

This is a good explanation of how the CIA and related U.S. spy agencies have operated and continue to operate against the Cuban revolution--IAC

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Terrorism and Civil Society as Instruments of U.S. Policy in Cuba

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Adapted from Agee lectures for International Workshops for Peace to be held at the Cuban Peace Movement in Havana, May-October 2003---see www.cubalinda.com

Havana, May 2003.

Condemnation of Cuba was immediate, strong and practically global last month for the imprisonment of 75 political dissidents and for the summary execution of 3 ferry hijackers. Prominent among the critics were past friends of Cuba of recognized international stature.

As I read the hundreds of denunciations that came through my mail, it was easy to see how enemies of the revolution seized on those issues to condemn Cuba for violations of human rights. They had a field day. Deliberate or careless confusion between the political dissidents and the hijackers, two entirely unrelated matters, was also easy because the events happened at the same time. A Vatican publication went so far as to describe the hijackers as dissidents when in fact they were terrorists. But others of usual good faith toward Cuba also jumped on the bandwagon of condemnation treating the two issues as one. The remarks that follow address the human rights issues in both cases.

With respect to the imprisonment of 75 civil society activists, the main victim has been history, for these people were central to current U.S. government efforts to overthrow the Cuban government and destroy the work of the revolution. Indeed regime change, as overthrowing governments has come to be known, has been the continuing U.S. goal in Cuba since the earliest days of the revolutionary government. Programs to achieve this goal have included propaganda to denigrate the revolution, diplomatic and commercial isolation, trade embargo, terrorism and military support to counter-revolutionaries, the Bay of Pigs invasion, assassination plots against Fidel Castro and other leaders, biological and chemical warfare, and, more recently, efforts to foment an internal political opposition masquerading as an independent civil society.

Terrorism

Warren Hinkle and William Turner, in *The Fish is Red*, easily the best book on the CIA's war against Cuba during the first 20 years of the revolution, tell the story of the CIA's efforts to save the life of one of their Batista Cubans. It was March 1959, less than three months after the revolutionary movement triumphed. The Deputy Chief of the CIA's main Batista secret police force had been captured, tried and condemned to a firing squad. The Agency had set up the unit in 1956 and called it the Bureau for the Repression of Communist Activities or BRAC for its initials in Spanish. With CIA training, equipment and money it became arguably the worst of Batista's torture and murder organizations, spreading its terror across the whole of the political opposition, not just the communists.

The Deputy Chief of BRAC, one José Castaño Quevedo, had been trained in the United States and was the BRAC liaison man with the CIA Station in the U.S. Embassy. On learning of his sentence, the Agency Chief of Station sent a journalist collaborator named Andrew St. George to Che Guevara, then in charge of the revolutionary tribunals, to plead for Castaño's life. After hearing out St. George for much of a day, Che told him to tell the CIA chief that Castaño was going to die, if not because he was an executioner of Batista, then because he was an agent of the CIA. St. George headed from Che's headquarters in the Cabaña fortress to the seaside U.S. Embassy on the Malecon to deliver the message. On hearing Che's words the CIA Chief responded solemnly, "This is a declaration of war." Indeed, the CIA lost many more of its Cuban agents during those early days and in the unconventional war years that followed.

Today when I drive out 31st avenue on the way to the airport, just before turning left at the Marianao military hospital, I pass on the left a large, multi-storey white police station that occupies an entire city block. The style looks like 1920's fake castle, resulting in a kind of giant White Castle hamburger joint. High walls surround the building on the side streets, and on top of the walls at the corners are guard posts, now unoccupied, like those overlooking workout yards in prisons. Next door, separated from the castle by 110th street, is a fairly large two-story green house with barred windows and other security protection. I don't know its use today, but before it was the dreaded BRAC Headquarters, one of the CIA's more infamous legacies in Cuba.

The same month as the BRAC Deputy was executed, President Eisenhower, on the 10th of March 1959, presided over a meeting of his National Security Council at which they discussed how to replace the government in Cuba. It was the beginning of a continuous policy of regime change that every administration since Eisenhower has continued.

As I read of the arrests of the 75 dissidents, 44 years to the month after the BRAC Deputy's execution, and saw the U.S. government's outrage over their trials and sentences, one phrase from Washington came to mind that united American reactions in 1959 with events

in 2003: "Hey! Those are OUR GUYS the bastards are screwing!"

A year later I was in training at a secret CIA base in Virginia when, in March 1960, Eisenhower signed off on the project that would become the Bay of Pigs invasion. We were learning the tricks of the spy trade including telephone tapping, bugging, weapons handling, martial arts, explosives, and sabotage. That same month the CIA, in its efforts to deny arms to Cuba prior to the coming exile invasion, blew up a French freighter, Le Coubre, as it was unloading a shipment of weapons from Belgium at a Havana wharf. More than 100 died in the blast and in fighting the fire afterwards. I see the rudder and other scrap from Le Coubre, now a monument to those who died, every time I drive along the port avenue passing Havana's main railway station

In April the following year, two days before the Bay of Pigs invasion started, a CIA sabotage operation burned down El Encanto, Havana's largest department store where I had shopped on my first here visit in 1957. It was never rebuilt. Now each time I drive up Galiano in Centro Habana on my way for a meal in Chinatown, I pass Fe del Valle Park, the block where El Encanto stood, named for a woman killed in the blaze.

Some who signed statements condemning Cuba for the dissidents' trials and the executions of the hijackers know perfectly well the history of U.S. aggression against Cuba since 1959: the murder, terrorism, sabotage and destruction that has cost nearly 3500 lives and left more than 2000 disabled. Those who don't know can find it in Jane Franklin's classic historical chronology *The Cuban Revolution and the United States*.

One of the best sum-ups of the U.S. terrorist war against Cuba in the 1960's came from Richard Helms, the former CIA Director, when testifying in 1975 before the Senate Committee investigating the CIA's attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro. In admitting to "invasions of Cuba which we were constantly running under government aegis," he added:

We had task forces that that were striking at Cuba constantly. We were attempting to blow up power plants. We were attempting to ruin sugar mills. We were attempting to do all kinds of things in this period. This was a matter of American government policy.

During the same hearing Senator Christopher Dodd commented to Helms:

It is likely that at the very moment that President Kennedy was shot, a CIA officer was meeting with a Cuban agent in Paris and giving him an assassination device to use against Castro. [Note: the officer worked for Desmond Fitzgerald, a friend of Robert Kennedy and at the time overall chief of the CIA's operations against Cuba, and the agent was Rolando Cubela, a Cuban army Comandante with regular access to Fidel Castro whose CIA codename was AMLASH.]

Helms responded:

I believe it was a hypodermic syringe they had given him. It was something called Blackleaf Number 40 and this was in response to AMLASH's request that he be provided with some sort of a device providing he could kill Castro..I'm sorry that he didn't give him a pistol. It would have made the whole thing a whole lot simpler and less exotic.

Review the history and you will find that no U.S. administration since Eisenhower has renounced the use of state terrorism against Cuba, and terrorism against Cuba has never stopped. True, Kennedy undertook to Khrushchev that the U.S. would not invade Cuba, which ended the 1962 missile crisis, and his commitment was ratified by succeeding administrations. But the Soviet Union disappeared in 1991 and the commitment with it.

Cuban exile terrorist groups, mostly based in Miami and owing their skills to the CIA, have continued attacks through the years. Whether or not they have been operating on their own or under CIA direction, U.S. authorities have tolerated them.

As recently as April 2003 the Sun-Sentinel of Ft. Lauderdale reported, with accompanying photographs, exile guerrilla training outside Miami by the F-4 Commandos, one of several terrorist groups currently based there, along with remarks by the FBI spokeswoman that Cuban exile activities in Miami are not an FBI priority. Abundant details on exile terrorist activities can be found with a web search including their connections with the paramilitary arm of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF).

Reports abound of the arrest in Panama in November 2000 of a group of 4 exile terrorists led by Luis Posada Carriles, a man with impeccable CIA credentials. They were planning the assassination of Fidel Castro who was there for a conference. Posada's résumé includes planning the Cubana airliner bombing in 1976 that killed all 73 people aboard; employment by the CIA in El Salvador in 1980's re-supply operations for the contra terrorists in Nicaragua; and organizing in 1997 10 bombings of hotels and other tourist sites in Havana, one of which killed an Italian tourist. A year later he admitted to the New York Times that CANF directors in Miami had financed the hotel bombings. Through the years Posada freely traveled in and out of the United States.

Another of the CIA's untouchable terrorists is Orlando Bosch, a pediatrician turned terrorist. As mastermind along with Carriles of the 1976 Cubana airliner bombing, Bosch was arrested with Carriles a week after the bombing and spent 11 years in a Venezuelan jail undergoing 3 trials for the crime. He was acquitted in each trial, released in August 1987, and arrested on his return to Miami in February 1988 for parole violation after a previous conviction for terrorist acts. In 1989 the Justice Department ordered his deportation as a terrorist citing FBI and CIA reports that Bosch had carried out 30 acts of sabotage from 1961 to 1968 and was

involved in a plot to kill the Cuban Ambassador to Argentina in 1975. After lobbying on Bosch's behalf by Miami Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Cuban American with close ties to CANF, and by Jeb Bush, Ros-Lehtinen's campaign manager prior to his election as governor, the elder President Bush, who was CIA Director at the time of the Cubana airliner bombing, ordered the Justice Department in 1990 to rescind the deportation order. Bosch was released from custody and has freely walked the streets of Miami ever since.

Seeing the obvious, that the U.S. government was not taking action to stop Miami-based terrorism, the Cubans opted in the 1990's to send their own intelligence officers to Florida under cover as exiles to provide warnings on coming terrorist actions. There they infiltrated some of the exile groups and were reporting back to Havana, including information on planned illegal over-flights of Cuba by Brothers to the Rescue.

Still, the Cuban government hoped that the U.S. could be convinced to take action against Miami-based terrorists. So in 1998 Cuba delivered to the FBI voluminous information they had collected on U.S.-based terrorist activities against Cuba. But instead of taking action against the terrorists, the FBI then arrested 10 members of a Cuban intelligence network whose job was to infiltrate the terrorist organizations. Later the 5 Cuban intelligence officers running the network were tried in Miami, where conviction was guaranteed, for conspiracy to commit espionage and for not having registered as agents of a foreign power. They had never asked for nor received a classified government document or classified information of any kind, yet they were given draconian sentences, one of them two life terms. The inhuman treatment of these unbending prisoners ordered by Washington, designed to destroy them mentally and physically and turn them against Cuba, sets world records for sordid, deranged punishment. Demand for their freedom is the main political topic in Cuba today.

Most recently, in declaring an unending war against terrorism following the September 2001 attacks by Al Qaeda and prior to the war against Iraq, President Bush declared that no weapons in U.S. possession are banned from use, presumably including terrorism. But rather than starting his anti-terrorist war in Miami, where his theft of the White House was assured and his election to a second term may depend, he started the series of pre-emptive wars we have watched on television, first Afghanistan and then Iraq, and now he threatens Syria, Iran and others on his list of nations that supposedly promote terrorism. Cuba, of course, is wrongfully on that list, but people here take this seriously as a preliminary pretext for U.S. military action against this country.

Civil Society and the Dissidents

Going back to the Reagan administration of the early 1980's, the decision was taken that more than terrorist operations was needed to impose regime change in Cuba. Terrorism hadn't worked, nor had the Bay of Pigs invasion, nor had Cuba's diplomatic isolation which gradually ended, nor had the economic embargo. Now Cuba would be included in a new world wide program to finance and develop non-governmental and voluntary organizations, what was to become known as civil society, within the context of U.S. global neo-liberal policies. The CIA and the Agency for International Development (AID) would have key roles in this program as well as a new organization christened in 1983 The National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

Actually the new program was not really new. Since its founding in 1947, the CIA had been deeply involved in secretly funding and manipulating foreign non-governmental voluntary organizations. These vast operations circled the globe and were targeted at political parties, trade unions and businessmen's associations, youth and student organizations, women's groups, civic organizations, religious communities, professional, intellectual and cultural societies, and the public information media. The network functioned at local, national, regional and global levels. Media operations, for example, were underway continuously in practically every country, wherein the CIA would pay journalists to publish its materials as if they were the journalists' own. In the Directorate of Operations at the CIA's headquarters, these operations were coordinated with the regional operations divisions by the International Organizations Division (IOD), since many of the operations were regional or continental in nature, encompassing many countries, with some even worldwide in scope.

Over the years the CIA exerted phenomenal influence behind the scenes in country after country, using these powerful elements of civil society to penetrate, divide, weaken and destroy corresponding enemy organizations on the left, and indeed to impose regime change by toppling unwanted governments. Such was the case, among many others, in Guyana where in 1964, culminating 10 years of efforts, the Cheddi Jagan government was overthrown through strikes, terrorism, violence and arson perpetrated by CIA international trade union agents. About the same time, while I was assigned in Ecuador, our agents in civil society, through mass demonstrations and civil unrest, provoked two military coups in three years against elected, civilian governments. And in Brazil in the early 1960's, the same CIA trade union operations were brought together with other operations in civil society in opposition to the government, and these mass actions over time provoked the 1964 military coup against President Joao Goulart, ushering in 20 years of unspeakably brutal political repression.

But on February 26th, 1967, the sky crashed on IOD and its global civil society networks. At the time I was on a visit to Headquarters in Langley, Virginia near Washington, between assignments in Ecuador and Uruguay. That day the Washington Post published an extensive report revealing a grand stable of foundations, some bogus, some real, that the CIA was using to fund its global non-governmental networks. These financial arrangements were known as "funding conduits." Along with the foundations scores of recipient organizations were identified, including well-known intellectual journals, trade unions, and political think tanks. Soon journalists around the world completed the picture with reports on the names and operations of organizations in their countries affiliated with the network. They were the CIA's darkest days since the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

President Johnson ordered an investigation and said such CIA operations would end, but in fact they never did. The proof is in the CIA's successful operations in Chile to provoke the 1973 Pinochet coup against the elected government of Salvador Allende. Here they combined the forces of opposition political parties, trade unions, businessmen's groups, civic organizations, housewife's associations and the information media to create chaos and disorder, knowing that sooner or later the Chilean military, faithful to traditional fascist military doctrine in Latin America, would use such unrest to justify usurping governmental power to restore order and to stamp out the left. The operations were almost a carbon copy of the Brazilian destabilization and coup program ten years earlier. We all remember the horror that followed for years afterwards in Chile.

Fast forward to now. Anyone who has watched the civil society opposition to the Hugo Chavez government in Venezuela develop can be certain that U.S. government agencies, the CIA included, along with the Agency for International Development (AID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), are coordinating the destabilization and were behind the failed coup in April 2002 as well as the failed "civic strike" of last December-January. The International Republican Institute (IRI) of the Republican Party even opened an office in Caracas. See below for more on NED, AID and IRI in civil society operations.

In order to understand how these civil society operations are run, let's take a look at the bureaucratic side. When I entered the CIA's training course, the first two words I learned were discipline and control. The U.S. government was not a charitable institution, they said, and all money must be spent for its exact, designated purpose. The CIA operations officer that I would become is responsible for ensuring this discipline through tight control of the money and of the agents down the line who spend it. Orders to the agents on their duties and obligations are to be clear and unambiguous, and the officer must prevent personal embezzlement of money by an agent, beyond the agent's agreed salary, by requiring receipts for all expenses and for all payments to others. Exceptions to this rule needed special approvals.

In the CIA, activities to penetrate and manipulate civil society are known as Covert Action operations, and they are governed by detailed regulations for their use. They require a request for money in a document known as a Project Outline, if the activity is new, or a Request for Project Renewal, if an on-going activity is to be continued. The document originates either in a field station or in Headquarters, and it describes a current situation; the activities to be undertaken to improve or change the situation vis-à-vis U.S. interests; a time-line for achieving intermediary and final goals; risks and the flap potential (damages if revealed); and a detailed budget with information on all participating organizations and individuals and the amounts of money to go to each. The document also contains a summary of the status of all agent personnel to be involved with references to their operational security clearance procedures and the history of their service to the Agency. All people involved are included, from the ostensible funding agencies like officers of a foundation, down to every intermediate and end recipient of the money.

In addition to these budget specifics, a certain amount of money without designated recipients is included under the rubric D&TO, standing for Developmental and Targets of Opportunity. Money from this fund is used to finance new activities that come up during the project approval period, but of course detailed information and security clearances on all individuals who would receive such funding is always required. A statement is also required on the intelligence information by-product to be collected through the proposed operation. Thus financial support for a political party is expected to produce intelligence information on the internal politics of the host country.

Project Outlines and Renewals go through an approval process by various offices such as the International Organizations Division, and depending on their sensitivity and cost, they may require approval outside the CIA at the Departments of State, Defense, or Labor, or by the National Security Council or the President himself. When finally approved the CIA's Finance Division allocates the money and the operation begins, or continues if being renewed. The period of approvals and renewals is usually one year.

Both the Agency for International Development and the National Endowment for Democracy without doubt have documentation requirements and approval processes similar to the CIA's for project funding in the civil societies of other countries. All the people involved must receive prior approval through an investigative process, and each person has clearly defined tasks. An inter-agency commission determines which of the three agencies, the CIA, AID or NED, or a combination of them, are to carry out specific tasks in the civil societies of specific countries and how much money each should give. All three have obviously been working to develop an opposition civil society in Cuba.

One should note that the high-sounding National Endowment for Democracy has its origins in the CIA's covert action operations and was first conceived in the wake of the disastrous revelations noted above that began on February 26th, 1967. Two months later in April that year, Dante Fascell, member of the House of Representatives from Miami and a close friend of the CIA and Miami Cubans, together with other Representatives, introduced legislation that would create an "open" foundation to carry on what had been secret CIA funding of the foreign civil society programs of U.S. organizations (e.g., the National Students Association) or of foreign organizations directly (e.g., the Congress for Cultural Freedom based in Paris).

The Fascell idea failed to prosper, however, because of the breakdown of the bipartisan approach to foreign policy that had prevailed since the administration of Harry Truman after World War II. Differences since the late 1960's within and between the two parties over the war in Southeast Asia, then in the 70's over Watergate and the loss of the Vietnam war, and finally over revelations of assassination plots and other operations of the CIA by Senate and House investigating committees, prevented agreement and resulted in several years of isolationism. Only the successes of revolutionary movements in Ethiopia, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Grenada, Nicaragua and elsewhere brought "cold warrior" Democrats and "internationalist" Republicans together to establish in 1979 the

American Political Foundation (APF). The foundation's task was to study the feasibility of establishing through legislation a government-financed foundation to subsidize foreign operations in civil society through U.S. non-governmental organizations.

Within APF four task forces were set up to conduct the study, one for the Democrats, one for the Republicans, one for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and one for the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). Together their work became known as the Democracy Program. They consulted a vast array of domestic and foreign organizations, and what they found most interesting were the government-financed foundations of the main West German political parties: the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung of the Social Democrats and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung of the Christian Democrats. When these foundations were first set up in the 1950's, their task was to build a new German democratic order, a civil society based on the Western parliamentary model while lending their weight to repression of communist and other left political movements.

From early on the CIA channeled money through these foundations for non-government organizations and groups in Germany. Then in the 1960's the foundations began supporting fraternal political parties and other organizations abroad, and they channeled CIA money for these purposes as well. By the 1980's the two foundations had programs going in some 60 countries and were spending about \$150 million per year. And what was most interesting, they operated in near-total secrecy.

One operation of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung shows how effective they could be. In 1974, when the fifty-year-old fascist regime was overthrown in Portugal, a NATO member, communists and left-wing military officers took charge of the government. At that time the Portuguese social democrats, known as the Socialist Party, could hardly have numbered enough for a poker game, and they all lived in Paris and had no following in Portugal. Thanks to at least \$10 million from the Ebert Stiftung plus funds from the CIA, the social democrats came back to Portugal, built a party overnight, saw it mushroom, and within a few years the Socialist Party became the governing party of Portugal. The left was relegated to the sidelines in disarray.

Ronald Reagan was an early and enthusiastic supporter of the Democracy Program, describing his plans in a speech before the British Parliament in June 1982. This new program, he said, would build an "infrastructure of democracy" around the world following the European example of "open" support, furthering "the march of freedom and democracy." Of course the German programs were anything but "open," nor would the American programs be "open" once they began. In fact even before Congress established the NED, Reagan set up what was called Project Democracy in the U.S. Information Agency under direction of the State Department. A secret Executive Order at the time, soon leaked to the press, provided for secret CIA participation in the program. An early grant was \$170,000 for training media officials in El Salvador and other right-wing authoritarian regimes on how to deal with the U.S. press--the Salvadoran program to be carried out through the Washington public relations firm that had represented the Somoza dictatorship.

In November 1983 Dante Fascell's dream finally came true. Congress created the National Endowment for Democracy and gave it an initial \$18.8 million for building civil society abroad during the fiscal year ending September 30, 1984. Fascell became a member of NED's first Board of Directors. Whereas the CIA had previously funneled money through a complex network of "conduits," the NED would now become a "mega-conduit" for getting U.S. government money to the same array of non-governmental organizations that the CIA had been funding secretly.

The Cuban American National Foundation was, predictably, one of the first beneficiaries of NED funding. From 1983 to 1988 CANF received \$390,000 for anti-Castro activities. During the same period the separate political action committee (PAC) run by CANF directors to fund political campaigns, gave a nearly identical amount for the campaigns of Dante Fascell and other friendly politicians, a clear trade-off based on funds received from NED.

Legally the NED is a private, non-profit foundation, an NGO, and it receives a yearly appropriation from Congress. The money is channeled through four "core foundations" established along the lines of the four original task forces of the Democracy Program. These are the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (Democratic Party); the International Republican Institute (Republican Party); the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (AFL-CIO); and the Center for International Private Enterprise (U.S. Chamber of Commerce). The NED also gives money directly to "groups abroad who are working for human rights, independent media, the rule of law, and a wide range of civil society initiatives." [Quote from NED web site May 2003.]

The NED's non-governmental status provides the fiction that recipients of NED money are getting "private" rather than U.S. government money. This is important because so many countries, including both the U.S. and Cuba, have laws relating to their citizens' being paid to carry out activities for foreign governments. The U.S. requires an individual or organization "subject to foreign control," i.e., who receives money and instructions from a foreign government, to register with the Attorney General and to file detailed activities reports, including finances, every six months. The five Cuban intelligence officers were convicted for failing to register under this law.

Cuba has its own laws criminalizing actions intended to jeopardize its sovereignty or territorial integrity as well as any actions supporting the goals of the U.S. Helms-Burton Act of 1996, i.e., by collecting information to support the embargo or to subvert the government, or for disseminating U.S. government information to undermine the Cuban government.

Reagan's new programs in civil society started out with a huge success in Poland. During the 1980's the NED and the CIA, in joint operations with the Vatican, kept the Solidarity trade union alive and growing when it was outlawed during the marshal law period

beginning in 1981. The program was agreed between Reagan and Pope John Paul II when Reagan visited the Vatican in June 1982. They did it with intelligence information, cash, fax machines, computers, printing and document copying equipment, recorders, TVs and VCRs, supplies and equipment of all kinds, even radio and television transmitters. The trade union transformed itself into a political party, and in 1989, with encouragement from Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, Solidarity took control of the government. Years later, in May 2001, Senator Jesse Helms introduced legislation to provide \$100 million to duplicate in Cuba, he said, the successes of the CIA, NED and Vatican in Poland.

Such efforts to develop an opposition civil society in Cuba had already begun in 1985 with the early NED grants to CANF. These efforts received a significant boost with passage in 1992 of the Cuban Democracy Act, better known as the Torricelli Act, that promoted support through U.S. NGO's to individuals and organizations for programs to bring "non-violent democratic change in Cuba." A still greater intensification came with passage in 1996 of the Cuban Liberty and Solidarity Act, better known as the Helms-Burton Act. As a result of these laws the NED, AID and the CIA, the latter not mentioned publicly but undoubtedly included, intensified their coordinated programs targeted at Cuban civil society.

One may wonder why the CIA would be needed in these programs. There were several reasons. One reason from the beginning was the CIA's long experience and huge stable of agents and contacts in the civil societies of countries around the world. By joining with the CIA, NED and AID would come on board an on-going complex of operations whose funding they could take over while leaving the secret day-to-day direction on the ground to CIA officers. In addition someone had to monitor and report the effectiveness of the local recipients' activities. NED would not have people in the field to do this, nor would their core foundations in normal conditions. And since NED money was ostensibly private, only the CIA had the people and techniques to carry out discreet control in order to avoid compromising the civil society recipients, especially if they were in opposition to their governments. Finally, the CIA had ample funds of its own to pass quietly when conditions required. In Cuba participation by CIA officers under cover in the U.S. Interests Section would be particularly useful, since NED and AID funding would go to U.S. NGO's that would have to find discreet ways, if possible, to get equipment and cash to recipients inside Cuba. The CIA could help with this quite well.

Evidence of the amount of money these agencies have been spending on their Cuba projects is fragmentary. Nothing is publicly available about the CIA's spending, but what is easily found about the other two is interesting. The AID web site cites \$12 million spent for Cuba programs during 1996-2001 (average per year \$2 million), but for 2002 the budget jumped to \$5 million plus unobligated funds of \$3 million from 2001 to total \$8 million. Their 2003 budget for Cuba is \$6 million showing a tripling of funds since the Bush junta seized power. No surprise given the number of Miami Cubans Bush has appointed to high office in his administration.

The money, according to AID, was spent "to promote a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba." From 1996 to 2001 they disbursed the \$12 million to 22 NGO's, all apparently based in the U.S., mostly in Miami. By 2002 the number of front line NGO's had shrunk to 12: The University of Miami, Center for a Free Cuba, Pan-American Development Foundation, Florida International University, Freedom House, Grupo de Apoyo a la Disidencia, Cuba On-Line, CubaNet, National Policy Association, Accion Democratica Cubana, and Carta de Cuba. In addition, the International Republican Institute of the Republican Party received AID money for a sub-grantee, the Directorio Revolucionario Democrático Cubano, also based in Miami.

These NGOs have a double purpose, one directed to their counterpart groups in Cuba and one directed to the world, mainly through web sites. Whereas on the one hand they channel funds and equipment into Cuba, on the other they disseminate to the world the activities and production of the groups in Cuba. Cubanet in Miami, for example, publishes the writings of the "independent journalists" of the Independent Press Association of Cuba based in Havana and channels money to the writers.

Interestingly, AID claims on its web site that its "grantees are not authorized to use grant funds to provide cash assistance to any person or organization in Cuba." It's hard to believe that claim, but if it's true, all those millions are only going to support the U.S.-based NGO infrastructure, a subsidized anti-Castro cottage industry of a sort, except for what can be delivered in Cuba in kind: computers, faxes, copy machines, cell phones, radios, TVs and VCRs, books, magazines and the like.

On its web site AID lists 7 purposes for the money: solidarity with human rights activists, dissemination of the work of independent journalists, development of independent NGOs, promoting workers' rights, outreach to the Cuban people, planning for future assistance to a transition government, and evaluation of the program. Anyone who wants to see which NGOs are getting how much of the millions under each of these programs can check out <http://www.usaid.gov/regions/lac/cu/upd-cub.htm>.

AID's claim that its NGO grantees can't provide cash to Cubans in Cuba, makes one wonder about the more than \$100,000 in cash that Cuban investigators found in possession of the 75 mostly unemployed dissidents who went on trial. A clue may be found in the AID statement that "U.S. policy encourages U.S. NGOs and individuals to undertake humanitarian, informational and civil society-building activities in Cuba with private funds." Could such "private funds" be money from the National Endowment for Democracy?

Recall the fiction that the NED is a "private" foundation, an NGO. It has no restrictions on its funds going for cash payments abroad, and it just happens to fund some of the same NGO's as AID. Be assured that this is not the result of rivalry or lack of coordination in Washington. The reason probably is that NED funds can go for salaries and other personal compensation to people on the ground in Cuba. There is, after all, the rung of organizations below the U.S. NGOs in the command and money chain, and these are the

individuals and groups in Cuba that correspond in purpose with the U.S. NGO's. They number nearly 100 and have names [translated from Spanish] like Independent Libraries of Cuba, All United, Society of Journalists Marquez Sterling, Independent Press Association of Cuba, Assembly to Promote Civil Society, and the Human Rights Party of Cuba

Each of the Cubans in these organizations will be fully identified with assigned tasks in the AID, NED or CIA project documentation covering the activity, probably in a classified annex, whether they are categorized as human rights activists, independent journalists, independent librarians, or distributors of information materials. The money, after all, does not go to phantoms or ghosts even on the lowest level. Nor are the U.S. NGO's given discretion to pass out money to whatever malcontents they can find to take it. End users (final recipients) are designated beneficiaries in writing just as the core foundations and intermediary U.S. NGOs are.

NED's web site is conveniently out of date, showing only its Cuba program for 2001. But it is instructive. Its funds for Cuban activities in 2001 totaled only \$765,000 if one is to believe what they say. The money they gave to 8 NGOs in 2001 averaged about \$52,000, while a 9th NGO, the International Republican Institute (IRI) of the Republican Party received \$350,000 for the Directorio Revolucionario Democrático Cubano, based in Miami as previously noted, for "strengthening civil society and human rights" in Cuba. In contrast, this NGO is to receive \$2,174,462 in 2003 from AID through the same IRI. Why would the NED be granting the lower amounts and AID such huge amounts, both channeled through IRI? The answer, apart from IRI's skim-off, probably is that the NED money is destined for the pockets of people in Cuba while the AID money supports the U.S. NGO infrastructures.

According to the Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, in a press conference on April 7th, and Cuban security agents working inside the dissident groups that he showed on film, the U.S. money came to recipients in Cuba disguised as wired family remittances, in cash mixed with the many remittances brought by couriers known as "mules," and by payments to the Transcard debit card system in Canada for credit to cards held by dissidents in Cuba. (The cards are good for cash withdrawals from Cuban banks.) Although the Foreign Minister said the Cuban Central Bank has followed carefully the flow of money to the dissidents, he did not reveal the total amount for any given period or specific amounts to recipient groups or individuals.

Whatever the amounts of money reaching Cuba may have been, everyone in Cuba working in the various dissident projects knows of U.S. government sponsorship and funding and of the purpose: regime change. Far from being "independent" journalists, "idealistic" human rights activists, "legitimate" advocates for change, or "Marian librarians from River City," every one of the 75 arrested and convicted was knowingly a participant in U.S. government operations to overthrow the government and install a different, U.S.-favored, political, economic and social order. They knew what they were doing was illegal, they got caught, and they are paying the price. Anyone who thinks they are prisoners of conscience, persecuted for their ideas or speech, or victims of repression, simply fails to see them properly as instruments of a U.S. government that has declared revolutionary Cuba its enemy. They were not convicted for ideas but for paid actions on behalf of a foreign power that has waged a 44-year war of varying degrees of intensity against this country.

To think that the dissidents were creating an independent, free civil society is absurd, for they were funded and controlled by a hostile foreign power and to that degree, which was total, they were not free or independent in the least. The civil society they wished to create was not just your normal, garden variety civil society of Harley freaks and Boxer breeders, but a political opposition movement fomented openly by the U.S. government. What government in the world would be so self-destructive as to sit by and just watch this happen?

Those interested in understanding how U.S. promotion of "independent civil society" works in one sector, private libraries, can find an excellent report presented in November 2002 by Rhonda L. Neugebauer, Bibliographer, Latin American Studies, University of California, Riverside, at the Pacific Coast Council on Latin American Studies, East Los Angeles College. The report is the result of extensive research, visits to private libraries in Cuba and interviews with their owners, and a study of the Cuban state library system. Included are descriptions of the U.S. NGO system backing private libraries, their funding by AID, and the misleading information put out by this system. [Click here to see the Neugebauer report.](#)

Foreign Minister Pérez Roque in his press conference gave an example of how several operations worked. He showed a film clip from the trial of Oswaldo Alfonso Valdés, President of the Liberal Democratic Party of Cuba, in which Alfonso described a meeting he had with an AID official and Vickie Huddleston, until mid-2002 the chief of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, in which they discussed how to improve the way that he was getting "resources" in order to better conceal the U.S. government as the source. In the clip Alfonso also acknowledged receiving money and material resources from the U.S. government via organizations based in Miami.

Under Cuban law, being paid to execute U.S. policy toward Cuba is illegal and in itself sufficient to convict. The largest group within the 75, the 37 "independent journalists," were writing commentaries on Cuba for publication outside the country using the internet for communications. One of their organizations in Cuba was the Independent Press Association of which the President, Néstor Baguer, was a Cuban government security agent who testified in court. Members of his group, he said, wrote for the website Cubanet, based in Miami, and were paid via the Transcard debit card system in Canada except for large amounts that were brought by courier. Cubanet by the way received \$35,000 from NED in 2001 and is to receive \$833,000 from AID in 2003. Baguer also testified that on visits to the U.S. Interests Section, he and his colleagues received instructions on topics to cover in their writings such as the shortage of medicines, the treatment of patients in hospitals, and the treatment of inmates in prisons. Generally speaking the "independent journalists" were to place Cuba in a bad light abroad and to justify continuation of the trade embargo.

The Foreign Minister also showed three letters dated in January and March 2001 to Oswaldo Alfonso, the Liberal Party leader, from Carlos Alberto Montaner, an exile journalist who lives in Madrid and is President of the Cuban Liberal Union (member of the Liberal International). Montaner is also a founding member of the Hispanic-Cuban Foundation, a project of Spain's ruling conservative party. Montaner is also closely associated with the exile cultural/political quarterly Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana which is based in Madrid and financed in part by NED (\$80,000 in 2001).

Reading from the letters, Pérez Roque revealed that each of the three letters mentioned money included: 200 dollars, 30,000 pesetas and 200 dollars, the latter two apparently from people Montaner and Alfonso know mutually. In the letter with the pesetas, Montaner wrote: "Very soon two high level Spanish friends will call you to talk about Project Varela. I suggested five names for the founding of that new idea: Payá, Alfonso, Arcos, Raúl Rivero and Tania Quintero."

Readers can draw their own conclusions on the possible foreign influence in Project Varela. Oswaldo Payá, of course, is the dissident honoured by the European Union with the Sakarov Human Rights Prize for his leadership of Project Varela.

Prominent in the outrage at Cuba's action against the dissidents were commentaries of shock over how nice things had been getting in recent years with Fidel's mellowing and tolerance of the dissident community, and suddenly now THIS! In actual fact May 20, 2002 was the turning point when in speeches in Washington and Miami, Bush announced his "Initiative for a New Cuba." Central to this "new" plan, citing Poland as a past success, he announced increased and direct assistance to "help build Cuban civil society," leading to a "new government" in Cuba. I wonder. Would it be overreach to say Bush was advocating regime change through the dissidents? The Cubans made no secret of their interpretation.

The knell for "our guys" came with the arrival in September 2002 of a new Chief of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, the equivalent of Ambassador were Cuba and the U.S. to have full diplomatic relations. James Cason is a career State Department diplomat who has served mostly in Latin American countries, not menacing to the eye, just a bit overstuffed in the round face, double chin like a Porky Pig in his late fifties, with wide round glasses in front of half-closed eyes. Like he's had too many two-hour lunches and not enough jogging. Otto Reich, Cuban-American fanatic and one of the un-indicted criminals of Iran-Contra, who was serving a limited recess appointment (read no chance for Senate confirmation) as Bush's Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American, gave Cason the job and apparently put an ample load of hot sauce on his appointee's backside.

Cason swooped down on Havana like a fed from Gangbusters' central casting with an "in your face" attitude big time. But give the guy credit. He ran his ass off all over this island burning his dissident friends, "our guys," and sealing their fate as he went along. His blatant support for Washington's civil society in Cuba looked for all the world like he was bent on getting himself PNG'd, expelled as persona non grata in diplomatic parlance. He made a show of unity with groups in the provinces as well as Havana; gave 24-hour passes to the Interests Section to favorites, including Cuban penetration agents, for free internet access and other facilities; attended meetings in dissidents' homes where he gave the equivalent of press conferences to foreign journalists; personally launched the youth wing of the Liberal Party; entertained dissidents in his official residence, even hosting an independent journalists' workshop there one Saturday. His conduct went so far beyond accepted diplomatic protocol that you might say he was the mother of all provocations.

But expelling Cason would have led to a new crisis with the U.S., and the Cubans didn't take the bait. For six months they waited and watched through their highly placed penetrations of Cason's dissident community. Then they decided to act. They had the evidence of criminal activities in support of Helms-Burton and in violation of other legislation on sedition, so they finally decided to sweep away Cason's constituency in a stroke. And there he stood in March, appropriately like the Emperor who wore no cool. Indeed, there's been not a peep from the man since his acolytes were picked up.

One can imagine the bitterness from prison with 75 of "our guys" reflecting on how stupid they were to fall for Cason's grandstanding. So now Cason and his staff, CIA and AID officers included, have to start all over, pretty much from scratch. But hey, buddy, careful whom you all recruit. You may be salivating tomorrow over another of Fidel's finest. Never know, do you? Think about that when you file for security clearances on your next generation of dissidents.

Without a doubt the Cubans weighed the price they would have to pay with friends and foes before taking the decision to act. And they knew they had a lot to lose. The movement in the U.S. to end the embargo and travel ban, in Congress and on the street, would peel rubber in reverse with all the media distortions. Cuban entrance into the Cotonou Agreement for preferential trade and aid with the EU would likely go back into the deep freeze, which it did. Moreover, the U.N. Human Rights Commission was then meeting in Geneva, and the U.S. was trying as hard as possible, with threats and bribes, to get a motion approved condemning Cuba for human rights violations. In the end they didn't get it, but the Cuban government was willing to take this risk as well.

With so much at stake, the timing of the decision triggered intense speculation. In truth the dissident community, including those imprisoned, has never been a threat to the revolution, and Cuba could have gone on indefinitely tolerating, penetrating and monitoring their U.S. government-ordered activities. But the U.S. might have seen that as weakness, and that's the last thing you want a Grendel to think.

Moreover there was an important internal political dimension to tolerating Cason's insulting provocations because they were so widely known here. He had gone so far beyond the pale that people in general wondered about the government's tolerance. This too could be seen as weakness by supporters of the revolution. So they decided to stop him once and for all and to send a message to his

remaining protégés, to stretch the protective connotation just a bit in the Cuban context. In 1996 the government had stopped the highly visible Brothers to the Rescue overflights by the shootdowns, largely for internal political reasons, knowing full well the price they would pay internationally. So also in 2003 they decided to firmly use the hook on Cason's Top Gun stage act regardless of international opinion. As in the shootdowns, internal Cuban politics, not international reactions, more than likely determined the timing.

The Three Executions

The hijacking of the Havana harbor ferry, the Baraguá, couldn't have come at a worse time. It was the 7th hijacking in 7 months and came on April 2, a day before the trials of the dissidents were to start, making it easy for Cuba's enemies, and not a few of its friends, to lump the two disparate events into one "wave of repression."

The ferry was no more than a flat-bottomed self-propelled barge with a cabin, safe only for calm harbor waters, and that night there were 50-odd people on board including children and foreign tourists. The armed hijackers took it to sea in a highly dangerous Force 4 wind, ran it out of fuel, and threatened by radio to start throwing hostages overboard if they were not given enough fuel to reach Florida. The amazing part is how the Cuban coast guard convinced the hijackers to allow a tow of the drifting ferry to the port of Mariel where special forces set up a trap and divers prepared for the rescue. After many hours of standoff, it all ended in less than a minute when a French woman suddenly dove overboard and was followed en masse by the other hostages and the hijackers as well. The hostages were all rescued, and the hijackers quickly arrested.

In the trial the state asked for, and received, the death penalty for the three ringleaders of the hijacking, an action upheld by an appeals court because it was a terrorist act of extreme gravity even though no one was injured. Then the Council of State had to ratify or commute. Should Cuba end their nearly three-year moratorium on executions? Should they stir up condemnation from the world movement against the death penalty? Should they delay their decision and let those guys wait on death row for a while---not 15-20 years like in the States but at least a few weeks so as not to show undue haste? Or should they commute to life and show mercy.

Frankly, being against the death penalty, I thought a combination of the last two would be best: wait and commute. But I didn't know that at the time the Cuban security forces were investigating another 29 hijacking plots. From the Council of State's point of view it surely looked like the beginning of a wave of hijackings encouraged as always by the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act and the wet-foot, dry-foot policy that discriminates against all non-Cuban illegal immigrants. Particularly galling to Cuba is the hero treatment hijackers have gotten in Florida and the fact that if a pilot flies a plane over there willingly, he's not considered a hijacker and is guilty of no more than misappropriation of property.

If there is one principle that Cuba has always followed, at least since the missile crisis of 1962, it is never to give the U.S. a pretext for military action. Another Mariel exodus or rafters crisis, or indeed a wave of hijackings, would be just such a pretext, as Fidel later reasoned, for imposing a U.S. naval blockade, an all-out bombing campaign, and an outright invasion. They could avoid another Mariel or rafters episode, but they had to stop the hijackings immediately. And he was right. On April 25th the chief of the Cuba Bureau of the State Department told the Chief of Cuba's Interests Section in Washington that the United States considers any more hijackings to be a serious threat to U.S. national security. Understanding "one more and we take military action" would not be paranoia.

But the Council of State didn't have to wait for that news. They knew it already. They ratified the sentences on April 10th, and they were carried out the next morning. You can fault Cuba on the principle of "no death penalty under any circumstances," but the fact is that Cuba is one of more than 100 countries that have it on the books. They had just seen what U.S. bombs and missiles had done to Baghdad, saw the painstaking work of two generations at risk, including their centers of science and technology, educational institutions, hospitals and clinics, their historic cultural heritage, but most important their people who would be killed and maimed. And they didn't confuse the hijackers with dissidents. They were delinquents turned terrorists who had threatened vastly more than their 50 hostages.

It came as no surprise to Cuba when, with the executions and the sentencing of the dissidents at nearly the same time, the howling around the world began. They seemed to be ready for it to a degree, but you could sense a certain shock when long-time friends of the revolution like Eduardo Galeano and Jose Saramago joined the chorus of condemnation. They were joined by Chomsky, Zinn, Albert, Davis, Dorfman and others, whose works are treasures in my library, who signed the superficial statement of the Campaign for Peace and Democracy: "We the undersigned strongly protest the current wave of repression in Cuba.[against dissidents].for their non-violent political activities." Like the dissidents are not equal to terrorism, embargo, and psychological warfare as instruments in Washington's unending campaign to convert Cuba into another American vassal. Fair enough if that's what they want for Cuba. Pitiful if they signed without thinking.

A few weeks after the executions and dissident trials, at the May Day rally of more than a million people in Havana's Revolution Square, the Rev. Lucius Walker, one of the most effective and committed U.S. Cuba solidarity activists, made an elegant plea for Cuba to abolish the death penalty. Fidel responded with appreciation, saying only that such an action was under study. Yet less than 3 weeks later another group of 8 armed hijackers, arrested before taking over a flight on April 10th, were tried and sentenced. Despite convictions for terrorism and violence, the ringleaders were sentenced to life imprisonment and the others to terms of 20 to 30 years.

Readers will note that the important legal and human rights issue of due process has not been addressed in these pages. Among the criticisms of both the dissidents' and the hijackers' cases were allegations that the defendants were railroaded without an opportunity for adequate legal defence. The problem in addressing this issue has not been helped by the lack of published information on the trials. For example, I have found no public chronology in any of the 75 cases from the moment of arrest to the opening of the trial that would include dates and times for events such as the arrest, the presentation of charges, and sessions spent by the defendant with a defence lawyer in preparation for the trial. Nor have the written charges nor the defendants' responses and pleas nor the judges' decisions been published with the exception of the sentences. This lack of information prevents assessment of due process.

Nevertheless the Foreign Minister went to pains to address these criticisms in his three hour-plus press conference of April 7th, pointing out the Spanish colonial origins of summary trial procedures and their wide use around the world today. He also said that in the 29 trials (some trials had more than one defendant) 54 lawyers participated of whom 44 were chosen by the defendants and 10 appointed as public defenders by the courts, adding that several lawyers served more than one defendant. Perhaps most important, he said that defendants were allowed to testify before the court answering the charges and submitting to cross-examination. He emphasized the number of people allowed to attend the trials, mostly family members and averaging about 100 observers per trial. Still, the lack of full information on the prosecution and trial procedures has left the door open for charges of lack of due process, charges that cannot be resolved until the courts provide more details.

Epilogue

In Washington, despite the black eye that Cuba is seen to have self-inflicted, the Congressional supporters of legislation to end or ease the embargo and to abolish the travel ban are again moving ahead with the introduction of new legislation for that purpose. While most condemned the April events, they are sticking with their principles, mostly in the belief that Americans who come to Cuba will change the Cubans. Over the years I've seen just the opposite happen, but ending the travel ban is certainly worthy, reasons aside.

The Bush administration, peopled as it is with hard line Cuban-Americans, continues to ratchet up the pressure with the expulsion of 14 Cuban diplomats in Washington and New York on vague espionage charges. Clearly a political, not a national security decision, someone in the FBI leaked the news that the White House had apparently told the State Department to expel Cubans, and State asked the FBI for some names. The FBI source added that none of the Cubans was the subject of an on-going espionage investigation. Conversely the Cuban-American congressional representatives from Miami, Ros Lehtinen and Díaz Balart, whine openly that Bush won't take their calls demanding a swift end to the Cuba problem once and for all.

In Miami all those NGOs sucking at the teats of AID and NED to keep their anti-Castro industry going, along with their comfortable life-styles, will have to go back to their computers and draw up new plans for civil society in Cuba. They'll have to look for ways to salvage their counterpart fronts across the straits and for more Cubans with few enough scruples and just enough self-destructive instincts to take their money.

Over here in Havana, James Cason would do well to slip away on consultations back at the State Department and quietly retire. He did, after all, get 75 of "our guys" put away, some for quite a while, and all the anti-Cuban propaganda dividend flowing from his service to Reich in no way compensates. He's finished in the Foreign Service even though he was carrying out Reich's orders, for Cason, not Reich, is the one who'll take the fall. Then again he might just find a fat new anti-Cuba career with one of the Miami NGOs.

At the U.S. Interests Section, State, AID and CIA officers will now have to start beating the bushes for new blood, sending names and background information for security clearances on people willing to work with the Miami NGOs following in the footsteps of the 75, and the Cuban security service will surely oblige with promising candidates as they always have in the past.

And the rest of us?

The threat of war in Cuba from Bush and his coterie of crusaders, all of them crazed with hubris after Iraq, is real. A military campaign against Cuba, coinciding with the already-underway 2004 electoral campaign, may be the only way he can hope to finally get himself elected, even if only for his second term. And every day the economy is working against him with no signs of improving for 2004. He knows the economy in '92 did his father in, and he may conclude that fulfilling his divine mission to extend U.S. military control of the world will need a crisis very close to home.

The time to mobilize against that war is now, and not a day can be lost.