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Cuba: Military Tribunal Delivers Recommendations On Treatment Of Division Gen. Ochoa

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On June 27, in a unanimous ruling, a 47-member military tribunal recommended that Division Gen. Arnaldo Ochoa Sanchez be condemned for "high treason against the fatherland" for drug trafficking and corruption. (See Chronicle, 06/27/89.) According to Cuban military law, Ochoa must be sentenced by a formal court-martial. The tribunal also recommended that Ochoa be dishonorably discharged from the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces, expelled from the Cuban Communist Party and as a member of the National Assembly, and be stripped of his rank and military medals and awards. The tribunal's statement was published on the front page of the official government newspaper, Granma, and a complete facsimile of the original document was duplicated again on a full page inside the newspaper, including all 47 signatures of tribunal members. Ochoa is accused of heading a group of military and Interior Ministry officials who collaborated with the Medellin drug ring, and of smuggling ivory and diamonds. Gen. Raul Castro accused Ochoa of trying to build his own power base, a clique created on the basis of lavish gifts. Castro said after Ochoa returned from Angola in 1988, he began spreading such gifts around, and that he was trying to create "an image and ties of personal gratitude with an absolute lack of principle and ethics."

Witnesses provided detailed testimony of black market dealings involving diamonds, ivory, sugar, TV sets, tape recorders, coffee, wheat, dried fish and sides of beef. Most of the witnesses said they had believed the sales and conversion of proceeds to dollars were to be used in shoring up the Cuban economy, and that they understood the money was intended to improve the quality of life of the Cuban troops in Angola. Next, the witnesses testified that a portion of the money was used for purchases of refrigerators, stereo equipment, juice extractors, a bed, and clothing for several officers, including Ochoa. One of the witnesses, Capt. Jorge Martinez Valdez, who served as Ochoa's assistant, testified that he commenced drug money-laundering transactions with Panamanians and Colombians as early as 1985 on Ochoa's behalf. Martinez said members of the Colombian Medellin drug ring were under the impression that their Cuban connection had official sanction. (Basic data from AP, 06/27/89; New York Times, 06/28/89)

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