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Terrorists' private banker

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There is a new reality in the world. Even some states that until very recently were clear enemies of the United States have now agreed to cooperate in the global war on international terrorism. But the Cuban dictatorship has made another choice: It continues to provide safe harbor for terrorists and insists upon serving as the world's primary money-launderer for international terrorism. Fidel Castro doesn't just provide his "revolutionary" banks for Puerto Rican FALN terrorists like those who took their stolen millions from the United States to Cuba. Laundering money for drug-dealers, terrorists and corrupt politicians has become Mr. Castro's most profitable businesses.

While some continue to deny Mr. Castro's connections to international terrorism, let us briefly review some public facts. In May, the Cuban dictator visited Syria, Iran and Libya. In Iran, Mr. Castro declared that "together Iran and Cuba will bring the United States to its knees." Later, in July, Mr. Castro marked the anniversary of his political movement by hosting the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader and leading hard-liner. On Aug. 29, an anonymous letter to Radio Cayman alleged that three Afghan nationals who had recently arrived in Grand Cayman from Cuba were "agents of Osama bin Laden . . . and are organizing a major terrorist attack against the U.S. via airlines." The letter was ignored until the September 11 attacks. The three Afghan nationals, who according to UPI had \$2 million in cash in their possession, were then detained by Cayman authorities.

Three suspected IRA terrorists were arrested on Aug. 11 in Bogota by Colombian police. The terrorists were apparently providing specialized bomb-making expertise to the Colombian FARC. According to the BBC and the Irish Times, one of the three arrested, Nial Connolly, has been the official IRA representative in Cuba since 1996, was training at several Cuban terrorist camps, and was paid by Mr. Castro. Castro agents were middlemen between the IRA and the Colombian FARC which, according to the State Department, has "a permanent presence" in Cuba.

The Castro dictatorship also maintains what it calls "fraternal, sustained and increasingly deep" ties with the Basque ETA terrorist organization. Mr. Castro even refused to sign an international declaration issued by the November 2000 Ibero-American Summit condemning ETA terrorism. The only case of direct state terrorism against Americans in recent history occurred on Feb. 24, 1996, when Mr. Castro ordered the shooting down by his air force and assumed personal responsibility for the murder of three unarmed American citizens and another U.S. resident over the Florida Straits.

There is a litany of evidence incriminating Mr. Castro. More than 90 U.S. felony fugitives wanted by the FBI for hijacking, murder, armed bank robbery, the sale of explosives to Libya and kidnaping, remain in Cuba. An Office of Technology Assessment report entitled "Technologies Underlying Weapons of Mass Destruction" identified Cuba as one of 17 states possessing bioweapons. In 1998, 10 Cuban spies in South Florida who were trying to penetrate U.S. military installations were arrested and subsequently convicted, including one of them for conspiracy to murder U.S. citizens. In 1999, Dr. Ken Alibek, a former Soviet army colonel and deputy chief of Soviet bioweapons development, declared that the Castro regime "has produced biological weapons since 1991."

In February 2000, the FBI arrested a high-ranking U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service officer in Miami for conspiracy to spy for the Castro regime. On March 4, 2000, the Associated Press reported that Cubans were present at al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. In October 2000, Carlos Lage, a senior official of the Castro dictatorship, traveled to Iran to inaugurate a biotechnical research and development facility. In February 2001 before the Senate Intelligence Committee, Adm. Tom Wilson, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, confirmed that "Cuban armed forces can initiate an information warfare or computer network attack" that could "disrupt our military" and that "their

involved in the 1996 shutdown of two small aircraft over the straits of Florida charge the Cuban DGI with conducting espionage against U.S. military and civil aviation through a network of some 300 agents operating across the continent.

Exchanges between bin Laden's al-Qaeda network and Cuban intelligence also could involve the provision of weaponized biological strains produced by Cuba's extensive chemical/biological warfare facilities exposed by Insight three years ago (see "Fidel Castro's Deadly Secret," July 20, 1998). Kenneth Alibek, who developed anthrax as deputy director of the Soviet biological warfare Biopreperat program, says in his book *Biohazard*, published last year, that Castro has since been running an advanced biological-weapons program administered by scientists trained in Moscow in the 1990s.

Reports smuggled out by Cuban dissident scientists confirm that Castro's research has concentrated on developing undetectable methods of spreading deadly bacteria, including the use of contaminated bird flocks. Cuba, meanwhile, has been engaging in scientific exchanges with Iraq, say these scientists. A year ago, Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage opened a biotechnological research-and-development plant in Iran, paving the way for Castro's visit to that country last May.

Atta's dealings with the DGI are not the only contacts reported between Cuba's military intelligence and al-Qaeda. The Associated Press reported on March 4, 2000, that a young Afghani who trained at a camp run by bin Laden in northeast Afghanistan says he saw advisers there from Chechnya, Sudan, Libya, Iran, North Korea and Cuba. Some of these foreigners, he said, had brought biological/chemical weapons, which were stored in caves.

Three Afghani nationals and suspected al-Qaeda members caught trying to deposit \$2 million in a bank in the Cayman Islands last August were found to have entered the British colony on a commercial flight from nearby Cuba using false Pakistani passports. British authorities who arrested the three men believe that they were handling drug proceeds laundered in Havana.

Colombia's former national police chief, Gen. Rosso José Serrano, maintains that Cuba also has facilitated contacts between radical Muslim militants and leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas. Serrano says that about 100 Afghanis have entered Colombia during the last decade to introduce cultivation of heroin poppies in guerrilla-held areas. An Egyptian terrorist belonging to al-Gamal al-Islamiya — who was wanted in connection with the 1997 massacre of 80 Western tourists near Cairo — entered Colombia illegally in 1998 to hold talks with FARC and was arrested and turned over to U.S. authorities.

Cuban biological/chemical-warfare technology also has been detected in Colombia. A FARC bomb that burned out the lungs of

that instead the listening post would be closed. Influential elements in Moscow fear that the rogue use of Cuban spy facilities could drag Russia into an unwanted confrontation with Washington. According to Cuban exile Ernesto Betancourt, some Russian officials were highly disturbed by a 1999 incident recorded by the Federal Communications Commission in which Cuban electronic-warfare specialists penetrated New York's air-traffic-control system by simulating U.S. Air Force flight codes. The signals, which seriously threatened to disrupt air traffic, were traced to a 1,500 kilowatt transmitter operating west of Havana.

As Russia and the United States try to close ranks against the common threat posed by Muslim terrorist networks in Central Asia, say intelligence insiders, Castro's growing ties with radical Islamic movements have become a source of worry for both governments. During his recent tour of Syria, Libya, Iran, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Malaysia, the Cuban dictator told a cheering crowd of Muslim students at the University of Tehran, "Together we will bring America to its knees."

Agence France-Presse reported that Castro, in an apocalyptic speech on May 10, told his Muslim audience in Iran: "America is weak. I have studied its weaknesses from very close by. I tell you, the imperialist king will finally fall." Following the Sept. 11 attacks, Castro followed the lead of hard-line Muslim leaders by blaming "this tragedy" on "the terrorist policies of the United States."

There are signs that Castro's new alignment with fundamentalist Islam could go beyond crowd-pleasing declarations. U.S. law-enforcement agencies have indications that Cuba may have assisted the logistics and planning for the latest wave of terrorist attacks. Insight has learned that al-Qaeda ringleader Mohammed Atta, who organized the Sept. 11 attacks and crashed a hijacked airliner into one of the twin towers of the World Trade Center, may have met secretly with Cuban undercover agents shortly after his arrival in the United States last year. The Czech government has confirmed that Atta similarly had met with Iraqi intelligence officers in Prague.

Federal investigators believe that Castro had been exploiting the international controversy unleashed by the Elian Gonzalez case to flood the United States with intelligence agents — including high-level officials of Cuba's biological-warfare program who allegedly spoke with Atta at a Miami motel. Federal investigators suspect that Atta's Cuban contact was a top defense-ministry officer with personal ties to Castro who entered the United States under cover of assignment to a Cuban-government delegation escorting Elian's two grandmothers, who supposedly were coming to mediate the custody battle.

"Information which Atta's al-Qaeda cells readily possessed on flight schools, airport security and airline flight patterns only could have been obtained through an intelligence infrastructure already in place," says a federal law-enforcement official. FBI affidavits filed in connection with the roundup of a Cuban spy ring

an entire police garrison in the Colombian town of San Adolfo last September contained chlorine-based poison gas, according to a lab analysis of the device. Some 20 Cuban military advisers currently are operating with FARC, according to Colombian army intelligence. It also has intercepted guerrilla radio communications in which FARC's military commander, Jorge Briceno, alias "Mono Jojoy," talks about forming an "anti-imperialist front" to launch terrorist attacks against targets in the United States. "To take away their economic resources wherever they may be, reach into North America and get to their own territory," says Briceno, "to make them feel the pain which they have inflicted on others."

In September, meanwhile, as Montes frantically transmitted information to her DGI spymasters through Cuba's mission to the United Nations, according to an FBI affidavit, Castro was ordering a military alert in Cuba and calling up reserves. A CIA psychiatric profiler who has studied Castro's personality believes that the Cuban dictator was displaying "geriatric overexertion." But top intelligence specialists tell Insight that Castro may have had reasons to fear a possible U.S. retaliation when President George W. Bush declared his war on terrorism.

"Tours through radical Islamic states by Castro and his close Venezuelan ally, President Hugo Chavez, in the months prior to the September attacks indicate some level of complicity or knowledge of what was going to happen," says Lisette Bustamante, a former aide to Castro who currently works on the Spanish daily newspaper La Razon.

Not only were statements by both leaders in their Middle Eastern trips laced with violent anti-American rhetoric, Bustamante points out, but Chavez quite candidly told reporters that his talks with Saddam Hussein and heads of other oil-producing states involved the creation of a "new anti-imperialist axis" against Western industrialized economies.

It was just the sort of anti-American blather that tends to excite the faithful remnant of the old-guard communists, say U.S. intelligence analysts. Mysterious predictions about some catastrophic event in the United States began to circulate in the electronic traffic and even were voiced by Russia's Pravda on Aug. 1 under the headline, "The Dollar and the U.S. Will Fall." Based on interviews with the Malaysian ambassador to Moscow and a group of Russian economists, the report was taken seriously enough for members of Russia's parliament, the Duma, to advise Russian citizens to cash out dollars. An adviser to the Duma's Commission on Economic Politics, Tatyana Koryagina, even specified late August or early September as the likely time for an attack on the United States that would lead to its economic collapse.

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