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Cuban Exiles Promise a Peaceful Flotilla at Spot

Reuter

MIAMI, March 1—Cuban exiles today promised a peaceful event when a flotilla of small boats and planes drops wreaths Saturday at the spot in the Florida Strait where four pilots were killed when their unarmed Cessnas were downed by Cuban MiGs last weekend.

The Coast Guard said it will escort the boats with an armada of its own.

President Clinton, meanwhile, declared a national emergency to allow the Transportation Department to "regulate the anchorage and movement of vessels" to prevent them from entering Cuban territorial waters. The declaration gives the Coast Guard and Federal Aviation Ad-

ministration broad authority to ensure that the air and sea memorial to the dead pilots will be "conducted in a safe manner."

Clinton said the emergency declaration was necessary because "the government of Cuba has demonstrated a ready and reckless willingness to use excessive force, including deadly force, in the ostensible enforcement of its sovereignty."

The flotilla to the site about 21 miles off Havana was planned as the centerpiece of a day of mourning in Miami's large Cuban American community.

Cuban American owners of grocery stores, pharmacies, restaurants and other businesses plan to shut their doors for at least an hour to

mourn the four men who died in last Saturday's attack, and tens of thousands of exiles are expected to fill the Orange Bowl stadium for a me-

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morial service Saturday evening.

But Cuban and U.S. military attention will be focused on the flotilla, which plans to depart Key West at the southern tip of Florida at

Where Planes Were Shot Down

dawn, accompanied by at least two private airplanes.

"This is going to be 100 percent peaceful. We don't want to make it a political show," said Ignacio Herrera, a spokesman for the Cuban Democracy Movement, a Miami group of anti-Castro exiles who are organizing the day's events.

The airplanes flying above the flotilla belong to Brothers to the Rescue, the same Miami-based exile group that lost two of its planes in the MiG attack in waters off Cuba. Fidel Castro's government insists the small planes violated Cuban airspace, and he has asked the U.S. government to halt the Saturday foray by anti-communist exiles.

Eleven Coast Guard cutters, four helicopters and two C-130 airplanes will escort the flotilla through international waters to the site where the Cuban MiGs shot down two planes with air-to-air missiles. Each vessel is armed with weapons ranging from antiaircraft guns to .50-caliber machine guns.

Defense officials said they also will move additional F-15 fighter jets to Homestead Air Force Base near Miami ahead of Saturday's flotilla.

One of the C-130 airplanes will escort the Brothers to the Rescue aircraft while another accompanies the flotilla, a Coast Guard spokesman said. Two U.S. Navy guided missile cruisers will also be nearby if needed.