

Smokescreen Over Espionage

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With the admission coming from the confession of Fidel Castro himself that Cuba had sent spies to the United States, specialists in Cuban affairs and leaders of anti-Castro organizations said on Tuesday that the Cuban government is trying to distort the true nature of its espionage activities in this country.

"Castro is very worried now because he knows that six of the ten spies under arrest are collaborating fully with the FBI," said Ernesto Betancourt, a specialist in Cuban affairs, residing in Washington.

Castro justified the presence of Cuban spies in U.S. territory, indicating that the United States has "industrial quantities of spies" and admitted that movements of the United States military in areas near Cuba would be of interest "were they to become acts of aggression against Cuba."

"But we know that at this time, that is not the fundamental thinking of the U.S. government," Castro said to the CNN television network which broadcast on Tuesday an exclusive interview granted to Lucia Newman, CNN's correspondent in Havana, during the recently ended Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government in Oporto, Portugal.

Betancourt, the ex-director of Radio Martí, and the author of various studies of the Castro regime said that, according to his reports, the FBI had been able to examine "dozens of documents and diskettes and it is surprised at the breadth of Castro's espionage network as well as the aggressiveness of its plans."

"Now Castro wants to distort all that for U.S. public opinion and CNN is cooperating with him, as it has on other occasions, giving him a platform," said Betancourt.

In Washington, James Rubin, spokesman for the State Department, discounted Castro's allegations, calling them "ridiculous" and saying that the United States does not sanction anti-Castro terrorist tactics.

"We've arrested people and are committed to vigorously enforce our laws, and those include laws against terrorism," said Rubin. "We are committed to fighting terrorism here and in every country in the world. And unfortunately, again, Fidel Castro is wrong."

Silvia Iriondo, President of the "MAR for Cuba" organization, who traveled to Oporto along with representatives of other anti-Castro organizations in order to protest against Castro's presence at the summit, said that his declarations "show once again how Castro mocks the world, through his audacity."

"He chose CNN in Oporto, in order to seek the international stage that this television network grants him," said Iriondo. "This interview could have been done in Havana." Castro admitted that he had sent spies to the United States in order to infiltrate exile groups and gain awareness of "their terrorist activities," but emphatically denied that his regime is interested in U.S. "strategic affairs."

"We're not interested in information about military bases," said Castro.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), the group had planned to infiltrate itself into U.S. military installations such as SouthCom, with its headquarters in Miami, the Naval Bases at Boca Chica and Key West, and the Air Force base at MacDill in Tampa, and gather all possible military information about these installations.

The accused were identified as: René González, Linda Hernández, Nilo Hernández, Alejandro Alonso, Manuel Viramontes, Luis Medina, Antonio Guerrero, Rubén Campa, Joseph Santos and his spouse Amarylis Silverio.

Santos and his spouse, both 37 years old, will have a judicial hearing today for having offered to plead guilty in the case revealed by the FBI last month.

The couple agreed to join three other members of the presumed network, composed of 10 individuals, who are going to declare themselves guilty of the minor infraction of having acted as unregistered agents of a foreign government. This offense carries a sentence of up to five years in prison.

Castro's affirmations are in contrast to those made in recent days by his brother, Raúl Castro, head of the Cuban Armed Forces and second in command of the regime, who put Cuban military leaders on alert for a possible U.S. military intervention in Cuba.

"There is still a real danger of a military conflict," said Raúl Castro in a speech given last October 6th at the military council of Cuba's Eastern Army, held in Las Tunas. "The enemy is powerful and continues to modernize his arsenal, as in the days of the Cold War."

Ramón Saúl Sánchez, president of the Democracy Movement, said that Castro's declarations also confirm the complaints of exile groups about the presence of Cuban spies among them.

"A confession, proof enough," said Sánchez, citing the old saying. "No doubt many of the wild passions of the exiles that appear to the rest of the world as intolerance, intransigence, and backwardness, are planned by Castro's agents."

"The United States has industrial quantities of spies," said Castro. "It has CIA agents dedicated to that, and to subversion, in its Interests Section in Havana."

Castro argued that the U.S. intelligence services are so efficient that U.S. spies can even listen to all of Cuba's telephone calls. "I can't make a single call to a Latin American leader, or to a politician, without the United States listening in."

Color photo: Augusto Pinochet (a)

Photo: Fidel Castro (n)

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