

# Imperfect Crime

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**By Daniel Morcate**

The rate at which some swindlers in Havana and Washington are going, José Basulto would have ended up being accused of bringing down the two planes of Brothers to the Rescue (HAR).

Guided by the hand of unscrupulous manipulators, the ever-gullible public opinion was about to demonize the president of Brothers to the Rescue for the death of his four companions. Some accused him of "provoking" a defensive action by the Cuban government. Others attributed survivor's guilt to his complaints against Castro's and Clinton's officials. But events have taken a sudden radical turn. And that turn suggests that Basulto was right from the beginning, not only for accusing Cuba of premeditated murder, but also for maintaining that some U.S. government officials could be directly or indirectly involved in the crime.

A grand jury in Miami marred the light version of these horrific murders — the favored of the United States press and the shoddy Cubanologists' — by formally charging Castro's spies with having perpetrated it with much premeditation. The indictment alleges that Gerardo Hernández, alias "Manuel Viramóntez", Juan Pablo Roque and several more spies conspired to help Castro's militarists to execute the BTTR members in the air. It adds that they did this under the direction of a Cuban official identified with the code MX, and according to exiled sources, would be Eduardo Delgado Rodríguez the head of the Intelligence Directorate of the island's formidable political police. It emphasizes that within the spies' illegal work was the manipulation of the FBI. At least two of the 14 accused, Roque and René González, alias "Castor," were FBI (mis)informers. As least one of them, Roque, charged for the misinformation he gave to the clueless agency.

The indictments are, without a doubt, a significant step toward the desirable goal of clarifying the facts and doing justice for the victims, prosecuting all those responsible. Given the political implications of the investigation, it is admirable the courage with which the jury did its work and produced the first indictments. It is worth remembering that these were realized despite the reluctance with which President Clinton's administration has responded to inquiries about these crimes, the ease with which the media has swallowed Havana and Washington's bull, that Basulto and other members of HAR "Asked for it," and of the unfortunate candor of the public's part who, in discussions around tables, in letters to editors and programs with open microphones, repeated like a parrot what the propaganda claimed.

These prosecutions, however, should be just the beginning of a deeper inquiry. That the prosecution has excluded Fidel Castro suggests that the jury failed to fully liberate itself, if not from political pressure, then at least of the concerns of possible repercussions of going to the core of the problem. Castro publicly assumed responsibility for the downing of the planes when he presented it as a spontaneous defensive action. The indictment also states that he met twice with those who plotted the operation; and that once the crime was consummated, he decorated those who perpetrated it. Nobody should be surprised that our government prefers to play baseball with Castro than to bother him with murder charges. But now no one should either doubt that such a charge would be legally justified.

A thorough investigation would answer the following uncomfortable questions for our government: Why did U.S. officials initially state that the BTTR planes had been shot down while conducting a mission in Cuba, apparently to pick up Cubans on the island? (This version, designed as an alibi for a perfect crime, collapsed as soon the third plane piloted by Basulto miraculously returned intact). Did Castro's spies provide this disinformation to the government? And if so, why blindly believe it?

More annoying and key questions: Why did the Pentagon stand down from a state of alert, the F-15's from Homestead Air Force Base between 3:20 pm and 3:35pm on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1996, precisely the minutes when Cuban MiGs shot down the planes? (The Pentagon has this information, but refuses to divulge it, proclaiming it a state secret); Why was the Clinton government determined to deport to Cuba the refugee Adel Regalado, even after his acquittal of air piracy in Florida? (Regalado fled the island on a plane and told how he had witnessed the practice of downing planes, and how once the crime was committed, the participants in the training were decorated).

And finally we must find out if Basulto went from hero to villain in the press because of the pure stupidity of certain journalists, or through a campaign of disinformation orchestrated by interested and smeared persons.

You can bet that there will not be many answers to these questions while this government lasts. Such are the political and criminal connotations in answering them.

After all, the Justice Department, the FBI, the Immigration Service and the State Department, amongst other state agencies, even collaborated closely with the dictatorship that perpetrated the crimes. And yet the ultimate justice for victims will depend, precisely, on giving honest answers to these questions.