

the village

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*Puerto Rico:  
The Fire This Time  
By Jose Chegui Torres  
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## Inside Omega 7

- *Key Anti-Castro Terrorists Named*
- *Why Is Washington Doing Nothing?*

By Jeff Stein

District Attorney Robert Morgenthau stands behind a heavy wooden chair at the conference table in his seventh-floor office. Bombers are striking at will from across the Hudson River in

New Jersey, a kind of Cambodian "Parrot's Beak" out of reach of city police. The district attorney is told the bombers believe the police are on their side, and that the victims *(Continued on page 11)*

**By Jeff Stein**

(Cont. from page one) need reassurance that the government is on their side, not on the side of the bombers. But top city law enforcement officials believe that nothing can be done to stop the terrorist wave without vigorous federal intervention—and so far Washington has remained silent.

Recent published assertions in *The New York Times* that the federal government has assigned "highest priority" to neutralizing the terrorists are met with considerable skepticism by local and regional officials, who still complain that the Justice Department has failed to assemble a national strike force for the effort. In addition, critics of the federal government's performance over the years—especially those targeted by the terrorists—argue that the government's failure to assemble a strike force, recent press reports notwithstanding, actually encourages the terrorists to continue their bombing and murder campaigns.

On December 11, the Cuban exile organization known as Omega 7 significantly escalated its anti-Castro campaign by taking credit for a tremendous dynamite blast in the garage of the Soviet Mission to the United Nations on East 67th Street. Several Russian diplomatic personnel were injured when windows were blown out as high as the third story. A New York policeman standing in front of the mission was hospitalized with shards of glass in his eyes.

The Soviet Union responded immediately and with significant harshness at a time when the U.S. Embassy in Iran continued under siege. The bombing, a TASS comment charged, had been carried out "with the connivance of U.S. authorities." With a later allusion to U.S. difficulties in Tehran, Moscow left the chilling implication that if security could be lax for a Soviet installation in New York, American outposts in the Soviet Union could be correspondingly vulnerable.

Suddenly, there was a new passion for clamping down on Omega 7, a passion noticeably absent following the seven attacks on Cuban diplomats and missions in the U.S. over the past seven years, three in the past six months. And those bombings were only a sliver of the total anti-Castro terrorist performance that had continued with ever greater boldness and momentum through the years; in all, over a hundred violent "incidents" in less than a decade, and two daylight assassinations on crowded streets this past year alone.

"It took the Russian bombing to rattle a few cages around here," confided a senior New York police official who asked not to be identified. "Omega 7 blew up the Cuban mission three times lately and nobody made a peep. With the Russians, though, it's a whole new ballgame."

"It's hot all right," said an FBI agent who tracks exile-terrorism. And it's gotten even hotter in the last few weeks—on Sunday evening, January 13, the Soviet Aeroflot office on fifth Avenue was wrecked by another powerful blast and more Russians were injured. The same night, the Cuban Mission in Montreal, and a cigar factory in Miami, were bombed. Each action was claimed by Omega 7. "Mother Russia is another thing altogether," suggested another federal official. "This gets it out of the Third World and into the Superpowers."

There is little doubt that both local and federal intelligence agencies have known for years who the key Omega 7 figures are. To emphasize that the problem is not one of discovering the identities of the terrorists but of a continuing lack of a high-level federal commitment to gather evidence for indictments, concerned local and federal investigators have provided *The Voice* with a composite portrait of the shadowy Omega 7 network. This information was in turn confirmed by several other sources with close ties to the Cuban exile community, as well as, in some cases, reputed Omega 7 operatives themselves.

Generally, the sources believe, three major anti-Castro groups have been supportive of Omega 7 terrorist operations in New Jersey, Florida, and Puerto Rico. All



JEFF STEIN

Armando Santana, the reputed chief of Omega 7

## Inside Omega 7

of the groups have public fronts and spokespersons as well as a clandestine side. Most of them are also surrounded by a coterie of financial supporters and friendly local politicians.

The exact degree of coordination between members of the groups is a matter for guesswork. Generally, it is believed, once a strategy is agreed upon, each group, or cells within the groups, are free to mount their own attacks.

(1) *The Cuban Nationalist Movement (Northern Zone)* has enjoyed the support of key officials in northern Hudson County, New Jersey, particularly Julia Valdivia, the assistant to the mayor of Union City, William Musto. The group made an international reputation when five of its members were indicted in connection with the Orlando Letelier murder. Letelier's assassination was accomplished on contract to the Chilean secret police (DINA), with which the group developed a close relationship within months of the U.S.-supported Chilean coup of 1973.

The Novo brothers, Guillermo and Ignacio, dominated the group for more than a decade, until their jailing in the Letelier case last year, by drawing headlines for such capers as firing a bazooka at the United Nations building in 1964 during an appearance by Che Guevara. (They were arrested and confessed, but had to be released because police failed to give them proper Miranda warning.) Two members of the group, Virgilio Paz Romero and Jose Dionisio Suarez, are still at large and wanted for the Letelier murder. Suarez, a hit man for Fidel Castro's once close associate Huber Matos in the early days of the revolution, is considered especially dangerous. Informants regularly report sightings of the two in the New York-New Jersey area, and say they are perhaps directing the recent Omega 7 offensive and providing training in explosives for new members.

With the Novos in jail, the group is now led by 30-year-old Armando Santana, a husky, volatile, six-footer whom the FBI feels is the key Omega 7 operative in this area. In 1976, Santana and two sidekicks, Alfredo Chumacero and Jorge Gomez,

were arrested as they planted a bomb at the door of the Academy of Music Theater on 14th Street, where a celebration of the Cuban revolution was scheduled for later in the evening. They served two years for that offense.

A Weehawken High graduate, and a talented commercial artist, Santana learned his English peddling lemons as a boy on the streets of Miami. Lately, he's been working as a bill collector. As to being the chief of Omega 7, Santana responded last summer during an interview in his Union City clubhouse: "I will not confirm it, and I will not deny it. Why don't you bring me the proof?"

An FBI source says Santana "is the most chilling personality I have ever met, and I've met a lot of these guys." Last summer, Santana led a walkout of three ultra-right groups from the Bloc of Revolutionary Organizations, an umbrella group of some 30 anti-Castro factions in the New York-New Jersey area led by Hector Wiltz, an exile psychiatrist. Since the Santana faction was the only group which backed its rhetoric with action, Wiltz, according to a well-informed source, is now "leading an empty shell."

Santana, meanwhile, is having his own leadership problems. *The Voice* has obtained a copy of a letter said to have been written in late October from Alvin Ross Diaz (a group member convicted in the Letelier plot and now serving a life sentence) to Santana in which Ross discusses the misuse of group funds and squabbles among the members. "I am just as upset as you are about the problem with Ignacio's wife," Ross writes. "I have written to Guillermo on innumerable occasions, complaining about this woman's meddling in our affairs. . . . My mother complains to me a lot about this woman's attitude regarding the collection of funds." Several sources say Ross is referring to the common feeling in exile circles that Silvia Novo has been siphoning off funds raised for an appeal of the Letelier convictions. "Silvia is on her own and nobody can control her," Ross complains.

In the letter, Ross also mentions that son of a bit ab Negrin. In September, he

and ears open since we can never be sure with those rats." (In late October, Eulalio Negrin of Union City, a leading advocate of closer ties with Castro, started getting telephone calls at three o'clock in the morning. There would be nothing coming from the receiver except the metallic tick-tick-tick of an alarm clock. And so he would lie there in the darkness with the telephone to his ear, listening to the tick-tick-tick. His time was running out. In early November, Negrin bought a casket and made out his will. A few weeks later he was gunned down on the streets of Union City.)

Other key Cuban Nationalist Movement (CNM) operatives are Armando Santana's brother Eduardo, a mail clerk at the Panasonic plant in Secaucus, and Jose Tenreiro, the group's official public relations officer. Sources say financial support comes at least partially from Andy Miro, a Union City furniture store owner, and "Guido" Guirardo, a restauranteur in that town. "They help us," Santana conceded last summer.

The Cuban Nationalist Movement also has a "Southern Zone" headed by Felipe Rivero, who was trained by the CIA for the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1962. Rivero, the C.N.M.'s talkative "Chief of Ideology," originated the group's "war throughout the roads of the world," a philosophy of violent attacks on Cuban outposts and diplomatic personnel around the world. A dedicated fascist, Rivero was, according to grand jury transcripts, one of DINA's first contacts when it came looking for assassins to kill Letelier. He works as a salesman at Sheehan Buick in Miami's "Little Havana."

(2) *Abdala*, outwardly an academically oriented exile youth group, has a regional headquarters on 29th Street in New York and an active chapter at Rutgers University. For most of its history, the group has pursued peaceful political activities, but police now suspect some of its members may have turned toward violence under the banner of Omega 7.

"We felt that Abdala supported the last two bombings as a matter of their right-wing philosophy," says a New York Police Department intelligence source, adding that one Abdala member fits the description a Cuban mission official gave to police. In Miami last summer, two Abdala members were arrested on charges of shooting up a meeting of the Antonio Maceo Brigade, a left-wing exile organization.

Generally, the group espouses a neo-conservative philosophy and has concentrated on an international struggle against left-leaning youth groups. In October, 1978, for example, it hosted a conference in New York with delegates from the youth wings of the Gaullist party in France, the West German Christian Democrats, and the Progressive Alliance of Liberia, among others. In this connection, it is interesting to note Abdala's membership in the U.S. Youth Council, a Washington, D. C. organization which gets 90 per cent of its funding from the International Communication Agency. The Youth Council, incorporated in New York in 1969, hosts conferences on social, economic, and political problems around the world, apparently picking up openly where the CIA left off when covert funding of the National Student Association was exposed.

President of Abdala is mustachioed, 32-year-old Gustavo Marin, whose name appears in police files as an Omega 7 suspect. A resident of Queens, Marin steered his group into a political alliance with Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church in 1974 when Abdala supported the Moonies' fast to save Richard Nixon.

Abdala has a "First Secretary for Foreign Relations," Manuel Santana, an employee of the New York chapter of the American Automobile Association. When Fidel Castro's most famous political prisoner, Huber Matos, came to town in early December, it was Santana who supplied bodyguards for him, police say.

(3) *Brigade 2506*, like Abdala in some respects, has operated on an international scale since the early '60s with paramilitary

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action as its apparent forte. Brigade 2506 is made up of hundreds of exiles originally trained by the CIA for the Bay of Pigs invasion. Over the years, Brigade 2506 veterans have fought in the Congo and Viet Nam, and in 1975 set up a Miami recruiting station for the Angolan civil war, supported by Jonas Savimbi's UNITA and "South African interests," according to *The New York Times*. Last year, at least one brigade member died fighting for Somoza in Nicaragua. Currently, a brigade project is gathering statistics on Cuban casualties in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, supplied by the Somali Mission to the U.N. According to a brigade source, the information is then either smuggled into Cuba or broadcast to Havana by Miami radio stations close to the brigade. The FBI has reportedly begun inquiries to investigate whether the Foreign Agents Registration Act may have been violated.

Until recently, the head of the brigade was Roberto Carballo, an intensely ambitious man whom police authorities from Dade County, Florida, consider another key Omega 7 operative. Carballo, who has visited General Pinochet in Chile, is also said by Dade County police officers to be on a personal retainer to Anastasio Somoza, now in exile in Paraguay. According to Miami and federal intelligence reports, Carballo attended a June 1976 meeting of several groups in the Dominican Republic where an international terrorist campaign against Fidel Castro was mapped.

Anti-Castro activity, first sponsored by the CIA and FBI, has long been a staple of the Cuban exile community, and it is thus not surprising that local politicians lend support to these groups. By and large, the 700,000 Cuban exiles in the United States are resolutely anti-Communist, but few appear to approve wholeheartedly of the bombings. Except in Union City. There, Julia Valdivia, officially only an assistant to Mayor William Musto, but unofficially known as "the lady mayor," is outspoken in support of the Novo brothers, now serving life terms for the Letelier murder conspiracy. "He was a friend," she told me, speaking of Guillermo, "and I respected his opinions. He believed in what he was doing, and I respected what he did." (Valdivia's husband is also on the Union City payroll as the CETA Spanish Affairs Officer, a position created especially for him.) An examination of city books, meanwhile, shows that a handful of vehement anti-Castro tabloids in the area have received almost \$30,000 in city advertising in the past 18 months. The local edition of *Guerra*, the house organ of Brigade 2506, received about \$6000 in 1978 and 1979.

Pedro Hernandez, publisher and editor of Weehawken's *El Cubano Libre*, the voice of the far-right Independent Syndicalist Action group, was having money problems in 1979. "So I called up the Moonies," he told me. Reverend Jose Casado, a Spanish-born Moonie operative, bankrolled Hernandez's publishing costs for the first three months of the year, Hernandez said, enabling the paper to come out weekly during the Letelier trial. A swarthy man in his mid-forties, Hernandez is a close ally of Santana's Cuban Nationalist Movement and, according to New York police files, "a suspect in recent Cuban bombings."

"The Moonies may be our new partner," claimed Mario Ciria, clearing papers off a seat for me in his cluttered and dusty three-room suite overlooking Times Square. A bantam-like, dark-complexioned, and intense man in his mid-thirties, Ciria is the editor of *Ultima Hora*, a tabloid which regularly publishes Omega 7 communiques. (The front page headline for the December 16 edition shouted: *Defiant Omega-7: WE HAVE BAZOOKAS AND GRENADES TO CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE IN NEW YORK.*) Ciria's predictions for a Moonie-Cuban exile alliance appear to have been premature; when the FBI got wind of Casado's donations to the Cuban Nationalist Movement's defense fund last summer, Casado dropped out.

Federal authorities became alarmed about such a potentially volatile relationship. With untold millions of dollars flowing into its coffers beyond the reach of the Internal Revenue Service because of its status as a "church," plus its small arms manufacturing business in Korea, the Moonies could turn the Cuban exiles into a small army. The Moonie-exile relationship now appears to be confined to mutual support for demonstrations, etc.

But the rumor mills are loaded with sketchy reports of an emerging alliance of several anti-communist terrorist groups, particularly involving the Croations, who have recently stepped up their bombing attacks locally. Financing for this activity, according to FBI sources, is coming from Paraguay and Somoza's coffers.

Meanwhile, several members of the Cuban exile community have been explicitly told by police that they are the next targets of Omega 7. These are members of the Committee of 75, a group of Cuban exiles who, in an historic break from the past, favor closer relations with Havana. In November 1978, members of the group traveled to Cuba at the invitation of Fidel Castro to discuss the release of political prisoners and visits by exile families to their relatives on the island. Their trip was an overwhelming success: some 3000 political prisoners have been released, and an average of 12,000 exiles a month began visiting the island.

Two Committee of 75 members have been slain in the past nine months. Last April, in San Juan, 26-year-old Carlos Muniz, who operated a travel agency, was driving across town to visit his mother. As he drove up to her house, a car with three men pulled up and emptied their revolvers into his face. He died the next day.

"Any Cuban or Puerto Rican, just as any American who travels to Cuba, regardless of his motives, is considered our enemy, and we will be forced to deal with them as we did Muniz," a terrorist communique announced. It was signed by "Commando Cero," which federal agents consider another name used by Omega 7 operatives.

On Sunday morning November 25, another Committee of 75 member, Eulalio Negrin, was just about to get into his car in Union City with his 12-year-old son when three men pulled up in a car, wearing ski masks and brandishing automatic rifles. Negrin was gunned down and pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital.

Both cases have been proclaimed "local matters" to date, although, unofficially, FBI agents have done some investigating. They say they have no leads.

"What we want," says an angry Hal Mayerson, the Committee of 75's lawyer—highly critical of the government's response in the wake of the Negrin murder and recent bombings—"is not only that the Department of Justice set up a task force, but physically go into Union City, hold hearings or whatever, and relieve the feeling that the government doesn't give a damn, to say 'That's all! No more bombings!'"

On December 14, Mayerson and Committee of 75 representatives met with Justice Department and FBI officials in Washington. "They said they weren't sure they have jurisdiction," he fumed. "It struck me that it was the same way the feds responded in the South when black kids were murdered."

Veteran FBI agent John Culpepper, who met with Mayerson, responded: "If you do not have jurisdiction, you are conducting an illegal investigation, and the FBI does not conduct illegal investigations."

Mayerson said that FBI officials in Washington urged the Committee of 75 to cooperate with Union City police, a ludicrous notion if it weren't so hazardous. Even the suspected terrorists, conceded one local and concerned FBI source, think law enforcement agents don't care. "This guy said to me, 'Hey, I know you're just doing your job,' when I went to talk to him. I said that it wasn't just my job, that I didn't like this bombing, but he didn't

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believe me."

Mayerson also recently met with Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau and other city officials who, he said, "clearly indicated that until the federal government coordinated a national effort, their hands were tied."

"I don't think so. No. Not for many years," the senior FBI official said quietly, thoughtfully, looking out the window toward Miami Beach. He was talking about the CIA's involvement with Cuban exiles. He was persuasive. Yet the suspicion lingers that the federal government has either continued to assist, or at the very least condoned anti-Castro terrorism.

Miami is where it all started. The city's "Little Havana" is the conspiracy buff's Disneyland. Here is where the Bay of Pigs invasion, the assassination plots, and Watergate all found willing soldiers.

In the Dade County police department, terrorism experts exchange smiles and look down at their hands when you ask them if the CIA's involved with exile Cuban anti-Castro activities. They look to each other to answer first, clear their throats, shift in their seats. The answer is yes.

Two stories were squeezed out of New York police officials months later. "You know, it's funny," said one cautiously, "there have been one or two things . . . but let's put it this way. You get just so far on a case and suddenly the dust is blown away. Case closed. You ask the CIA to help, and they say they aren't really interested. You get the message."

Another investigator said he was working on a narcotics case involving Cuban exiles a couple of years ago, and telephone records he obtained showed a frequently dialed number in Miami. He said he traced the number to a company called Zodiac, "which turned out to be a CIA front." He dropped his investigation.

In a room in the Havana Riviera Hotel last summer, a Cuban intelligence official calmly leaned forward from the couch, pushed aside his lunch, placed his fingertips on the coffee table, and quietly outlined two decades' worth of CIA sabotage operations directed at his country. He said that, in his view, the most recent cycle of terrorism seemed to coincide with certain factors in the international situation. The year 1976, he noted, marked the victory of the Havana-supported MPLA in Angola, as well as the extension of Cuban military aid to Ethiopia and other African states or liberation movements. "Henry Kissinger was hysterical about Angola, as we all know," he said. "We believe that it is more than coincidental that this violent campaign resumed against us in 1976." He paused and then added slowly, "We believe the U.S. wants to punish us for our Angolan involvement." He sat back and silently drank from a glass of beer, leaving the notion to float gingerly between us over the hum of an air conditioner.

Maria Estrella (I'll call her) is a little cranky this muggy July morning as she walks through the parking lot outside an East Side hospital with the keys to her sister's sports car. She and her sister are both originally from Cuba. Her sister is a well-paid research physician. Maria is a professor of sociology at a western university. They sat up together most of the night talking politics. Maria's sister couldn't care less. She's got a good job, a nice apartment, friends, an expensive car. She doesn't want to be a Cuban-American. She's an American. In short, she's very much like the great majority of Cubans who have been here 20 years: vaguely anti-Communist, ardently anti-Fidel if the subject's brought up, but, all-in-all, "the hell with it, let's get on with life."

Driving through the Lincoln Tunnel and circling off the highway into hot and smoggy Union City, Maria tells her story. When the revolution came, she was 16. Her parents, Catholic and fearful of the unknown, brought the family out of Cuba in 1960. Ever since, she's yearned to go

back. It's not that she's a Communist—she isn't. In fact, she is very critical of some aspects of the Cuban revolution. It's just that she feels she missed something by leaving Havana.

We drive down Bergenline Avenue, a narrow, shop-crammed street which seamlessly connects Union City, Weehawken, and West New York. Salsa floats from the speakers outside the record stores. Three teenage girls in tight pants, with long, chestnut hair, wide, dark eyes, and deep red lips, wave to young men cruising by in a new Toyota. Old men gather in the open-air coffee shops around thimble-size porcelain cups of thick, rich espresso. A Schlitz sign over a bodega blinks "Cerveza." Union City, a town resurrected and abandoned by waves of immigrants, has been born again with the Cubans.

Maria Estrella wrote her doctoral dissertation on Cuban exiles. She constructed a questionnaire to measure their political values in relation to symbols of authority. She called it an "F-scale" or "fascism scale." Cubans, she said, generally rank high in their authoritarian attitudes, but members of the ultra-rightist Cuban Nationalist Movement and other similar groups she interviewed in the early 1960s "went right off the scale." Most of them, she explained, came from the lower middle class in old Cuba. Through the revolution, they were victimized by the upper classes and a political culture that places a premium on being white.

Maria orders tostadas in a tiny luncheonette. "Their world here is an alien and disconcerting place that confers on them little or no power and social status," she continues. "These men and women are easy prey for the movements and intelligence agencies in a society slowly but systematically moving politically to the right and in the process of socio-economic disintegration."

She hesitates, sipping coffee and looking out to the sidewalk. "They are today's and tomorrow's bomb-throwers, Watergate plumbbers, mercenaries—and most important," she taps a finger on the table, "today's and tomorrow's reactionary electorate."

She pays the bill and walks out onto the sidewalk, staring down Bergenline Avenue for a moment as she watches Eulalio Negrin park his car, get out, and wave happily toward us. Seven years before he went to Havana as part of the Committee of 75 to work for closer U.S.-Cuba ties, Negrin had campaigned for Richard Nixon. And only three months after he waved at us, he was murdered by Omega 7.

Manuel de Dios is sitting at his desk in the newsroom of *El Diario La Prensa* on Hudson Street with a brittle smile on his face and a piece of paper in front of him. In October, 1978, de Dios, himself a Cuban refugee, published an interview with Fidel Castro which led to the formation of the Committee of 75 and its visit to Cuba. For most of the past three years, de Dios has been tracking Omega 7. On his desk this snowy night is Omega 7's latest handiwork, a clipping of a story about Negrin's death torn from another paper, a warning crudely etched with green magic marker across the top: "Be careful. You're next." It's signed: "Omega 7."

We walk to a local bar. "I get used to it," he says, trudging along the sidewalk, head against the wind, "but my wife is very upset with the calls late at night."

Some members of the Committee of 75 have taken flight, changed their telephone numbers, or are moving from place to place.

I called Manuel Gomez, a member of the Committee of 75.

"Two FBI agents came to my house on December 14," he says. "They came to warn me my name was on somebody's hit list. They said it wasn't concrete, they'd picked it up on the street. I asked for protection. They said, 'Talk to the New York Police Department.' I asked for a gun permit. They said, 'Talk to the New York City Police Department.' I said, 'What am I to do in the meantime?' They said, 'Be careful.' I asked about Negrin. They said it's still a local matter. I mean . . ."