

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

September 2001

Economy

September 30: Out of more than 5 600 internal audits carried out in the island 38% were rated either as "unsatisfactory" or "poor" according to the Ministry of Auditing and Control (MAC) (Juventud Rebelde, 21/11/01)

Security

September 17: President Vladimir Putin announces that Russia will close its major Electronic Radar Station in Lourdes, Cuba. It will save the Russian military \$200 million a year. The base, built by the Soviet Union in 1964, continues to house an estimated 1,500 military personnel, and its role as a significant electronic intelligence center has been a major point of contention with the United States in recent years. Cuba releases an official declaration in which it is stated that the withdrawal of the Electronic Radar in Lourdes, would be a message and a concession to the government of the United States, and adds that it "would constitute a grave threat to Cuba's security, and therefore we were not in agreement with its closure". (The Washington Post, 17/10/01, Granma, 18/9/01)

September 21: The Defense Intelligence Agency's senior analyst for matters involving Cuba is arrested at her office and accused of providing classified information about military exercises and other sensitive operations to the Cuban government. Federal prosecutors say Ana Belen Montes, 44, of Northwest Washington, was working for the Cuban intelligence service while on the U.S. government payroll. The FBI, which said had been tailing Montes for months, surprised her at work at Bolling Air Force Base and charged her with conspiracy to deliver U.S. national defense information to Cuba. (The Washington Post, 22/9/01)

Terrorism

September 11: In reply to the press on the terrorist attacks on the United States minutes before, the Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs, Felipe Pérez Roque, said that his country has historically condemned and opposed terrorism regardless of where it originates and of where it's carried out. He also added that Cuba has indicated to regional aviation control authorities its willingness to lend its airports for the aircrafts still in the air to use given the present situation of US airspace. As to Cuba's connection with the attacks he said: "I don't think we have to refer to that and I hope no one would entertain such a nonsense". A few hours after the terrorist attack Cuba issued an official declaration stating that: "The Government of the Republic of Cuba has learned with grief and sadness of the violent surprise attacks carried out this morning against civilian and official facilities in the cities of New York and Washington, which have caused numerous deaths". It also adds: "Both for historical reasons and ethical principles, the Government of our country strongly repudiates and condemns the attacks against the aforementioned facilities and hereby expresses its most heartfelt sympathies to the American people for the painful, unjustifiable loss of human lives resulting from these attacks"(...) "In this bitter hour for all Americans, our people express their solidarity with the American people and their full willingness to cooperate, to the extent of their modest possibilities, with the health care institutions and any other medical or humanitarian organization in that country in the treatment, care and rehabilitation of the victims of this morning's events." (Cubavisión, 12/9/01)

September 12: At the inauguration of the school Salvador Allende, in Havana, Fidel Castro stated that September 11 was a day of tragedy for the US, and that Cuba has never felt hatred toward the American people. He added: "we have felt pain and sorrow with the American people". Castro also stated that: "it is important to know what will be the reaction of the US Government. Possibly the days to come will be dangerous for the world, and I do not mean Cuba. Cuba is the most peaceful country in the world." (Granma, 13/9/01)

September 15: During a weekly rally normally reserved to criticize the United States, the Cuban government condemns terrorism and repeats its support of the American people after the September 11 attacks. Saturday's rally was given the theme: "Our solidarity with the American people during the national tragedy they are living through." Defense Minister Raúl Castro, presided over the gathering in Majibacoa, a small town 410 miles east of Havana. (Associated Press, 17/9/01)

September 19: Cuba issues a second official statement on the world situation after September 11 which expresses its opposition to war: "From the beginning Cuba has made it known that in today's world no problem can be solved with the use of force and that, in order to fight terrorism, it was necessary to build an awareness and a universal union capable of definitely eradicating this and other scourges and tragedies that put in jeopardy the very survival of the human specie." (...) "Everything is not lost yet. In Afghanistan the ulemas --religious leaders of a traditionally combative and brave people-- are meeting to adopt fundamental decisions. They have already said that they will not oppose the application of justice and the relevant procedures if those accused, living in their country, are really guilty. They have simply asked for evidence, and for guarantees of impartiality and equity in the process, something that the United Nations could perfectly ensure, with full support from the international community. If such evidence exists, as the leaders of the U.S. government have categorically affirmed, and the religious leaders are not asked to override the deepest convictions of their faith, which they are known to defend with their own lives, then an alternative to war could be worked out. They would not sacrifice their people uselessly if their ethically unquestionable request was taken into account. In fact, bloodshed could be avoided and this could become the first great step towards a world without terrorism or unpunished crimes: a true world association for peace and justice could emerge and the American people would earn enormous prestige and respect. Cuba would resolutely support such a solution." (Granma, 20/9/01)

September 22: In a speech, at a public rally in San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba, Fidel Castro says about September 11 attack: "It was an enormous error, a huge injustice and a great crime whomever they are who organized or are responsible for such action". "However, the tragedy should not be used to recklessly start a war that could actually unleash an endless carnage of innocent people and all of this on behalf of justice and under the peculiar and bizarre name of Infinite Justice." "After the shock and sincere sorrow felt by every people on Earth for the atrocious and insane terrorist attack that targeted the American people, the most extremist ideologists and the most belligerent hawks, already set in privileged power positions, have taken command of the most powerful country in the world". Castro recited several passages from President Bush's address to Congress on October 18, and said Bush's call to arms could turn into a "struggle against ghosts they don't know where to find -- if they exist or not". "When I think about the real or imagined parties involved that bizarre holy war that is about to begin, I find it difficult to make a distinction about where fanaticism is stronger." And reiterated: "Whatever happens, the territory of Cuba will never be used for terrorist actions against the American people." (Cuban Interest Section, Washington D.C.)

September 22: An argument between Cuban exiles groups in Miami and other US organizations has arisen as to the links between the Cuban government and international terrorism. The Cuban American National Foundation, Congresswoman, Ileana Ross-Lehtinen and academic Jaime Suchlicki claim that Cuba kept links with the organization of Osama Bin Laden as well as other terrorists organizations. However, moderate sectors of the exile Cuban community disagree.

Cuba has "only two choices and will opt, just as China did, to cooperate in the antiterrorist war", predicts the Coordinator of the Cuban Committee for Democracy. Likewise, Wayne Smith, former Head of the US Interests Section in Havana and member of the Washington-based Center for International Policy, argues that there is no reason at present to consider Cuba a terrorist state. (El Nuevo Herald, 09/25/01)

September 29: President Fidel Castro states that "a peaceful solution is still possible," referring to the United States' announced military response against Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks. "Some speak of using nuclear weapons as casually as if they were talking about drinking a glass of water; others affirm that they will use guerrilla warfare tactics with special forces; there are many others who are speaking more rationally and with more common sense. The idea of purely bellicose formulas has been planted in the minds of many citizens, with no thought about the loss of U.S. lives." (...) "We are and we will always be against terrorism and against war. Nothing that happens could make us stray from that position," he said before about 100 000 persons at a rally in Ciego de Avila, about 426 kilometers from Havana. (Granma International, 29/9/01)

US-Cuba Relations

September 10: The Cuban Minister of Justice, Roberto Díaz Sotolongo, announces invitation to the US Drugs Enforcement Agency (DEA), to attend the Regional Conference on Drug Control in the Caribbean to be held November 9-10, in Havana. (El Nuevo Herald, 09/11/01)

September 19: Aimée Hernández, spokeswoman of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Relations, confirmed having held diplomatic contacts with the United States. In a written reply to questions from the press she said: "such contacts have been limited to specific issues". Hernández also said that this exchange of information dealt with "individuals involved in the migrant smuggling trade, possible attempts to use our territory for terrorist activities against the United States or other countries, and other issues to fight illegal activities in the present international situation". (El Nuevo Herald, 09/20/01)