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On Cuban Corruption Scandals: Partial Summary Of Events & Statements, U.S. Reaction, July 6-31

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July 6: The Cuban Communist Party's daily newspaper, Granma, reported that president of Cuba's Civil Aviation Institute, Vicente Gomez Lopez, had been dismissed by the Council of State after less than two years on the job. The announcement said his dismissal was "for serious errors in the methods and style of his work." He was replaced by Gen. Rogelio Aceveda, head of the political department of the Cuban armed forces. July 9: According to Prensa Latina, Havana's court of appeal upheld the death sentences for four senior military officers. The four officers Gen. Arnaldo Ochoa and Capt. Jorge Martinez of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces and Col. Antonio de la Guardia and Maj. Amado Padrón of the Interior Ministry were convicted by court-martial of conspiracy to ship tons of cocaine and marijuana through Cuba to the US. The death sentences were imposed by a special military tribunal the previous week. Ten others convicted by the military tribunal were sentenced to prison for terms ranging from 10 to 30 years. The officers were also convicted of black marketeering and smuggling diamonds, ivory, sugar, fine woods, manufactured goods and US dollars. July 10: Amnesty International appealed to Cuban President Fidel Castro to reprieve the officers sentenced to death, pointing out that many socialist countries had abolished the death penalty or limited its use, as had Cuba. It urged the Cuban government to "set an example to those countries which persist in using the death penalty frequently, often with the most minimal judicial guarantees, by demonstrating Cuba's desire no longer to be associated with this terrible form of punishment..." Cuban news agency AIN said that the Council of State had ordered the four officers to be put before a firing squad. The 29 members of the Council of State, headed by Castro, voted unanimously to uphold the decision of the Cuban Supreme Court, which turned down the appeal of the four men. Under Cuban law, in cases of the death penalty the Council of State is the court of last resort. July 13: Prensa Latina reported that at dawn a firing squad had executed the four officers. Meanwhile, US State Department deputy spokesperson Richard Boucher said the Bush administration was not prepared to accept President Castro's proposal for a dialogue leading to cooperation to stem the drug trade. Rep. Charles B. Rangel (D-NY), chairperson of the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, said the administration should accept Castro's offer and demand that he provide information on ships and planes carrying drugs through Cuba to Florida. "It's time for the State Department to stop playing anti-communist politics. It's drugs, not communism, that are killing our kids," he said. Jaime Suchlicki, director of the Institute of Inter-American Studies at the University of Miami, said there were apparently two drug-smuggling operations "an official operation sanctioned by Fidel and Raul Castro and a second operation by Ochoa and small independent mafiosi." July 14: Prensa Latina reported that deputy interior minister Maj.Gen. Pascual Martinez Gil resigned July 13 "in view of the irregularities that occurred in this institution by a group of officers, activities that went unpunished for 2-1/2 years." He was replaced by Maj.Gen. Romarico Sotomayor, chief of staff of the Eastern Army and a substitute member of the Communist Party's Central Committee. Next, the news agency reported that six other Interior Ministry officials were replaced. German Barreiro Carames resigned and was replaced by Maj. Gen. Jesus Bermudez Cutino as chief of intelligence at the Interior Ministry. The report
added that both Martinez Gil and Barreiro Carames "will be employed in other tasks." The five others were identified as Amado Valdez, chief of border guards; Miguel Bermejo Labrada, chief of the forest fires department; and Manuel Suarez Alvarez and Felix Veliz Hernandez, deputy chiefs of the Ministry's political section. Brig. Gen. Roberto Gonzalez Caso was fired as chief of immigration, the news agency said. July 15: Cuba's AIN news agency reported that former transport minister, Diocles Torralbas, was expelled from the National Assembly of People's Power, the Cuban parliament. AIN said the 150 representatives to the Municipal Assembly of People's Power in the eastern Cuban municipality of Palma Soriano who had elected Torralbas to the National Assembly voted unanimously to remove him. Torralbas was fired as minister on June 13 for "his immoral and corrupt personal conduct" and expelled from the Communist Party and its Central Committee on June 29. In an interview on CNN's "Evans and Novak," Secretary of State James Baker said President Castro continues to export revolution to Central America and that his behavior still did not meet internationally accepted norms. Baker made the comment when asked why US officials had not commented on the July 13 execution of four Cuban military officers found guilty of drug trafficking. He said, "We're taking note of that. But there are a lot of things that Castro is not doing to change behavior that doesn't meet internationally accepted norms." July 19: The US Senate voted unanimously (99-0) to approve a resolution calling for free and fair elections in Cuba. The resolution said, "The Cuban people should be allowed to express their views on their country's political figure, (and) that the Cuban Communist Party should permit a plebiscite, by a secret yes/no ballot." The resolution called on Cuban President Fidel Castro to allow opposition groups to organize publicly; grant opponents equal media access; release all political prisoners; and permit that a neutral commission oversee the elections. The resolution was approved as an amendment to the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for 1990, which authorizes funds for the State Department, USIA, Board for International Broadcasting and related programs. July 24: Granma reported that on July 23 the Havana provincial people's court had sentenced Diocles Torralbas, former transport minister and former vice president of the Council of Ministers, to 20 years in prison. Torralbas was convicted of misappropriation of goods, abuse of power and improper use of financial and material resources. He was also charged with corrupt, and frivolous conduct. The tribunal also ordered an investigation of five transportation ministry officials. July 25: At a news conference in Camaguey (300 miles southeast of Havana), Deputy Foreign Minister Ricardo Alarcon said Cuba wants to cooperate with the US in anti-drug trafficking efforts. In reference to the execution of Gen. Ochoa and three other officers, he said: "The way we handled this problem demonstrates the consistent policy of Cuba against drug trafficking." In Washington, Asst. Secretary of State for International Narcotics Matters, Melvyn Levitsky, told members of Congress that a marked increase in reported drug trafficking incidents in Cuban territory had occurred in the first half of 1989. In response to a question, Levitsky said there was apparently "a drop-off" in drug-smuggling flights across Cuba in the last 30 days. July 31: Former Interior Minister Jose Abrantes Fernandez and four others have been arrested and imprisoned, according to a report by Prensa Latina. Citing Granma, the report did not say when the arrests occurred. The others detained were identified as Brig. Gen. Roberto Gonzalez Caso, former chief of immigration; Oscar Carreno Gomez, former head of customs; Lt. Col. Rolando Castaneda Izquierdo; and Hector Carbonell Mendez, former director of a company involved in international transactions. Abrantes has been removed from his interior ministry post. His replacement was not yet known. Next, five other generals were demoted to colonels and retired in the "reordering of the Interior Ministry and rectification of errors and negative tendencies," Granma said. The Communist Party ordered the new arrests and demotions. (Basic data from UPI, 07/13/89; DPA, 07/19/89, 07/24/89; Reuters, 07/06/89, 07/09/89, 07/10/89, 07/15/89; AP, 07/13/89,
07/14/89, 07/31/89; New York Times, 07/14/89, 07/26/89; Washington Post, 07/15/89; AFP, 07/24/89; Xinhua, 07/31/89; Notimex, 07/31/89; Prensa Latina, 07/24/89)

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