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## **Cuba Says U.S. Is Seeking To Break Relations And Heighten Aggressions**

by Mike Leffert

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Cuba, in the person of President Fidel Castro, has looked upon recent US diplomatic behavior on and toward the island and sees in it a strategy to force a rupture in relations. High on the list of provocations is an illuminated electronic sign along the fifth floor of the US Interests Section building in Havana that blinks out what the US has termed "human rights messages." Among the messages have been excerpts from the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi, and Lincoln, and some news items, all in big red letters.

Castro denounced the flashing sign as "grossly outrageous," especially coming from a country "that every day tortures, murders, and commits acts of genocide." In a diplomatic note to Washington, he demanded it be taken down. The note brought the reply from the State Department that the sign did not violate a 1961 Vienna Convention on diplomatic relationships because the screen was inside the building. Fidel rejoined, "Then can you shoot a bazooka or launch a nuclear device from that building so that it explodes in the Havana tunnel?"

Cuba has been through this kind of show from the US before and, in the last encounter, had the high ground. When the US put up Christmas decorations last year alluding to the arrests in Cuba of some alleged independent journalists, Cuba countered with billboards showing abused Iraqi prisoners in US custody. This time, Cuba countered first with a massive march and then, on Jan. 25, by digging up the street in front of the building, preparing to block the view of the screen. Cuban officials said they were extending a stage that has been used since 2000 for political rallies against the US. "We are expanding the Anti-Imperialist Stage," said one official at the construction site.

The extension is to include a new square with flag masts. These officials were more forthcoming than Castro, who visited the site in the dead of night to see how the construction was going. "If I tell you it will ruin the surprise," he told reporters clamoring to know what was being built. As to the question of relations, he said he had no intention of breaking them. "It is the Americans who will decide what happens to this Interests Section," he told the reporters.

### *Posada case part of the plan*

That was the most colorful of the US acts concerning Cuba but not necessarily the most important. Recent news that Luis Posada Carriles might walk free was more troubling. Posada Carriles, a convicted and admitted terrorist, is wanted for extradition by Venezuela in connection with the bombing of a Cubana airliner resulting in 76 deaths in 1976, and Cuba strongly supports the extradition (see NotiCen, 2004-09-23 and NotiSur, 2005-06-10). In its efforts to avoid turning Posada over, the US has resorted to a number of legal twists, including carefully declining to use the word terrorist, holding him in custody only for immigration violations. The US has fought extradition claiming Posada would be tortured if returned to Venezuela.

Refusal to acknowledge Posada's terrorist activities has put the US in a moral contretemps internationally in view of its war-on-terrorism rhetoric, but Jose Pertierra, a lawyer representing Venezuela in the extradition case, cited a legalistic rationale for the tactic. He said that, in its refusal, the US could annul three separate anti-terrorism treaties if it admitted the use of the term. He named the treaties as a 1922 treaty signed by Venezuela and the US, the Treaty for the Repression of Illegal Acts Against Civil Aviation Security signed by both in 1971, and the International Treaty to Repress Terrorist Bomb Attempts passed by the UN in 1997.

Pertierra explained that, by declining to acknowledge Posada's terrorism, the US not only evades the consequences of these treaties but also leaves itself obligated to turn him loose under provisions of US federal law that prohibits the indefinite detention of undocumented immigrants. The lawyer said there were innumerable laws under which Posada could be held, and failure to apply them signals that "a cynical double standard prevails in this story. You cannot launch a war against terror a la carte by fighting enemy terrorists and protecting friendly terrorists. Terrorism is terrorism, and that's that, period."

Caught in a moral dilemma, but apparently not wishing to have Posada walking around free in Miami, the US on Jan. 25 said it would seek to deport him to a third country that would not be Cuba or Venezuela. An official release said, "The ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) continues to progress in its intent to deport Posada from the United States. An immigration judge deferred the deportation of Posada to Cuba or Venezuela based on the Convention Against Torture; nevertheless, this does not impede ICE from proceeding to deport him to a third country."

### *Other provocations*

Neither of these top-of-the-news items by itself or together, however, constitute sufficient basis for Castro's assertion that the US is seeking a break in relations. In a speech, the president ticked off a list of concomitant occurrences. One was the release of a German documentary alleging that Cuba was responsible for the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy in 1963. Castro charged the film was "CIA invoiced" and its release timed to coincide with a release of Posada. He next turned to an October 2005 Madrid seminar on Transition in Cuba in which a USAID administrator took part and said that the transition had to be carried out by Cubans and the country's current leaders held responsible.

In the same month a secret US State Department Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization document surfaced in Britain listing Cuba as one of 25 countries whose "high levels of instability and risk could lead to a US intervention." In November, the coordinator for the Transition in Cuba seminar, who met with several European foreign ministers, said, "The tightening of the economic embargo has resulted in losses of US\$500 million to the Castro regime."

Again that month, the US Congress passed the Science, State, Justice, Commerce, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2006, which included US\$37 million for funding subversive broadcasts on the Marti radio and television stations and an increase of US\$10 million to buy an

airplane from which to transmit the anti-Cuban broadcasts, all despite the established fact that almost no one on the island receives them.

Then, Castro recounted, the US Treasury Department sent letters to 200 members of the Venceremos Brigade and Pastors for Peace requesting information on their last trips to Cuba, a first step toward prosecution of these pro-Cuba activists. The Treasury Department also denied licenses to travel to Cuba to the US National Council of Churches. Castro mentioned several other initiatives, terming them "aggressive." Cuba sees invasion in the offing Should relations be broken, goes the prevailing Cuban thinking, the island would be squeezed in a variety of ways including a crisis in the food supply as imports from the US are cut off.

This could lead to a massive exodus of Cubans by sea that the US has previously said it would interpret as an act of aggression, a breach of the bilateral migratory accord signed in 1994 after the "balsero" crisis that brought waves of Cubans to Miami. The US could then invade. Castro has vowed not to be provoked into giving the US the excuse but neither would he accept the "perverse violation of its dignity and sovereignty." He promised a firm, peaceful, Cuban response. On Jan. 23, as many as 1.4 million Cubans organized by neighborhood Comites de Defensa de la Revolucion (CDRs) poured out onto the Malecon to join in a "marcha combatiente" against the US acts. They carried national flags and placards reflecting anti-US, anti-Bush, and anti-Posada sentiments. Their numbers were meant to reflect their support for their government, attest to its legitimacy, and deny the enemy the pretense that an invasion could be justified as "liberation."

The chief of the US Interests Section Michael Parmly has denied that it is seeking to provoke the Cuban government. He said of his electronic sign, "We consider that it is an effort at dialogue with the Cuban people, to understand what the Cuban people want." He also denied that his country wants to precipitate a break in the migratory accord. "It's not something we've thought about," he said.

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