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Cuba: Top Officials Accused Of Corruption, Drug Trafficking

by John Neagle

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On June 14, the Cuban Communist party's daily newspaper Granma announced that Brigadier Gen. Arnaldo Ochoa Sanchez had been arrested on charges of corruption. The Armed Forces Ministry said the general will be tried by a military tribunal, and that the tribunal's recommendations are to be made public. Maj. Gen. Ochoa was decorated as "Hero of the Cuban Republic" for his service in the war in Angola, and was cited for "honesty, unselfishness and purity." Ochoa led Cuban forces in a successful campaign in Ethiopia in the late 1970s, served for two years as commander of the Cuban military advisers in Nicaragua after 1983 and recently was a top officer of the 50,000 Cuban troops in Angola. In a two-hour televised speech on Wednesday evening, first vice president and armed forces chief Raul Castro warned that corruption will not be tolerated at any level of Cuban society. Referring to Ochoa, Gen. Castro said, "Despite all the stars on his shoulder and the honorary title on his chest nobody should believe that he is untouchable. Here nobody can have personal prestige. We owe our prestige to the sweat and blood of others." Gen. Castro accused Ochoa of undertaking commercial activities unrelated to his military responsibilities while in Luanda. Castro warned all citizens against succumbing to "gold fever" as a result of Cuba's developing tourist industry and the need for foreign exchange. Next, the vice president chastised former transportation minister Diocles Torralbas, who was dismissed June 13 for "personal misconduct" from the transport post and as a vice president of the Council of Ministers. Torralbas was accused of enjoying himself at parties while the city's transportation system foundered. He offered no details on the illicit activities which Ochoa and Torralbas allegedly conducted. The June 15 edition of Granma accused Gen. Ochoa and other officials of "making contacts with international drug traffickers and reaching agreements with them." An editorial published June 16 in Granma said Ochoa and eight other high-level officials had been arrested on charges of corruption or drug trafficking. The editorial stated that Ochoa is also accused of stealing and wasting public funds and foreign reserves, and of corrupting junior officers. It suggested that Ochoa had been involved in illicit trading of sugar and other goods in Angola. Also arrested in connection with Ochoa was Gen. Patricio de la Guardia Font, Col. Antonio de la Guardia Font, Lt.Col. Alexis Lago Arocha and Maj. Amado Padron Trujillo, all members of the security police forces of the Interior Ministry. Also arrested were two members of Ochoa's personal staff, Col. Antonio Rodriguez Estupinan and a captain. The editorial claimed Ochoa's drug activities were "without precedent in the history of the revolution." Ochoa was often indicated as the officer to replace Raul Castro as armed forces chief. In its June 17 edition, Granma said the Torralbas and Ochoa cases were not directly linked. According to unidentified diplomats cited by Xinhua, Torralbas' conduct may refer to sexual "misbehavior." (Basic data from Xinhua, 06/14/89, 06/17/89; AFP, 06/15/89, 06/16/89; Washington Post, 06/17/89)

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