes that our presence has become unjustifiable and pointless, we have to consider withdrawing... If he believes we should remain we will try to send as many men and as much matériel as he considers necessary.... We will support whatever decision [Tatu makes].'¹⁸⁴ Castro left the decision to Guevara, his friend and commander-in-the field. The Soviet Union was not in the picture.

Cuba's policy in Africa was guided by Cuban national interests and ideology. This was well understood by US analysts. When Che Guevara went to Africa in December 1964, US intelligence followed his trip closely. 'Che Guevara's three-month African trip was part of an important new Cuban strategy', wrote Thomas Hughes, the director of Intelligence and Research at the State Department. This strategy, he argued, was based on Cuba's belief that a new revolutionary situation existed in Africa and that Cuba's own interest lay in the spreading of revolution there, because it would gain new friends who would lessen her isolation and, at the same time, weaken US influence. There was only one reference to the Soviet Union: 'Cuba's African strategy', concluded Hughes, 'is designed to

¹⁸² The Cubans sent their troops to Angola 'on their own initiative and without consulting us', writes Anatoly Dobrynin, former Soviet ambassador to the United States (*In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (New York, 1995), p. 362. See also Arkady Shevchenko, *Breaking with Moscow* (New York, 1985), pp. 271–2).

¹⁸³ See CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, weekly reports, 'The Situation in the Congo', 10 Mar. 1965, pp. 5–6, 31 Mar. 1965, p. 4, and 14 Apr. 1965, p. 4, all in NSFCF: Congo, box 87, LBJL; CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, 'Tanzanian Support for the Congo Rebels', 7 Apr. 1965, p. 4, *ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Rafael [Oscar Fernández Padilla] to Tatu, 4 Nov. 1965, ACC. See also Che Guevara, 'Pasajes de la guerra revolucionaria (Congo)' [Dar-es-Salaam, late 1965], pp. 118–19, PCH.

provide new political leverage against the United States and the socialist bloc... The Cubans doubtless hope that their African ties will increase Cuba's stature in the nonaligned world and help to force the major socialist powers to tolerate a considerable measure of Cuban independence and criticism.¹⁸⁵ It was a fair analysis of the pragmatic aspect of the policy, but it omitted the strong humanitarian motive that marked Cuban policy in Africa. Havana firmly believed that it had a duty to help those struggling for their freedom; it was this belief – not pragmatism – that led Cuba to help the Algerian rebels and risk the wrath of de Gaulle. It was a belief of which Amílcar Cabral and his friends were well aware. As a PAIGC leader said, 'The Cubans understood better than anyone that they had a duty to fight and help their brothers become free'.¹⁸⁶

The origins of Cuba's relationship with the PAIGC have nothing to do with the Soviet Union; they have to do with Guevara's trip to Africa and Cuba's new interest in subSaharan Africa. As Hughes asserts, neither the trip nor the policy responded to Soviet instructions. When Guevara went to Africa, he focused on Zaïre, and to a lesser degree the Angolan rebels of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the government of Congo Brazzaville. The PAIGC was just one movement among others, and not the most important. But the Cubans had overestimated the revolutionary situation in Africa in 1965: the revolt in Zaïre was crushed and Che's column withdrew in November 1965; the government of Congo Brazzaville was a disappointment, and the Cubans wisely withdrew in December 1966; the MPLA proved less strong than the Cubans had hoped. The PAIGC, on the other hand, was not a disappointment. The relationship that had begun in 1965 grew with mutual appreciation. For Cuba, *Realpolitik* and altruism went hand-in-hand. The independence of the Portuguese colonies would weaken the US-led camp and bring Cuba new friends. The cause was morally compelling: a people fighting with impressive courage against colonial rule. And Cuba could afford the costs. There is no reason to see a Soviet hand.

This policy would not have been possible without the volunteers – men who freely chose to risk their lives and endure sacrifices in order to serve Cuba and help others. Just as Havana was not bowing to Soviet pressure in helping the PAIGC, so too did individual Cubans volunteer of their own free will. And just as the valour of the PAIGC influenced Havana's decisions, so too did it influence the volunteers. 'I fell in love with Guinea-Bissau', remarks Coqui who had earlier been with Che in Zaïre.

¹⁸⁵ Hughes (INR) to SecState, 'Che Guevara's African Venture', 19 Apr. 1965, pp. 1–2, NSFCF: Cuba, box 20, LBJL.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Turpin.

‘They [the PAIGC] fought and we would see the tangible results of our efforts. They were committed. And there was warmth, gratitude toward us; we were like brothers. It was so different from the Congo [Zaire].’ Several of those who went to Guinea-Bissau, Coqui among them, returned a second time. ‘I went back to Cuba and I couldn’t forget my time in Guinea-Bissau’, says Dr Hechavarría. ‘I had endured a lot of hardships, faced a lot of problems, yet I could see how useful my work had been, and I kept thinking about the people I had met, about the patients who so desperately needed a doctor.’ He was back in Guinea-Bissau in 1970, twenty months after he had left.¹⁸⁷

To try to impose a Soviet dimension on the relationship between Cuba and the PAIGC seems to me to warp reality to satisfy an ideological bias. Robert Pastor, the NSC official who oversaw Latin America, wrote much the same to his boss, Zbigniew Brzezinski, in September 1979:

As we embark on another anti-Castro period, let me suggest that we try to use a different term to refer to the Cubans than that of ‘Soviet puppet’. My principal concern with that phrase is that it strains our credibility and gets people into debating the wrong issue. ... The word ‘puppet’ suggests that the Cubans are engaging in revolutionary activities because the Soviets have instructed them to do it. That, of course, is not the case ... I fear that if you or the President use the term ‘Soviet puppet’ in the future, you might just open yourselves to unnecessary charges that our information or analysis is faulty.¹⁸⁸

As former US Undersecretary of State George Ball has written, ‘Myths are made to solace those who find reality distasteful and, if some find such fantasy comforting, so be it’.¹⁸⁹ The sober fact stands that Cuba generously helped Guinea-Bissau become free, and that the United States helped the colonial power.

It was fitting that Cuba’s first ambassador to Guinea-Bissau (1975–80) was Alfonso Pérez Morales (Pina). ‘The comrade ambassador’, said President Luís Cabral, ‘is an old friend of ours; he lived with us in the jungle; he shared our hardship.’¹⁹⁰ At twenty-one, Pina had arrived in Guinea-Bissau in June 1966 and had remained until January 1968. In June 1972 he returned, at Amílcar Cabral’s request, and he did not leave until April 1974. On both occasions he was the chief of the Cubans on the northern front. Pina was ‘a wonderful comrade, very active, exemplary, for us he is a brother’, remarked a PAIGC commander.¹⁹¹ He learned to speak Creole like a native, ‘and on several occasions our people believed

¹⁸⁷ Interviews with Torres Ferrer (Coqui) and Hechavarría.

¹⁸⁸ Pastor to Brzezinski, 21 Sept. 1979, White House Central File, box CO-21, Jimmy Carter Library.

¹⁸⁹ George Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern: Memoirs* (New York, 1982), p. 374.

¹⁹⁰ *Nô Pintcha*, 29 Nov. 1975, p. 5.

¹⁹¹ Interviews with Borges (quoted) and Pina.

that he was a Guinean', writes Luís Cabral.¹⁹² 'I came to this country as ambassador with first-hand knowledge of the difficult and glorious struggle that you waged against Portuguese colonialism', Pina said in his farewell speech in June 1980. 'My relationship with you... did not begin with my appointment as ambassador... It was forged on the battlefield. And so I don't consider myself Cuba's first ambassador to Guinea-Bissau. The first ambassadors were those Cubans who volunteered to come here and to make their modest contribution to your liberation struggle.' Pina was one of these first ambassadors, one among hundreds.¹⁹³

Interviews

Several of the protagonists listed below were interviewed on numerous occasions about aspects of Cuban policy in Africa other than Guinea-Bissau. Here I list only the interviews and the position[s] held by the interviewee that are relevant for this essay.

(1) *Cubans* (Unless otherwise noted, the interviews took place in Havana)

Agramonte, Manuel. Ambassador in Guinée, 1973–6. [17 Dec. 1993; 5 July and 19 Dec. 1994]

Batista, Reynaldo. MMCG, 1967–8. [20 July 1995]

Burgos, Luis Mario. MMCG, 1967–8. [24 June 1994]

Candebat, Raúl. Physician, MMCG, 1967–8. [12 July 1995]

Cárdenas, Oscar. Intelligence officer. [5 and 14 Dec. 1993]

Dreke, Víctor. Che Guevara's deputy in Zaïre, 1965. Chief of the MMCG, 1967–8. Head of the political bureau of the armed forces, 1968–70. [Havana: 14 Dec. 1993; 24, 26, 27 June 1994; 7 and 11 July 1994; 7 Dec. 1994. Conakry: 19 and 20 Apr. 1996; 6 May 1996]

Estrada, Ulises. Senior intelligence officer. [20 Dec. 1993; 7 and 14 Dec. 1994; 21 July 1995]

Fuente Veitía, Orlando. MMCG, 1967–8. [25 June 1994]

Galarza, Armando. MMCG, 1966–7, 1971–2. [27 June 1995]

Guerrero Pozo, José. MMCG, 1972–4. [20 July 1995]

Hechavarría, Milton. Physician, MMCG, 1967–8; head of MMCG Medical Services, 1970–1, 1973–4. [20 July 1995]

Hernández Betancourt, Alcadio. MMCG, 1966–8. [11 Dec. 1994]

Hernández Gatorno, René. MMCG, 1973–4. [19 June 1994]

Martínez Vaillant, Melesio. MMCG, 1968–9, 1973–4. [20 Dec. 1994]

Medina, Manuel. Deputy commander, MMCG, 1973–4. [20 Dec. 1994]

Mesa Barrero, Cosme. MMCG, 1966–8. [25 June 1994]

Montero, Enrique. Intelligence Officer, MMCG, 1967–70 (head of Cubans at southern front, 1968–9; head of the MMCG, 1969–70). [20 Dec. 1993; 16 Mar., 4 Apr., 4 July and 14 Dec. 1994]

¹⁹² Cabral, *Crónica*, pp. 305–6.

¹⁹³ *Nô Pintcha*, 21 June 1980, p. 3.

- Moracén, Rafael. Military instructor aboard the *Uvero*, Apr. 1965. [21 June 1994]
- Oramas, Oscar. Ambassador in Guinée, 1966–73. [12 and 15 Dec. 1994; 30 June 1995]
- Peraza, Luis. Physician, MMCG, 1966–8. [5 July 1994]
- Pérez Capdet, Pablo. Physician, MMCG, 1968–71. [28 Feb. 1996]
- Pérez de León, Rubén. Physician, MMCG, 1967–9. [28 Feb. 1996]
- Pérez Morales, Alfonso (Pina). Head of Cubans at northern front, MMCG, 1966–8, 1972–4. [28 Feb. 1996]
- Risquet, Jorge. Head of Cuban column in Congo Brazzaville, 1965–6. [20 June 1994 and 16 Feb. 1996]
- Salavarría, Heriberto. MMCG, 1966–8 (deputy chief of mission, 1967–8). [25 June 1994]
- Torres Ferrer, Eduardo (Coqui). MMCG, 1967, 1970–1. [11 July 1994]
- Urta, Darío, MMCG, 1968–9; 1973–4. [18 Dec. 1994]
- Veliz Hernández, Félix. MMCG, 1970–2. [3 July 1995]
- Veranes, Augusto. MMCG, 1966–8. [12 Mar. 1996]
- Vidiaux, Erasmo. MMCG, 1967–9 (head of Cubans at southern front, 1967–8; head of the mission, 1968–9). [1 July 1994]

(2) *Guineans* (all the interviews took place in Bissau)

- Alfama, Leopoldo (Duky). PAIGC commander. [25 Apr. 1996]
- Alves, Paulo. PAIGC physician's assistant, 1969–[2 May 1996]
- Borges, António. PAIGC commander. [26 and 30 Apr. 1996]
- Cabral, Arlette. PAIGC health official. [28 Apr. 1996]
- Cabral, Fidelis. PAIGC leader. [30 Apr. 1996]
- Cabral, Vasco. PAIGC leader. [29 Apr. 1996]
- Furtado, Venancio. PAIGC physician, 1970–[1 May 1996]
- Lopes Moreira, Ernesto. PAIGC physician's assistant, 1969–[29 Apr. 1996]
- Mandjam Sambú, Félix. Scholarship student in Cuba, 1973–85. [26 Apr. 1996]
- Mané, Arafam. PAIGC commander. [28 Apr. 1996]
- Medina, Paulo. PAIGC physician, 1969–[29 Apr. 1996]
- Montero Santos, Manuel. PAIGC commander. [1 May 1996]
- Pereira, Francisca. PAIGC health official. [25 Apr. 1996]
- Ramos, Armando. PAIGC leader. [27 Apr. 1996]
- Sousa Carvahlo, Gaudêncio de. PAIGC dentist, 1971–[2 May 1996]
- Turpin, Joseph. PAIGC leader. [30 Apr. 1996]
- Vieira, João Bernardo (Nino). PAIGC commander; commander in chief, 1970–4; (President of the Republic, 1980–). [1 May 1996]

(3) *Others*

- Ba, Safayo. Scholarship student from Guinée in Cuba, 1972–9. [Conakry, 22 Apr. 1996]
- Bangaly, Dabo. Scholarship student from Guinée in Cuba, 1961–7; director, America division, Foreign Ministry, 1970–4. [Conakry, 18 and 20 Apr. 1996]
- Beavogui, Moussa. Scholarship student from Guinée in Cuba, 1973–9. [Conakry, 17 Apr. 1996]
- Diallo, Mamoudou. Scholarship student from Guinée in Cuba, 1973–9. [Conakry, 19 Apr. 1996]

- McIlvaine, Robinson. US ambassador in Conakry, 1966–9. [Washington, DC, 5 Feb. 1996]
- Sadialiou Sow, Mohamed. Scholarship student from Guinée in Cuba, 1974–81. [Conakry, 22 Apr. 1996]
- Sidiki, Aboubacar. Scholarship student from Guinée in Cuba, 1972–7. [Conakry, 20 Apr. 1996]
- Sylla, Sékou. Scholarship student from Guinée in Cuba, 1974–81. [Washington, DC, 16 July 1996]