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Region Struggles With WTO and CAFTA

by LADB Staff

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Some anti-Castro elements in the US jumped on a State Department claim that television programming to Iran was being jammed in Cuba to add that claim to a long list of alleged Cuban outrages. Two Cuban dissidents caused confusion and disagreement within the exile community. A new book accuses Elizardo Sanchez, leader of a human rights organization in Cuba, of working as an agent of the government while posing as a dissident. Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo, leader of a moderate exile group in Miami, returned to live permanently in Cuba hoping to convince President Fidel Castro to negotiate peaceful change.

Cuba ends jamming from Iranian Embassy

An incident involving jamming of satellite signals to Iran from "the vicinity of Cuba" was quickly resolved by routine diplomatic exchanges between Cuba and the US. However, a number of newspapers and political groups misrepresented the facts in an apparent effort to portray the Cuban government as the culprit. The jamming prevented satellite television signals from reaching Iran from private broadcasters in Los Angeles. The broadcasts were intended to support recent protests in Iran against the government.

The US State Department said US and Cuban officials met in Washington and Havana to discuss the jamming. The US officials said only that the jamming appeared to come from Cuba but made no accusations. In his daily press briefing, State Department spokesman Philip Reeker said the department did not know who was behind the jamming and had asked Cuba to look into it. Despite the nonaccusatory State Department tone, other government officials and news media presented the matter as a deliberate interference by the Cuban government with international broadcasting.

The US government's Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), which manages the Voice of America, placed the blame squarely on Cuba and asked the State Department and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to protest "wrongful interference." The BBG said that Iran had asked Cuba to block broadcasts from the US. An editorial in Insight Magazine asserted as fact that Cuba was jamming the signal "to challenge US dominance of space." The editorial defined dominance as the right of the US to have "unfettered access to communications...to broadcast and relay radio and TV programming into denied areas such as North Korea, Cuba, Iran, the People's Republic of China, and even friendly countries."

The Cuban Foreign Relations Ministry (MINREX) issued a formal statement July 19 denying that Cuba was responsible for the jamming and promised "a detailed investigation." The statement defended Cuba's right under international broadcasting agreements to jam US propaganda broadcasts aimed at Cuba but did not defend jamming of the private satellite broadcasts to Iran. It called the US government's conduct "impeccable" for refraining from making accusations and for using diplomatic means to solve the problem.

On Aug. 3, the State Department announced that Cuba had found the source of the jamming at a site in Havana owned by the Iranian Embassy, had shut it down, and sent a note of protest to the Iranian government.

Cuban government says Elizardo Sanchez was agent

On Aug. 18, the Cuban government released a book alleging that Elizardo Sanchez had been working as a government agent since 1997, even as he established his reputation as a dissident. The book, titled *El Camajan* variously translated as "chameleon," "charlatan," or "opportunist" alleged that Sanchez asked for a job as a government agent while he was on the US payroll as a dissident. Sanchez is a former Marxist who turned against Castro's revolutionary government. In exile in Miami, he organized the dissident human rights organization *Comision Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliacion Nacional*. He developed a role for himself as a moderate critic of the government working for dialogue. Sanchez allegedly supplied the government with information on CIA agents working in Cuba, the activities of dissidents in Cuba, and information on European countries that funded dissidents.

The book asserts that he received nearly US\$300,000 from the US, Spain, and Norway. He is accused of pocketing much of the money intended for distribution to other dissidents. Some of the dissidents on whom he informed were among the 75 imprisoned in March (see *NotiCen*, 2003-04-24). The book includes photographs of Sanchez purporting to show him receiving the Distinguished Service Medal from the Interior Ministry in 1998.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said the department did not believe the evidence offered in the book. "To us, it's another example that the regime is seeking to create divisions in the opposition by pitting those dedicated to real reform, one against the other," said Boucher. Much of the US media followed the same line. The headline on an Associated Press dispatch called the accusations part of a "smear campaign against rights activist."

The Miami Herald and other newspapers followed suit but offered no evidence to support their claims. Sanchez has categorically denied the charges. However, he acknowledged that he had contacts with the government but only in connection with his arrests for dissident activities. But the government then released a video showing him accepting the medal. Sanchez called the whole thing "a frame-up" and explained that he received a pen, not a medal.

In the video, Sanchez is shown joining a small group singing the national anthem. An army colonel reads a citation thanking Sanchez for his work and then pins a medal on him. A toast ends the ceremony of awarding the "pen." Responding to the video evidence, Sanchez said he was "disoriented" at the time, and hinted that he might have been drugged and the ceremony staged.

On Sept. 16, Sanchez made a near total retreat from his first denials, admitting in an interview with *The Miami Herald* that he had regular meetings with government officials. However, these meetings were to get better treatment for political prisoners, he said. He also recalled that he had received a medal, not a pen, from the Interior Ministry and that he had forgotten about it because of confusion resulting from attending so many meetings. "I admit I fell into a trap," he said. Insisting it was all a

government scheme to smear dissidents, Sanchez said he had drunk too much during the meeting, and anyway, "they put medals on everybody."

Dissident Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo returns to Cuba Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo usually referred to as Menoyo announced he was returning from exile to live in Cuba and help bring about peaceful change. A former combatant in the revolution who switched to the opposition, Menoyo served a lengthy prison term for a failed attempt at armed insurrection in Cuba in 1964. In Miami, he led the moderate exile organization Cambio Cubano. Menoyo said he rejected the right-wing exile elements in Miami who call for the overthrow of Castro through US intervention. Instead, he said, he would seek "legal space" in Cuba within the law, distancing himself from the US-paid dissidents. "I come to work for an open agenda in favor of peace and the reconciliation of all Cubans," he said.

In Havana, Menoyo told reporters he thought democratic change could come about in the medium term through negotiations with Castro. He said Castro possibly was not aware that he would have to negotiate, but a time could come when he would have to. Menoyo's faith in a negotiated outcome rests on his belief that the trials of hijackers and US-supported dissidents in March have weakened the Cuban government because of the negative reaction around the world. The government in Cuba is in a corner, he said, and faces the possibility that President George W. Bush's administration is working to create chaos and a mass exodus from Cuba as a pretext for some kind of intervention.

In April, Menoyo told Miami's Spanish-language newspaper El Nuevo Herald that Cuba was at a crossroads. "We are going to have a serious dialogue, in which our best credentials would be transparency, or we are going to allow our country to face a sad outcome of violence." Some fellow exiles in Miami denounced his move to Cuba and said it was complicity with the Castro regime.

"I imagine he is doing this because he is speaking the language the Castro dictatorship wants to hear," said Mariela Ferretti of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). Writing in El Nuevo Herald, anti-Castro propagandist Ernesto Betancourt called Menoyo "an insignificant figure," disparaging his contribution to the revolution and his later attempt to overthrow it. His plan now, said Betancourt, is to "sell his support to Fidel in the campaign to discredit all dissidents as a mere instrument of the United States."

To date, Menoyo has neither been kicked out of Cuba nor formally accepted and given residence permission. But his presence has meant readjustments in the various layers of Miami and Washington exile politics. With the prolonged stalemate in Cuba-US relations, the idea of overthrowing Castro from without shifted to dependence on dissidents within Cuba (see NotiCen, 2003-02-20). Because of the fracturing of the dissident movement in the March crackdown, Menoyo has for the moment transformed himself into a focal point for internal opposition.

Exile groups such as CANF now may have to choose between supporting the discredited dissidents or Menoyo, or else returning to reliance on the failed policy of external pressure.

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