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politics**08Sep89 ETHIOPIA: CUBAN PULLOUT FROM ETHIOPIA ENDS LARGE-SCALE AFRICA PRESENCE.**By **Lionel Martin**

HAVANA, Sept 8, Renter - Havana's decision to pull its troops out of Ethiopia marks the end of Cuba's large-scale military commitment on the African continent.

Thursday's announcement of the pullout from Ethiopia, where it has had troops since 1977, comes less than nine months after Cuba agreed to a staged withdrawal of its 50,000 troops from Angola by mid-1991. Cuba first sent troops to Angola in 1975.

Word of the intention to withdraw coincided with the start of peace talks in the southern U.S. city of Atlanta between the government of Ethiopia and guerrillas fighting for the independence of the northern province of Eritrea.

"The Cuban army can boast that it completed its missions successfully in both Ethiopia and Angola," a Western diplomat said here. "But the movement for peace in both those regions now makes the Cuban military presence unnecessary."

"One can suppose that the days of heavy Cuban involvement in African wars are over," he added. "For one thing, under its new policy of detente, the Soviet Union will probably insist that the weapons it provides Cuba be used only in defending the Caribbean island."

All weapons used by the Cuban armed forces are Soviet-made.

There has been no hint that the Soviet Union will reduce military aid to Cuba but both Cuban and Soviet government sources say Moscow will be unable to provide financial and technical aid on the massive scale of the past.

The sources also doubt whether the Soviet Union will continue to buy Cuba's raw sugar at four times the world price.

President Fidel Castro has said there will be no problem in absorbing the returning soldiers into the Cuban economy.

The Cuban government said all returning soldiers would be guaranteed employment or the opportunity to study.

According to Western diplomats, the return of the troops could help the Cuban economy by reducing its overseas expenditure. Cuba owes 6.4 billion dollars to Western creditors.

The withdrawal could also strengthen Cuba's military defences. Three shiploads of weapons, including tanks, armoured cars, MiG-21 fighters and artillery, have returned from Angola since the beginning of August.

Cuban troops gained vast battle experience in Ethiopia and Angola, where Western diplomats in Havana estimate that over 100,000 of them served over the past 13 years. Military observers now consider the Cuban army one of the most highly trained of any Third World nation.

The Cuban government never revealed how many troops it had in Ethiopia at the height of the fighting, but foreign experts estimate the number at between 11,000 and 20,000. In 1984, Cuba announced that it was reducing its troop strength in Ethiopia from 10,500 to 3,000.

Thursday's announcement did not give a schedule for the troop pullout.

Havana has also never revealed the number of troops it lost in Africa, although Castro said in 1978 that losses in Ethiopia had been minimal.

Thursday's announcement said the remains of Cuban soldiers killed in Ethiopia and Angola would be brought home, which should give a clearer picture of the casualties the island nation of some 10 million suffered in Africa.

The withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola began last January. Returning soldiers have been given heroes' welcomes as "internationalists who helped defeat the enemy of fraternal nations in Africa."

A peace treaty signed at the United Nations in New York last December by Angola, Cuba and South Africa called for an end to South African military intervention in Angola, independence for Namibia and the withdrawal of Cuban troops, who were engaged in heavy fighting with South African troops last year.

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