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Self-confessed Cuban Spy Recants Story

by LADB Staff

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Juan Alvaro Rosabal, who said in July that he was a defector from the Cuban intelligence service, surrendered to authorities in Venezuela Nov. 13 and retracted his story. When he first surfaced in Venezuela, he said in a radio broadcast that 1,500 Cuban operatives were working in Venezuela to undermine opposition to President Hugo Chavez's regime, to brainwash Venezuelans into accepting Cuba's Marxist ideology, and to crush a supposed military revolt against Chavez (NotiCen, 2000-09-08).

Rosabal made his claims a few days before the July 30 presidential election, which Chavez won (see NotiSur, 2000-08-04). Rosabal then disappeared. Later, it was learned that he took refuge in the Nicaraguan Embassy in Caracas from where he unsuccessfully petitioned the Tribunal Supremo de Justicia (TSJ) to countermand his arrest warrant on grounds that it violated his human rights.

On Nov. 3, Rosabal left the embassy. During his disappearance, his attorney Ricardo Koesling and officials of the Venezuelan anti-Castro organization Junta Patriotica Cubana suggested the Venezuelan government had sent him back to Cuba as a "gift" to Castro.

Rosabal told Venezuelan prosecutors that, as he was in a difficult financial situation, Koesling asked him to make the statements about Cuban covert activities in exchange for money. Rosabal said that his story was a lie. "I am not a Cuban security agent nor are there 1,500 Cuban security agents in the country," he said.

Rosabal said the campaign of lies was set up to affect the July 30 election. "I was used by a group of people who were looking to create political problems, who took advantage of my good faith and of the difficult situation I was having at that time," he said.

Rosabal said Koesling, along with Hector Carbonell and Salvador Romani two members of the Junta Patriotica Cubana offered to pay him US\$30,000. But he said they never gave him any money. "Then they put me in an embassy and I lost my dignity," he said. Rosabal said that, before entering the Nicaraguan Embassy, he told Koesling that he wanted to kill himself. Koesling then took out a pistol and said he should first kill Chavez at a public event in Plaza Caracas. "Right there I realized that I had a big problem," said Rosabal.

Koesling dismissed Rosabal's denials and his version of the gun incident. He said the retraction was a lie cooked up by Cuba and Venezuela and that Rosabal was a mental defective and a Cuban double agent. Romani also concluded Rosabal was a double agent and suggested that the Venezuelan government used the spy story to attack the Junta Patriotica, which had been quick to befriend Rosabal.

Rosabal wrote to Castro in late November confessing his "error" and asking forgiveness. He said he was not afraid to return to Cuba. Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jose Vicente Rangel said he did not favor extraditing Rosabal to Cuba. [Sources: El Universal (Venezuela), 10/09/00, 11/08/00; Spanish News Service EFE, 10/24/00, 11/13/00; Agence France-Presse, 10/01/00, 11/13/00, 11/14/00; El Nacional (Venezuela), 11/13/00, 11/14/00, 11/18/00; Reuters, 11/24/00]

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