



Testimony of LORENZO GONZALO,

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Given at the International Commission of Inquiry into the case of the Cuban Five on Friday the 7th of March 2014, 11:20 to 12:40, Session 2: Terrorist Attacks against Cuba.

1. The return to terrorist activities, conspiracies and new political pressures from conservatives and counterrevolutionaries in the US government.

The political differences that had intensified in the 1980s became even starker with the collapse of the Soviet Bloc in the 1990s. The Cuban American National Foundation wasted this opportunity to try out other less destructive options than the policy of the blockade and which in fact may have had a more destabilising effect on the Cuban government. As always, the desire for revenge prevented them from seeing clearly and as an answer to the crisis; the strategy they adopted was to place demands on the US administration to intensify the blockade. In the face of this, Fidel Castro called on Cubans to resist in order to keep the regime strong and unified and to avoid a similar fate to that of the Soviet Union.

If the Foundation had called for the lifting of the blockade at that time, the Cuban government would have had to adopt a different strategy, which would have involved greater risks.

In response to the position adopted by the Foundation, several former conspirators against the Cuban government, in spite of their differences, formed what could be called a moderate sector, along with other waves of immigrants. The counterrevolution referred to them as dialoguers, and they established a new discourse which involved finding ways of communicating with the Cuban government which, even if not amicable, was at least legitimate and respected by the Cuban people.

Cuba responded positively, opening its doors to representatives of these sectors, some of whom have since died, such as Francisco González Aruca, Amalio Fiallo, Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, Luis Ortega and others of whom are still alive, such as Nicolás Ríos and myself.

The Cuban government reinstated permission for flights, which had been unjustly suspended in 1980, when the Reagan administration authorised the setting up of Radio Marti and supported joint projects carried out by these immigrants alongside Cuban organizations, such as Seminars of Participative Democracy, PECA, RECUACO, the ATC, among others.

This process helped to bring together Cuban society and emigration, enabling the healing of old wounds, whilst at the same time widening the gulf between moderate emigrants and the counterrevolutionaries who defined themselves as 'exiles'. An important milestone during this stage was the Conference of the Nation and Emigration in which I participated.

This change in the tense relations that had characterised the past 30 years, along with the thousands of people who travelled every month to visit family and friends, alarmed violent extremists who felt that they owned Miami and the policy towards Cuba.

From this moment on, at the heart of the Cuban colony based in Miami, two distinct types of Cuban, types which had started to take shape during the debates of the 1980s, became apparent: the emigrants, who wanted to go back to their country, to visit and help their relatives, and the so-called exiles, an obstinate elite that a journalist baptized the 'Cuban-American Mafia'.

The mass decision of Cubans to travel to Cuba, in spite of the public pressure put on them by those who supported the Soviet-style collapse of the government, created a sense of desperation within the ranks of the counterrevolution.

During the 1990s, a suffocating climate of repression developed. Talking about anything related to Cuba at work was prohibited. People who travelled to visit relatives tried to keep it a secret and were warned by their employers and friends to maintain discretion. It was also risky to talk about Cuba in public places because any business owner or extreme conservative might get involved and become aggressive. As a result of that climate, the Conservatives, led by Mas Canosa, succeeded in getting Congress to pass a law known as the Torricelli Law (Cuban Democracy Act) in 1992.

From the start of the 1990s until 1998, the Foundation had contributed more than US\$1 million to the Democrat and Republican parties in the US. In 1996, the Helms-Burton Act, which banned all commercial transactions between the US and Cuba, was passed.

Late in 1999, the law was extended to additionally ban any foreign subsidiary with more than a 10% share of investment from a US-owned company from trading with Cuba. This was the first time in history that a law with an extraterritorial dimension was passed.

There is no doubt that US foreign policy became more aggressive at this time, also involving renewed attacks and belligerent actions.

In 1994, Humberto Eladio Real disembarked in Cárdenas in the province of Matanzas along with several others, killing a man in order to steal his car. The purpose of the visit was to enter the country to carry out acts of sabotage and terrorism.

That same year, two more people landed on the coast of Caibarién, north of the province of Las Villas.

In 1997, the Guatemalan Cruz León planted bombs on successive occasions in five hotels in Havana and in the restaurant La Bodeguita del Medio. The bomb he planted in Hotel Copacabana caused the death of the young Italian Fabio Di Celmo.

In the same year, another Guatemalan planted a bomb in a hotel and was caught whilst carrying out formalities and plotting to plant explosives in several places, among them the monument to Che Guevara in the city of Santa Clara, Cuba.

The Guatemalan citizens Miguel Abraham Herrera Morales, Marielena González and Jazid Iván Fernández also carried out similar acts. They were recruited by the terrorist Luis Posada Carriles and, according to their statements to the journalist Anne Louis Barcach, the operation had been carried out with funding from the Cuban American National Foundation.

In 1998, US coastguards held up the boat La Esperanza, which was carrying four Cuban-Americans. On board, high power assault rifles, nighttime telescopic riflescopes and a 50-calibre rifle were found. One of the crewmembers, Angel Alfonso Alemán, immediately told the authorities 'those weapons are mine, the others did not know anything about them'.

The boat was heading for none other than the island of Margarita, where a meeting was due to be held at which Fidel Castro would be present. The plan was evidently to attempt to bring down President Castro's plane as it landed on the island.

The Cuban American National Foundation was behind the incident and one of the weapons on board was registered in the name of Francisco José (Pepe) Hernández, its president.

It seems clear that the five Cuban agents and others that made arrangements with the authorities when they were arrested had been sent to gather information about this return to terrorist activity which the main groups and especially the Foundation had chosen as a new combat strategy. Of course the sweet face of this organization has always tried to project an image of being against violence.

It is worth noting that violence has always been used by these groups and only those that come to the realisation that this is not the right approach and that it is the result of manipulation by Washington have ended up championing the cause of dialogue and recognizing the legitimacy of the Cuban Government.

2. The trial and the press

On the 12th of September 1998, 10 people were arrested. Among them, the head of the Miami FBI, Héctor Pesquera, identified Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González, Antonio Guerrero, y René González.

Without a plausible explanation, the first people Mr Pesquera notified of the arrest were the members of Congress, Ileana Ross and Lincoln Díaz-Balart, iconic figures of the Cuban counterrevolution, who owed their political status precisely to the transformation the Cuban terrorist organizations had undergone at the hands of the Reagan administration, in an attempt to clean up Miami's image.

Ileana Ross-Lehtinen was elected in 1989 and is currently a member of Congress. Lincoln Díaz-Balart was elected in 1993 and was a member of Congress until 2011. Senator Bob Menéndez was elected in 1993 and became the first Latino to represent New Jersey in the Senate.

The trial of the Five began in Fall 2000 and ended in June 2001. It is thought to be the longest trial in US judicial history on record.

Because of this climate, it makes sense that the arrest and judicial process would be presented negatively by the Miami media, given that it is a strongly conservative city filled with hatred for the Cuban government.

At that time, there were no communists in Miami. You could count on one hand the number who would call them one. Nor were there many that would say they were in favour of or had any respect for the Cuban government.

This is in contrast to the current climate, in which there are more people who are willing to accept the Cuban government. Others of us may go even further than this and actually believe that it is the best way to avoid derailing the revolutionary process, very much *sui generis*, and that it will likely provide innovative solutions for overthrowing the capitalist state and changing the ways in which the economy is currently run.

But at the time of the trial, a more negative climate existed which was used by the press to inundate the news with information they came across and with editorials broadcast by the most important and furthest reaching media organizations.

Those of us who ran the alternative press attempted to be more objective and counteract these organizations, but their reach and the time of broadcast meant that they had no chance of competing with the official channels.

Before and during the trial, a series of journalists from Miami who worked in private media or as freelancers had two roles: writing for their respective press organizations, whilst being paid by the US government to speak on Radio Martí.

In other words, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the official propaganda agency for the US government, hired these people, whose disdain for the Cuban government was well known, to work on Radio Martí and, of course incentivized by the extra pay they received from the government, wage a campaign of defamation and unsubstantiated speculation.

Ariel Remos, a journalist from *Diario de Las Américas*, wrote an article on the 28th of November 1999 in which he referred to an interview he had conducted with the lawyer of José Basulto, head of the counterrevolutionary organization 'Brothers to the Rescue', and which was used to hound Gerardo Hernández, falsely accusing him of murder. It appears that during the interview, this lawyer linked the agents' actions with the figure of Fidel Castro, the result of which was that Remos ends his article by saying:

'Castro, having been mentioned in this case accused of murder and under investigation for murder, could be arrested and brought to justice in this country, should he set foot on US soil. Such is the view of the lawyer Fernández, as just expressed to Diario de Las Américas.'

A few months after the start of the trial, Ariel Remos published another article in *Diario de las Américas* (27th of February 2001), a letter from Jeane Kirkpatrick, the former conservative Ambassador to the UN during the Reagan administration, to the Attorney General of the Bush administration, Mr John Ashcroft, in which she states '*...In the trial of five Cuban functionaries in Florida, evidence has shown that the murders (referring to the Brothers to the Rescue pilots) were premeditated.*' It also says in the letter, in another part that was published: '*the highest authorities who approved this act of state terrorism have still not had charges brought against them.*'

When Gerardo's case was appealed on the 25th of April 2011, the response of the Department of Justice when denying the appeal was the following: '*the jury of this court was strictly instructed not to read press reports about the case and there is no reason to believe that these instructions have not been followed. However, the unrestrained comments of people who are designated as witnesses in the trial, acting against the clear instructions of the Court, puts the process in jeopardy, and as such will not be tolerated by any of the involved parties.*'

It is worth noting that in high profile cases, the jury is 'kidnapped' in a way that keeps them isolated from media opinion. This did not apply in the case of the jury assigned to the trial of the Five.

It is also interesting to observe how the press insisted on presenting the case as a threat posed by Cuba against the US.

The conservatives and the Cuban counterrevolution in Miami have always dreamed of a marine invasion of Cuba. Unable to gain power alone, they have relied on the 'benevolence' of Washington to carry out their dirty work for them by overthrowing the government and then having power handed to them on a plate.

Ariel Remos' comments were all aimed at stirring the US government into action against the Cuban government and highlighting the guilt of the detainees.

Pablo Alfonso, from the newspaper *El Nuevo Herald*, wrote on the 16th of September 1998 that:

'The surprising attack on an alleged network of Cuban spies in Miami could be aimed at preventing a possible collaboration between the Cuban government and other

countries involved in terrorist actions against the US, according to military and intelligence experts.'

As a source for this claim, Alfonso referred to the Cuban deserter, the former head of the Cuban Armed Forces, Orestes Lorenzo, who deserted in 1991 and who said, among other things, that he was not surprised that 'Fidel Castro is lending or selling his intelligence services to Islamic terrorist groups.'

This type of journalism was a relentless assault, which began with the arrest of the Five and continued throughout their trial.

Wilfredo Cancio Isla, another journalist from El Nuevo Herald, repeatedly wrote about this, starting in September 2000. According to public data, employment contract number P109 – 1036 between him and Radio Martí specified that between the 30th of September 2000 and the 3rd of December 2001, he was expected to participate in debate programmes on the radio station. For this, he received a total of \$4,725.00.

On the 4th of June 2001, an article by Wilfredo Cancio Isla appeared in El Nuevo Herald with the headline 'Cuba used hallucinogenics to train its spies'.

Between the 1st of November and the 3rd of December 2001, Pablo Alfonso received a total of \$58,600.00 from the government agency for broadcasting (BBG).

Ariel Remos received \$10,400.00 between the 1st of November 1999 and the 9th of February 2001.

The 1948 Smith-Mundt Law, which regulates public diplomacy abroad and is responsible for monitoring broadcasts of Voice of the Americas, Radio Free Europe and TV Martí, banned the government from using state media organizations to carry out public propaganda campaigns targeted at national public opinion within the country.

The Office of Cuba Broadcasting has invested US\$500 million into its broadcasts to Cuba. With this money, it has paid journalists to broadcast the same message abroad as in local and national papers. This is a violation of the Smith-Mundt Law.

Several important figures have protested the fact that the trial has been held in Miami. Lawrence Wilkerson, advisor to Colin Powell's team, stated on one occasion:

'When the case reached court, a change of location was justified and was requested, due to the fact that no court in Miami was going to provide a fair trial to the Five, given that the city, in large part, is in the hands of some of those same Cuban-Americans and their supporters who have allegedly perpetrated atrocities against the Cuban people and who are prepared to invade the island. But the motion for a change of location was rejected. And the Five, since then, had no chance.'

Jimmy Carter stated: *'I believe there is no reason to keep the Cuban Five in prison. There are doubts in the US courts and in human rights organisations around the world. They have now been in prison for 12 years and I hope that in the near future they will be freed so they can return to their homes.'*

Statements like these have been voiced for the past two years.

3. The political and unjust nature of the sentences

To conclude, I want to highlight not only the injustice of the sentences, but also their political nature, evidence for which I will provide by briefly referring to other similar cases. Among these is the case of the Russian spies arrested in New York in June 2010. Eleven people in total were arrested and accused of conspiracy, because they did not register as agents from another country, and for money laundering. In total, they could have faced maximum sentences of 5 to 20 years in prison. They were tried immediately before the judge Kimba Wood, of the Southern District of Manhattan.

President Obama's administration immediately negotiated with Russia, who offered to release four western agents sentenced in Russia in exchange for the deportation of the eleven. Among those was the Peruvian journalist Vicky Peláez, to whom the Russian government offered a life pension and payment of certain expenses.

Some of these people were compiling information about US politicians, attending political gatherings and carrying out other tasks that bore no similarities with the work of the Cuban Five. The actions of some of these agents were much closer to spying than any of those of the Cuban Five and yet in just a few days, they were deported without further ado.

Ana Belén Montes, an American of Puerto Rican origin, was a Cuban affairs analyst for the US Defense Intelligence Agency. She was arrested and found guilty of spying for Cuba. She was sentenced to 25 years in prison. She was not a foreigner spying on the US government but something much more serious, an intelligence officer recruited by another country to provide it with classified state information.

She was a US intelligence officer, arrested whilst in the middle of handing over highly classified data to a country considered by the US treasury to be an enemy of the US. It is worth pointing out here that, in spite of the US' aggression, Cuba has never officially referred to it as an enemy country.

On the 29th of December, John Kerry, Secretary of State for the Obama administration, stated on arriving in Israel that the Obama administration was considering deporting Jonathan Pollard. Mr Pollard was spying for Israel while he was working as an analyst in the US naval community.

A colonel from Israeli intelligence – and he received money and jewels in exchange for spying – had recruited him.

Since February 2013, the government of Benjamin Netanyahu has been pressing for his deportation and the US government is seriously considering it.

Pollard's is a case of out and out spying: he was part of the US intelligence community and was tried for a case that some intelligence analysts consider to have caused more damage to the US than any other case of espionage.

In spite of this, they are considering deporting him. We hope that before deporting Pollard, Obama's government first realizes that it has to deport the Five.

There is an endless list of cases whose seriousness is infinitely greater than that of these Cubans. Not only because they involve people who have been arrested for actual espionage, but because the sentences they have been given have been much more lenient than those of the Five.

The Cuban journalist Jorge Gómez Barata, in an article dated the 5th of March 2010, stated that:

'The total sentences given to the two scientists in the Manhattan project, found guilty of handing over nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union, and that of Sergeant Greenglass, who confessed to recruiting the Rosenberg pair and personally handed over the information, together is considerably less than that given to just one of the five Cuban heroes sentenced in the US for accusations that were never proved to be true and that did not damage any US institution, the US government or the American people.'

'The sentences of the five Cuban patriots are contrary to US legal tradition and are not consistent with the fact that the US and Cuba are not officially at war. Nor are they the result of a standard legal process, but the random product of a climate of political revenge that makes Miami a completely inappropriate place for this type of activity.'

It is without doubt an eminently political and essentially unjust sentence.