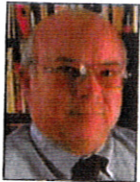


At Issue:

Is the Cuban government a threat to the United States?



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the Department of State lists the Castro dynasty as a “state sponsor of terror.” Castro provides safe haven for U.S. fugitives, including killers of American police officers. The Castros’ 50-year effort to harm Americans did not start when Fidel urged Moscow to drop an atomic bomb on the United States in 1962 and did not end with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today he nurtures like-minded regimes in Latin American nations, such as Venezuela and Bolivia, that share his hostility to American democracy.

Castro has always denied involvement in drug trafficking, but in July 1989 he brought Gen. Arnaldo Ochoa before a kangaroo court, charged him with narco-trafficking and promptly executed him. Ochoa, an unlikely suspect, had just returned from years in Africa leading Cuban armies. Cuba remains a transshipment point for drugs, and the U.S. Coast Guard — which has Castro’s permission to return Cuban refugees captured on the high seas back to the island — is not allowed to enter Cuban waters when in hot pursuit of drug smugglers.

Castro’s communist regime is a threat because it is just 90 miles from the U.S. coast, and whatever happens on the island is likely to spill over into the Southeast. Despite Castro’s gloating about his health-care system, Cuba has suffered through several dengue fever epidemics; the AIDS crisis is partly due to the increase in prostitution and to Castro’s refusal to reallocate resources he uses for propaganda and his penchant for inviting thousands to visit him with all expenses paid.

Those who minimize Castro’s threat refuse to mention Ana Belen Montes, a high-ranking U.S. defense-intelligence analyst who pleaded guilty in March 2002 of spying for Havana. In her work for the Pentagon assessing the level of Castro’s threat, she had access not only to intelligence about Cuba but also to American military secrets about hostile regimes. Havana shared the information she provided with America’s enemies. She is now serving a 25-year sentence. Unfortunately, Montes’ many years of telling American generals that Castro was not a threat continues to be accepted at face value by some who should know better.

If Washington were to forgive and forget, others thinking about doing harm to America will conclude that no matter how despicable their behavior — like the shooting down of American unarmed civilian aircraft in international airspace in the Florida Straits in 1996 — after a certain interval the U.S. would no longer hold them accountable for their crimes.



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the Cold War is long over. There are no longer Soviet troops in Cuba. Cuba has scaled back its own armed forces, and even without that would present no threat whatever to the United States. Some of its aircraft could reach Florida — but only if they could penetrate U.S. air defenses, which seems unlikely. But even if some got through, however, they have no weapons of mass destruction to deliver.

Back in March 2004, then-Undersecretary of State John Bolton charged that Cuba was “developing a limited biological weapons (BW) effort” and remained “a terrorist BW threat to the U.S.”

But Bolton presented not a shred of evidence to back up his allegations, and, interestingly, in subsequent reports the State Department has not repeated his charge. Further, the Center for Defense Information and the Center for International Policy sent several delegations to investigate and found no evidence at all that Cuba was in any way involved in biological weapons. As retired Marine Gen. Charles Wilhelm put it after a visit: “While Cuba has the capability to develop and produce chemical and biological weapons, nothing that we saw or heard led us to the conclusion that they are proceeding on this path.”

The State Department claims Cuba endorses terrorism as a policy and thus represents a threat. But, in fact, Cuba has condemned terrorism in all its manifestations, has signed all 12 U.N. anti-terrorist resolutions and offered to sign bilateral agreements with the United States to cooperate in efforts against terrorism. The Bush administration has consistently ignored the offer.

The United States has no evidence at all that Cuba is involved in terrorist activities. Not surprisingly, then, the annual State Department report on Cuba as a terrorist state puts forward what can only be described as misleading evidence. For example, it complains that “Cuba did not attempt to track, block or seize terrorist assets, although the authority to do so is contained in Cuba’s Law 93 Against Acts of Terrorism.”

But the obvious response to that is, “What assets?” There is no evidence that al Qaeda or any other foreign, terrorist organization has assets in Cuba. And so, there is nothing to seize. The statement does make clear, however, that Cuba has laws on the books against acts of terrorism.

As though grasping for something — anything — the report complains that Cuba “maintains friendly ties with Iran and North Korea.” True, but unless there is some evidence that those ties extend to cooperation in terrorist activities or planning — and no such evidence is presented — they are not pertinent to the question of whether Cuba is or is not a “terrorist state.”

To date, however, the U.S. has presented no evidence whatever that Cuba is a terrorist state.