

Discovered Cuban Espionage Network Constitutes an Attack on National Security

Translated from original Spanish

Diario Las Américas, September 15, 1998

ARIEL REMOS

At a press conference here in Miami on Monday, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) announced the breakup of a Cuban espionage network, through the arrest of 8 men and 2 women, 3 of them officers of Cuban intelligence, and the remaining 7 their agents. The seriousness of the case is revealed upon considering that the network's objectives constitute an attack on national security.

All the spies were arrested on Saturday and brought before federal judge Barry L. Gerber on Monday. They are: Manuel Viramontes, head of the spy network, Luis Medina, René González, Antonio Guerrero, Rubén Campa, Alejandro Alonso, the married couple Nilo and Linda Hernández, Joseph Santos and Amarylis Silverio, and they were accused of conspiracy against the United States or of being unregistered agents of a foreign country. Some may face life sentences.

FBI agent Héctor Pesquera explained that "the 10 were charged with infiltrating and spying on U.S. agencies and facilities," and also tried to "infiltrate and manipulate anti-Castro groups in South Florida." The military installations are specifically U.S. Army Southern Command, recently relocated to Dade County, MacDill Air Force Base near Tampa, and the Boca Chica Navy Base in Key West, where one of the accused, Antonio Guerrero, had managed to work and send reports to Cuba. Included in the exile organizations are Brothers to the Rescue and Movimiento Democracia (Democracy Movement). The investigation has been underway since 1995.

The FBI identified 3 of the 10 agents as the leaders of the group, who communicated directly with Havana to report on their activities and receive instructions from Cuban intelligence. They are Manuel Viramontes (alias "Giro"), captain in the Cuban army, residing in the U.S. since 1992; Rubén Campa (alias "Vicky"), and Luis Medina (alias "Allan"), a member of the General Directorate of Cuban Intelligence, who operated in the Tampa area to obtain information about the MacDill airbase.

Castro's spies used shortwave radios and laptops to communicate with Havana, which were found among a wide array of paraphernalia meant for their espionage work, such as disguises, antennas, plans and cash, which were confiscated by U.S. authorities. Included in the equipment were computer diskettes in which the spies referred to one another as "comrades" when exchanging coded messages.

Congressman Lincoln Díaz-Balart, who was informed by the FBI of the results of the operation, told DIARIO LAS AMERICAS that he congratulated the FBI for the measures taken to protect U.S. security, but that there were still "very serious matters pending regarding Castro's activities against the United States and there is an indictment prepared against the Castro regime in its entirety, as a criminal enterprise involved in a conspiracy for more than 10 years to send tons of cocaine to the U.S. I am sure that the U.S. law enforcement agencies wish to proceed against those criminals, as well as for the murder of 4 members of Brothers to the Rescue on February 24, 1996...It's high time that the Clinton administration untie the hands of

the security agencies so that they can enforce the laws to protect national security,” said Díaz-Balart.

Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen directed her remarks this Tuesday to the plenary session of the House of Representatives, emphasizing that the arrests carried out by the FBI on Monday were evidence that would come to confirm – above all to her colleagues who always look for ways to excuse Fidel Castro – the threat that his regime poses to the security of the United States. For his part, the federal prosecutor Thomas E. Scott called the wide network of Cuban agents an “attack on the very heart of our system of national security,” the largest ever uncovered here, as reported by the Washington Post in its Tuesday edition.

Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen in turn, commented to DIARIO LAS AMERICAS that in a conversation with FBI Director Louis Freeh about the case, he informed her that “this was not the last of it, and the investigation is ongoing.” She also said that in previous months, she had to request information from the head of the FBI about the substantial increase in trips by Cuban government officials to Miami and New York, the majority of which were referred to as “private meetings.”

Some of those arrested in this operation, it was learned, were associated with Juan Pablo Roque, the spy who infiltrated the anti-Castro organization Brothers to the Rescue – referenced by Díaz-Balart – and fled to Cuba the evening before the shutdown of the unarmed airplanes in international airspace. One of the accused, René González, also managed to infiltrate Brothers to the Rescue, but was let go because of suspicions. He became a member of Movimiento Democracia and had flown over the flotillas organized by that group.

Cuban exiles have expressed that as far as they’re concerned, the arrest of the spies and Castro agents came as no surprise since there have been symptoms of significant penetration by Cuban intelligence in exile circles for quite some time. As early as 1983, the well informed journalist Arnaud de Borchgrave complained to DIARIO LAS AMERICAS about “the infiltration of Castro agents in Dade county,” describing it as “incredible.” Previous memorable incidents of espionage are those of the previously cited Juan Pablo Roque, and that of José Fernández Brenes, who returned to Cuba after working for TV Martí, the U.S. government television station that broadcasts to the island.