

By R. Bruce McColm and  
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# FIGHTING CASTRO FROM EXILE

Last September, Félix García Rodríguez, an attaché to the Cuban Mission to the United Nations, was killed by a sniper while driving in rush-hour traffic through the Woodside section of Queens. Credit for his murder, the first assassination of a United Nations diplomat in the U.N.'s 35-year history, was immediately claimed by the Cuban exile terrorist group Omega 7.

The killing of Rodríguez was not an isolated act of terror. Since 1976, Omega 7 has carried out more than 40 bombings of Cuban airline offices, diplomatic missions, press agencies and businesses. The group has been linked by law-enforcement officials to at least 10 murders since 1973. Last year, Omega 7 made repeated attempts to bomb the Cuban Mission to the United Nations. On March 25, 1980, after an abortive plot to plant plastic explosives in the limousine of Raúl Roa, the chief Cuban delegate to the United Nations, the group vowed, in a letter to The Hudson Dispatch, to continue its assassination efforts until it succeeded.

Omega 7 is the most extreme element in a clandestine war being waged by small groups of anti-Castro exiles. This war takes many forms, from the bombing of Cuban embassies and the murder of alleged Cuban intelligence agents both here and abroad, to bombings of public places in this country.

While the vast majority of more than one million Cuban exiles who have settled in the United States are generally in agreement with the passionate anti-Castroism of the terrorists, not all endorse the tactics of violence, especially when they are turned against American businesses and individuals. After a wave of terrorist bombings and slayings in Miami during the past decade, one exile leader remarked: "The terrorism was a product of frustration and machismo. It was almost as if the people were saying, 'We know Cuba will never be free, but we have to do something.'" Even though most exile groups do not actively support the terrorism of Omega 7, there are complaints that the exile community has refused openly to condemn the terrorism and to cooperate in investigations of groups like Omega 7.

Law-enforcement officials link Omega 7, which is based in Union City, N.J., to the Cuban Nationalist Movement, an organization founded in 1959, shortly after Castro came to power. Although most of the group's members — estimated to be only 10 — have been identified, the F.B.I. and the New York Police Department, who formed a joint antiterrorism task force last May, have been unable to make any arrests.

Unlike Omega 7, most of the other militant exile groups — such as Abdala, Alpha 66 and Cuba Independent and Democratic (run by Huber Matos, the recently released political prisoner) — focus their efforts on forming plots to support dissident groups in Cuba and fomenting social unrest and economic disruption on the island. The recent arrival of more than 120,000 Cuban refugees has provided the militant groups with new recruits, and signaled the vulnerability of Castro's regime, which is currently faced with serious economic and social problems. A number of the recent refugees, according to law-enforcement officials, were involved in sabotage and espionage on the island for different anti-Castro groups, and some of them plan to continue their activities from exile. According to F.B.I. agents in New York and New Jersey, Omega 7 is now being pressured by groups "with cells inside Cuba" to stop its terrorist activities. "Now that these groups believe they have a shot at overthrowing Castro," commented one F.B.I. official, "they're cracking down on the terrorists."

With the exception of the Cuban Nationalist Movement, which espouses a philosophy similar to that of



By Delucia/The New York Times

Omega 7, an anti-Castro terrorist group claimed credit for the sniper slaying of a Cuban attaché last September whose body

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The slain man, Félix García Rodríguez, was a victim of the ongoing terror war.

### CUBAN AGAINST CUBAN:

The clandestine struggle between anti-Castro exiles and the regime in Havana is being played out both on the island and in this country with words and violent deeds.

lies slumped at the wheel of his car after he was killed by a hail of bullets on Queens Boulevard.

the late Spanish Fascist thinker José Antonio Primo de Rivera, most of the exile groups advocate a democratic system of government for Cuba, a state-run economy and a foreign policy of strict nonalignment. As Gustavo Marin, the 33-year-old secretary general of Abdala, a social-democratic group, has remarked, "For years we've been trying to make people realize Castro is a neofascist, the Trujillo of the left."

Since 1971, Abdala has established branches in Cuban communities throughout the United States and abroad, and has expanded its membership from young Cuban professionals to former political prisoners, recent refugees and former members of the 26th of July Movement, Castro's revolutionary organization in the 1960's. Long criticized by right-wing Cubans in the United States for its early stand against terrorism, Abdala contacted a number of dissatisfied Cuban diplomats and established its first cells in Cuba five years ago. An Abdala member, recently resettled from a refugee camp, claimed that he was one of 400 operatives in Havana province alone. Since last January, according to Abdala spokesmen, the group has been printing its own underground newspaper on the island, and it is continuing its Radio Abdala broadcasts across the northern provinces of Cuba, a practice begun in 1972. As for Abdala's paramilitary activities, Marin claims: "We do have the military power, but we don't show it. It's certainly not like we have armies of the night or anything like that. All any of us can do is create a certain degree of chaos in Cuban society. Then a new answer will come."

Marin, like members of the 26th of July Movement currently in exile, believes that political change in Cuba is perhaps five to 10 years off. He envisions a sequence of events leading to the type of liberalization that occurred in Czechoslovakia under Alexander Dubcek in 1968 before the Soviet invasion. Raul Chibas, who raised money and guns in Miami in the late 1950's for Castro's revolution, and who is now a Spanish instructor in the New York area, also views the most promising road for change in Cuba as a "democratization of the socialist state on the Dubcek model." Any sort of military invasion or guerrilla struggle against Castro, says Chibas, is "madness." The only way the present regime will ever be removed is through an alliance between exiles and dissidents in the military and among the young. "Cubans on the island," he says, "know the real conditions better than we do, but they don't understand how those conditions came about. The exile community provides the island with information and the tools."

After the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the United States informed the Soviet Union that it would not intervene militarily in Cuba, although it continued to attempt, using anti-Castro exiles, to destabilize the island until 1967. In Miami, during the 1960's, the Central Intelligence Agency conducted one of the



Militant exile: Huber Matos (with family).



Patient: Raul Chibas (with wife) seeks an alliance with young Cuban dissidents.



Moderate: Bernardo Benes (with Castro in 1978) favors a "dialogue."

**TWO-WAY DIALOGUE**  
 Militants use the exile flights to gain access to Cuba. Castro intelligence finds them a convenient cover.

largest anti-Communist operations in the world, employing 600 to 700 American staff officers and 2,000 Cubans. The United States officially divorced itself from anti-Castro activities when it signed the 1973 hijacking treaty. Required by the treaty to restrict anti-Castro activities, even if initiated from a third country, the United States began selectively passing information about militant exile groups to Havana — a practice which, after it was disclosed during a Federal grand jury investigation into exile activities in 1977, provoked street demonstrations in downtown Miami. By 1974, Castro, in an interview with a magazine in Mexico City, could say, "The C.I.A. no longer controls some of these buzzards [exiles]."

Since the mid-1970's, the United States has intermittently sought to improve relations with Cuba. The centerpiece of this fitful effort has been a "dialogue," initiated by Havana with moderate exile leaders in 1978, under which roughly 4,000 political prisoners and their relatives have been permitted to leave Cuba and about 220,000 exiles have been able to visit the island.

The man most responsible for this "dialogue" is Bernardo Benes, a 45-year-old Cuban-American banker who is an influential figure in the Miami exile community and was one of President Carter's first prominent backers in 1976, serving in that campaign as Florida director of Hispanic affairs. In August 1976, while vacationing in Panama City, Benes was approached by Cuba's Vice Minister of the Interior José Abrahantes, a member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, to discuss exile visits and the release of political prisoners to assuage the Carter Administration's human-rights policy. After two years of secret meetings with Cuban officials in Havana and Miami, Benes — who was in touch with then Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and the President's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski — met Fidel Castro at the Palace of the Revolution in Havana in October 1978. Shortly thereafter, the first groups of political prisoners were allowed to leave for Miami.

In mid-November 1978, formal talks began between Castro and 75 exile representatives — who had not been involved in anti-Castro activities — from the United States, Spain, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico and Venezuela. The Committee of 75, as it came to be known, was drawn from an assortment of Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy, members of the Antonio Maceo Brigade (a pro-Castro exile group) and selected Cuban-American businessmen who were to help arrange the political-prisoner release program and to process applications from exiles wishing to visit relatives in Cuba and from Cubans with relatives abroad wishing to emigrate.

Although militant anti-Castro exiles have denounced the "dialogue" — they

see it as the first step toward normalization, which they oppose — they have also taken advantage of the exile flights to gain easy access to the island. The Cuban Government uses the exile flights for similarly clandestine purposes. Havana agreed to release political prisoners and permit exile visits in order to neutralize anti-Castro sentiment within the exile community and to generate, from money spent by visiting exiles, desperately needed hard currency. (Castro also hoped to encourage the normalization of relations with the United States — a process that the continuing presence of Cuban troops in Africa has impeded.) But the flights have also served as cover for the operations of the Cuban intelligence service (D.G.I.), which for years has monitored the exiles' activities and, according to New York and Miami F.B.I. officials, has successfully penetrated the anti-Castro organizations.

Manuel de Armas, for instance, who, according to law-enforcement officials, was a double agent working for Havana and the C.I.A., testified at a televised hearing in Havana on April 22, 1976, that, as a high-level official in the Drug Control Commission of New York State, he had infiltrated both Abdala and Alpha 66. At one point, according to Abdala sources, de Armas had tried to entrap some of its members in an arms deal to be arranged at the Canadian border. Fidel Castro, in a speech before the First Communist Party Congress in Havana in December 1975, stated that "the Ministry of the Interior has infiltrated virtually every counterrevolutionary outfit, and in many, its men have held some of the highest posts in the leadership."

According to F.B.I. officials, the D.G.I. has recently stepped up its activities against the various militant groups which have had a political effect on the island. Much of the intelligence gathering takes place under the cover provided by the private agencies that handle the exile flights to Cuba and the political-prisoner release program. Moreover, during the past two years, Cuban intelligence agents have aggressively sought to penetrate business groups and other exile institutions to lobby for relaxing the American trade embargo and for normalizing relations with the island. According to an F.B.I. agent in Newark, the D.G.I. "is now working overtime" in the Cuban com-

munity in New York and New Jersey, which with 250,000 exiles is the largest Cuban settlement outside of south Florida's 650,000.

One result of this activity has been an upsurge in politically motivated violence. On Nov. 25, 1979, 38-year-old Eulio José Negrin was gunned down in Union City. Omega 7 called The Associated Press in Manhattan to claim credit for the murder, saying, "We will continue with these executions until we have eliminated all of the traitors living in this country."

Negrin, a naturalized American who once ran for the New Jersey State Senate as a Republican, was an advocate of improved relations with Cuba. A member of the Committee of 75, he lobbied for an end to the American trade embargo and arranged for the reunification of Cuban families from his office in Weehawken, N.J., which was bombed in the spring of 1979. At the time of his death, according to Rudolfo Benitez, his 20-year-old personal secretary and bodyguard, "Negrin was the only person Havana would deal with in northern New Jersey." His death raised a storm of protest among Cubans involved in the "dialogue" and started a crackdown by exile leaders on terrorism within their community.

According to New York and New Jersey F.B.I. officials, as well as Negrin's secretary, Negrin frequently charged exiles \$2,000 to \$5,000 to get their relatives out of Cuba. According to his diary, Negrin, on at least one occasion, arranged for the resettlement of Cubans recommended by a D.G.I. agent. Frequently, as his diary notes, he based his recommendations for resettlement on how much property in Cuba could be confiscated from his clients' relatives, and whether his clients were members of a "counterrevolutionary" group.

During the summer and fall of 1979, before Fidel Castro's visit to the United Nations, Negrin compiled dossiers on militant exiles for the Cuban Mission to the United Nations, frequently renting cars, according to his secretary, to photograph the exiles and members of their families. One New York F.B.I. official says that Negrin, only weeks before his death, offered to form an antiterrorism task force if the F.B.I. provided him with \$1.5 million, an offer the F.B.I. declined. "As crazy as it sounds," said one F.B.I. official, "Negrin was murdered because these people



New York plainclothes police examine the garage at the Soviet juring four other officers—Omega-7, which has been linked to 10

[Omega 7] were concerned about survival." According to intelligence sources, one Cuban exile terrorist, Aldo Vera Serafin, had been murdered in Puerto Rico in 1976 on the orders of the Cuban Government because of his alleged plan to kill the Cuban Ambassador to Argentina and his part in the murder of two suspected D.G.I. agents in Buenos Aires earlier in the year.

While exile terrorism was on the rise, Cuba's own intelligence-gathering operations in the United States picked up under the cover of the normalization efforts that had begun in the last half of the decade. There were claims that Cuban spies were using the exchange of visitors between the two countries to improve their watch on the exile groups in a way that had been denied when Cuba was virtually quarantined by Washington.

By February 1980, the head of the Committee of 75, the Rev. Manuel Espinosa, whom Castro had publicly praised, stunned the exile community by revealing a list of 300 persons who he claimed were agents of Havana or Castro collaborators. The evangelical minister was called "dangerous and irresponsible" by State Department and F.B.I. officials, but some local law-enforcement officials concluded that his charges had considerable substance. One Dade County public-safety officer commented, "Once you cut through all the baloney and make him spell it all out, he's batting .600." However, Arthur Nehrbass, the F.B.I.'s special agent in charge of Miami, said that Espinosa's actions had interfered with the

F.B.I.'s continuing investigation of Cuban intelligence activities, adding, "We have already successfully identified most if not all of the Cuban intelligence agents in this area."

Some Cuban exiles and law-enforcement officials believe that Espinosa's dramatic transformation from the leading proponent of the "dialogue" into an anti-Castroite came when Cuban authorities refused to finance his activities any further. Still, many exiles listened to Espinosa's charges and were willing to believe them. Among his allegations were that Havanatur, the Panamanian-registered company based in Miami that the Cuban Government had given a monopoly on exile flights, was a direct arm of the Cuban intelligence service. Espinosa claimed that these agents were gathering information on all passengers traveling to the island, relaying the intelligence to Havana and establishing a large contraband operation to circumvent the American trade embargo.

A Miami Herald investigation revealed that the "owner" of Havanatur was Carlos Alfonso, a former security adviser to the toppled Chilean Government of Salvador Allende-Gossens and identified by the State Department as a colonel in the Cuban intelligence service. In August 1979, Havanatur, which had been under surveillance by the F.B.I. for suspected covert operations, was identified as an agency of the Cuban Government by the State Department, and it was expelled from the United States on Dec. 31, 1979.

Key West, according to Es-



Mission to the U.N. in December 1979 after a bomb exploded, in-murders, claimed responsibility, as it has for some 40 bombings.

pinosa and many Cuban exiles, had become a center for smuggling of rationed goods to Cuba. Lobster and shrimp boats, docked adjacent to the Key West Coast Guard station, were said to transport embargoed goods to Cuba on the average of two or three times a week. Havana, after nearly two decades of trade embargo by the United States has a great appetite for American-made goods, especially refrigerators, televisions, freezers and other appliances. One Miami Coast Guard intelligence officer, refusing to confirm or deny Espinosa's charges, commented, "It's a totally different world down there. But I think any really massive operation we would have picked up through aerial reconnaissance."

Customs officials in Miami, however, confirm that, on a number of occasions, air ferries from Miami to Havana have carried tires, batteries, appliances and other embargoed items under bogus manifests labeled "donations." One such operation was conducted under the cover of "Operation People-to-People," a relief effort for the victims of Hurricane Frederic. A Miami Herald investigation revealed that Cuban officials, through Havanatur, catered the conference of nonaligned nations in October 1979 from a Miami gourmet shop, flying sausages, caviar and pâté to Havana on planes that had brought freed political prisoners to Miami.

In an interview, the banker Bernardo Benes commented on the controversy surrounding the Committee of 75 he helped found, the political prisoner-release program and the exile visits to the island:

"It's like talking about the trees, not the forest. The results speak for themselves — the political prisoners have been released and the exiles have visited the island. I couldn't care less whether Castro made money or some 'mercenaries' here made money off the arrangement because the 'dialogue' has achieved what it started out to accomplish. Nearly two-thirds of the island has been contacted by returning exiles. Now, these people have a point of reference to the outside world. The political implications of this are enormous."

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According to "Tomas" (a pseudonym), who has spent 20 years in Miami's "Little Havana" monitoring Cuba's internal developments for the exile community, active exile militants now number more than 5,000, compared with 20,000 in the early 1960's and 3,000 in the late 1970's. His own activities, like those of many exiles, include smuggling a newsletter to the island, preparing clandestine radio broadcasts and distributing intelligence information to the militant groups. Concerning exile commandos, "Tomas" mentioned 30 boat operations staged from different Caribbean islands in the last two years, although neither the C.I.A. nor the State Department confirms this, and members of the exile community are notoriously extravagant when it comes to claims of direct action against Cuba.

"It takes about \$50,000 for a boat run into Cuba," explained "Pedro Araujo" (a pseudonym) at his family's house in Miami. "We use a cigarette boat with double fuel tanks.



Eulalio José Negrin was gunned down by Omega 7 on a street in Union City, N.J., in November 1979. He had been a leader in the "dialogue" with Castro, and his murder outraged many Cuban exiles.

and a souped-up engine to get by the Border-Guard [Cuban coast guard]. Our operatives in the Cuban military and the C.D.R.'s [Committees for the Defense of the Revolution] hide our boats for us."

"Pedro," now in his mid-40's, is one of a few hundred commandos in the United States and Latin America who, with arms from small arsenals scattered outside major Latin American capitals and buried on deserted islands in the Caribbean, conduct forays into the island for intelligence, propaganda and sabotage. The commandos include Bay of Pigs veterans, former Cuban military officers and former guerrillas in Column Nine, the military unit in Castro's revolutionary army that was commanded by Huber Matos. "Pedro's" group operates under the cover name Movimiento Revolucionario Camilo Cienfuegos, after the charismatic Cuban military commander who disappeared without a trace in 1959.

The commandos' strategy is to encourage dissent among the Cuban young (half of Cuba is now under the age of 25) and to recruit operatives among the younger, dissatisfied veterans of the African wars. Nearly 45,000 Cuban troops and advisers are stationed in Africa, with about 29,000 in Angola and 16,000 in Ethiopia. According to anti-Castro militants, a large number of veterans are young officers superior in training, experience and political sophistication to their commanding officers, who fought alongside Castro in the revolution. One commando explained, "If you're younger and can't advance any further, you're going to become a dissident."

Last spring, Miami exiles re-

turning from the island reported the appearance of dissident pamphlets in zones restricted to military personnel. Samples of a newsletter distributed among the military on the island and abroad are filled with poetry written by dissatisfied soldiers in Angola, essays by former members of the 26th of July Movement about Soviet domination of the island and translations of American newspaper articles on Cuba's economic troubles and involvements abroad.

Although unrest in the military has not reached politically threatening proportions, Raúl Castro, Fidel's brother and Cuba's Defense Minister, thought it necessary to announce last April that the Government had the total allegiance of the armed forces. Low-ranking military officers who have recently escaped Cuba report an unusually high incidence of enlisted men going AWOL with their commanding officers' knowledge. Other young soldiers, according to refugees who left Cuba last year, now steal light weapons from the military and trade them to dissidents on the black market for food, tape recorders and radios brought into the country by visiting exiles and tourists. Even before the massive recent influx of refugees, State Department officials confirmed that a significant portion of visa requests at the United States Interest Section in Havana were draft-related, and refugees claim that hundreds of young Cubans are now serving prison terms for draft evasion or desertion. One State Department official who visited the island last year reported that sentiment against Cuba's African involvement was increasing among the people in Havana, who link the island's cur-

rent economic troubles with Cuban military adventures abroad, even though these are entirely subsidized by the Soviet Union. According to several Angolan veterans who have emigrated to the United States in the last year, soldiers returning from Africa are more disenchanted by a lack of jobs and poor housing conditions. "When I came back from Angola," said one refugee in Elizabeth, N.J., "I realized I was better off dead. At least then, my family would have received better housing and Government subsidies than if I were alive."

Thanks to the family-reunification flights, militant exiles can now fly directly to Cuba, using forged identification. Once cleared by immigration, they meet with dissident cells and deliver simple sabotage manuals such as "The Black Arts," "Total Resistance" and "How To Kill Safely" — publications available from Soldier of Fortune magazine. Gifts of Bic lighters and bars of soap are turned into incendiary devices and crude "napalm." How much of this actually is translated into anti-Government action is highly questionable, but in the past year the Cuban press has acknowledged an upsurge in politically motivated arson.

United States officials have also noticed an increase in anti-Government activities on the island. In the fall of 1979, two match factories were set on fire and two sugar mills were destroyed. Last year, according to intelligence sources, the train stations in Havana and Santiago de Cuba were bombed, as was the nightclub at the former Havana Hilton Hotel. Some of the *lancheros*, the Cuban boat people who hijacked Government ships earlier this year,

maintain they heard bomb blasts in Havana and other provincial capitals at the end of last year. One refugee claims the main police headquarters in Havana has been firebombed on a number of occasions. According to the refugees, the most recent anti-Government action was the bombing last summer of a school for children of Cuban officials outside Havana.

Both anti-Castro dissidents and exile militants have encouraged economic or "subtle" sabotage ranging from mere absenteeism to making inadequate repairs on plant machinery, forcing the Government to purchase new Soviet equipment at exorbitant cost. Since last January, the "Workers' Guard," according to reports in Jamaica's Daily Gleaner, has been put on all-night patrol duty to prevent sabotage.



Whatever domestic unrest the Castro regime faces, United States officials consider it manageable. The chances for a "Prague Spring" type of liberalization appear remote as Cuba remains firmly in the Soviet camp. The highly sophisticated secret police, numbering in the tens of thousands; the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, said to consist of half the population, and Cuba's 100,000-man army — with the addition of 1,500 to 2,000 Soviet military advisers, 60,000 civilian workers and advisers, and a brigade of 3,000 soldiers — make it improbable that any organized resistance against Castro could last very long.

State Department officials maintain that Cuba's political hierarchy has sized up the island's bleak economic situation without being able to develop any alternative policies. "They've been debating the question for a long time now, but can see no future solution to their economic problems," commented one State Department official. The economic troubles led to a shakeup of the Government last January, when Castro took direct responsibility for the army and the Ministry of the Interior, discharging nine Cabinet members. Earlier, in a November 1979 speech, Raúl Castro highlighted the island's severe food shortages, a growth rate that has dwindled to below 1 percent a year, a lack of hard currency and rampant inflation. Fidel Castro, speaking last March, talked about widespread street crime, worker absentee-

ism and high unemployment, accusing citizens of showing "symptoms of corruption" and becoming accustomed to "daily stealing."

By allowing a disorganized refugee exodus from the island last spring, over United States objections, Fidel Castro, according to American officials, hoped to ease his social and economic problems. Blaming the United States for encouraging the refugee flight, citing this as "new evidence of the immaturity of the United States policy," Castro sought, as he has done frequently in the past, to shore up Cuba's disintegrating internal situation by creating a bilateral issue. As one State Department official commented, "It's like getting somebody's attention by hitting them over the head with a two-by-four."

At the Second Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, held in Havana last month, the Cuban Government unveiled a five-year economic plan to upgrade the island's standard of living by proposing, among other things, to increase the availability of consumer goods and implement a new system of incentives to reward worker efficiency. In a speech lasting 12 hours, Fidel Castro also suggested the possibility of reopening the port of Mariel to more Cubans wanting to leave the island. According to exile leaders currently involved in the refugee resettlement program, as many as one million to three million Cubans might be involved in a second boatlift. According to Castro, the most important issue between the island and the United States is the solution of the emigration problem and the reunification of Cuban families that now have members in the United States.

While law-enforcement officials are reluctant to predict whether exile terrorism is on the wane, the anti-Castro consensus in the exile community has been significantly bolstered by the new wave of refugees. In the aftermath of the Mariel boatlift, anti-Castro militant groups gained new recruits and raised substantial funds for their activities. Yet, the sudden influx of refugees has also diverted the community's attention to the problems of assimilating the new arrivals. As one Cuban exile leader commented, "Castro is a brilliant psychologist, a great manipulator of the Cuban mentality. Whenever he has domestic problems, he lets people out like steam from a kettle. He has an uncanny knack for capitalizing on all his mistakes." ■