

The Alleged Spies Await the Verdict

Translated from original Spanish

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The long trial of five alleged Cuban spies yesterday reached its final stretch, with a pending verdict that could take up to two weeks.

After six months and 103 court hearings in a federal court in Miami, the case of those involved in the Wasp Network is finally in the hands of a jury that is mainly composed of Afro-Americans and Anglos, without the presence of any Cuban-American.

"It's been an interesting odyssey" said Judge Joan Lenard yesterday when instructing jurors for an hour. Three substitute members – a Hispanic, an Afro-American and an Anglo – were excused.

Lenard gave a timely warning to the jury on the 26 charges faced by the five defendants, asking them to make their decision "based only on evidence presented during trial", and to put aside any personal likes or dislikes.

"You are only judges of the facts" the magistrate emphasized, recommending the jurors analyze the alleged guilt of the accused "without any time pressure."

The defendants face charges of conspiring to obtain secrets of national security on military bases in the south of Florida and of being unregistered foreign agents and acting as such. The most complicated of all is the alleged ringleader of the network, Gerardo Hernandez, who is accused of conspiring in the murder of four pilots from Brothers to the Rescue, in 1996.

In closing arguments, the defense said the prosecution had created false proof to incriminate the five accused, describing them as "patriots" and "pacifists" that were trying to protect the island from violent actions.

The jury began its deliberations shortly after being instructed by Lenard, who permitted the use of notes taken during the process of the trial, which commenced on the 6 of December.

Lenard's office indicated yesterday that the phase of deliberations could take "hours or days." Analysts believe that because of the number of charges and defendants, the verdict will not be delivered before next week.

At the end of the day, the accused dismissed their attorneys with smiles and expressions of affection.

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