

commentary

from other pens...

Cuban exiles seek indictment of Castro

By George Gedda

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The Cuban-American Nation Foundation is thinking big.

The nation's premier anti-Castro group wants the Bush administration to convene a grand jury to determine whether murder indictments should be handed down against President Fidel Castro in the shooting down of two Miami-based planes north of Cuba in February 1996.

The attack by MiG jet fighters killed four Cuban-Americans, three of whom were American citizens. Cuba insisted the planes were shot down over Cuban air space but independent investigators sided with the U.S. view that the attack happened in international air space.

Official discussions have been held on the indictment issue, and the Foundation appears to have the administration's ear.

"This is a simple matter of justice," says Dennis Hays, a Foundation vice president. "We look to the administration to act appropriately."

Attorney General John Ashcroft discussed the issue this week during a luncheon meeting in Miami with Cuban-American leaders, who urged that Castro be indicted. Ashcroft asked a number of questions during the meeting but participants said he remained noncommittal.

The Foundation's quest for an indictment appears to be a long shot. Government officials and other experts say the sovereign immunity of heads of state is a well-established principle.

If the United States indicts Castro, it would set a precedent that could be used to indict American presidents. One government official known for his strong anti-Castro views said any attempt to indict Castro would be a serious mistake.

Wayne Smith, a former career diplomat who supports a return to normal relations with Cuba, said it would be very difficult to indict Castro. Without defending the 1996 attack, he noted the Cuban-American fliers had been warned to keep their distance from the island.

Smith added, "There is no tape of Castro giving the order to fire."

It is hard to overestimate the Foundation's influence here these days. Cuban-American votes for George W. Bush in Florida last fall contributed to Al Gore's defeat in the election. With Cuban-American support, Bush chose Cuban-born Otto Reich to head the State Department's Latin America bureau, he faces a tough Senate confirmation fight.

The recent trial in Miami of five Cuban agents has given the Foundation encouragement that an indictment of Castro may be within reach. All were convicted on spy charges.

One of the five, Gerardo Hernandez, faces up to life in prison for his role in the deaths of the Cuban-American fliers.

Prosecutors said Hernandez knew about the alleged plot because he warned two agents who infiltrated the group not to fly during a four-day period that encompassed the fatal flights.

Former U.S. Attorney Kendall Coffey, a Democrat, told The Miami Herald that Hernandez' conviction "makes it less unthinkable" that a South Florida grand jury may someday return a Castro indictment.

Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., says justice in the deaths of the Cuban-American fliers will not be done "unless the criminal conspiracy is traced up the chain of command to its ultimate source. This chain almost certainly leads to Fidel Castro."

Cuba sees itself as the victim of aggression emanating from South Florida. In a letter published last week in the Cuban media, the convicted Cubans said their mission was not to harm Americans but to expose alleged terrorist plans by Cuban-Americans against the island.

Cuban-American anti-Castro groups "want to continue to update a long-standing history of invasions, sabotages, biological aggressions and other similar actions," the five said.

Without referring to the four dead Cuban-Americans, the letter said 3,478 people had died over the years as a result of these "aggressions."

EDITOR'S NOTE — George Gedda has covered foreign affairs for The Associated Press since 1968.



What's a good Catholic to do?

Last week, the nation's Roman Catholic bishops voted to forbid its Catholic-affiliated hospitals from performing tubal ligations and vasectomies. They declared sterilizations to be "intrinsically evil."

The directive would also prevent rape victims from receiving the morning-after pill, unless tests confirmed that fertilization had not yet taken place. In other words, the hospital will give her the pill only if she doesn't need it.

(Also at the conference, the bishops declined to endorse the practice of holding hands during the Lord's Prayer. One bishop was concerned about "inappropriate touching.")

These decisions follow up on the Vatican's reaffirmation last December, on the eve of World AIDS Day, that the Church was opposed to the use of condoms even to check the spread of AIDS.

One can't help but wonder if the Catholic Church has been taken over by sociological researchers conducting a massive experiment on faith. They seem to be testing how far good Catholics can be pushed before they run screaming into the nearest Unitarian service.

I grew up Catholic. My parents are still Catholics. My aunt is a Catholic nun. I love the ritual of the Mass, the familiarity of the prayers. But to follow Catholic doctrine in today's world demands a



joan ryan

• commentary

suspension of common sense that surely challenges even the most devout followers.

I wanted to understand the basis on which the bishops had come to their decision about sterilization. So I read through the "Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, Fourth Edition, National Conference of Bishops." I found few references to the Bible but plenty to Encyclical Letters issued by various infallible popes, the same folks who declared the Crusades were God's will and the sun orbited Earth.

"It is necessary that each and every marriage act remain ordered per se to the procreation of human life," the bishops' document says. Each and every.

Thus, they are opposed to sterilization and all artificial birth control. Yet it says "natural" birth control, such as the rhythm method, is moral. I don't get the logic. If each and every marriage act remains ordered to the creation of human life, then why is it OK to have sex when you purposely have timed

it so you do not procreate?

The bishops refer frequently in the document to what is and is not "consistent with human dignity." I am not clear on how reducing the poor in Africa and other developing countries to AIDS-ridden, scavenging creatures breeding themselves into extinction is consistent with human dignity. I am not clear on how ignoring the needs of a mother of six who is already at the breaking point, financially and emotionally, is consistent with human dignity.

"The laws of Christ are difficult to accept," a top Vatican official said recently, "and there is compassion and understanding for those who are weak, but no exceptions to moral laws can be made."

These aren't the laws of Christ. Christ walked among the people. He witnessed their suffering up close, not from a palace in Rome. These "moral laws" are the laws of men who believe they speak for Christ, and Catholics are supposed to accept their interpretation without question.

At what point will a good Catholic's faith in the interpreters give way to the interpreter within, the one that understands that compassion and dignity are not rooted in man-made rules but in God-given conscience?

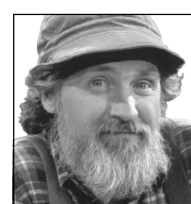
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Trolling for trouble

You see the ads on television with some Yuppie weenie in a high-priced Statusmobile taking a corner in a four-wheel drift at 130 mph. You wonder who'd be dumb enough to try that until you hit the highway and find out the answer. They're dippy-doodling through traffic at twice the speed of sense and turning your relaxing drive into a teeth grinder. What these goofs are more or less saying is "Outta my way sucker, and let the big fish through." Of course, the natural response is to teach them a lesson by driving like an idiot too, but think about it. At that speed, the road's going to go by pretty fast when you look down through the floorboards of your K-car. Instead stay calm and think about the truth. That guy that just blasted past you is making payments on a \$60,000 car, and he needs to get to work early so he'll get a promotion so next year he can make payments on an \$80,000 car. That's treading water in a saucepan: You won't drown, but you're still cooked. You, on the other hand, have the sweet life. If you're late for work, someone will cover for you. And there's no promotion coming your way, so you don't need to risk your life. Just slow down, turn up the radio if it works, and don't let that big fish in the small car bother you. Right now he's just the one who got away. But in the long run, you're the one who got away.

THE EXCITEMENT NEVER ENDS

When we were teen-agers, we lived for excitement. We drove the family car into the swimming pool ... tied the cat to the dog ... hid granny's den-



red green

• north of forty

tures in dad's pants pocket. It's lucky we stayed out of jail long enough to grow up. But now that we're middle aged, we're not really looking for excitement. We're married now, and if something exciting happens it means we have to come up with a really good lie, and we don't have a good enough memory to pull it off. You see, there are two kinds of excitement — good excitement and bad excitement. Good excitement is for young people at a drive-in. Bad excitement is for guys like us in the form of finding most of your hair in the sink trap or clipping your fingernails with a table saw or assuming that the exotic dancer is smiling at you. So avoid excitement. Your heart can't take it. And neither can your wallet.

MORE EXPECTED LIFE LESSONS

Here are few more life lessons that have come as a total surprise to me:

- It's important how your car smells.
- Exploding cakes are not universally appreciated.
- Strippers generally have no sense of humor.
- A person who's already had four drinks needs

independent advice before having another one.

— Apologies don't cover behavior that creates permanent change.

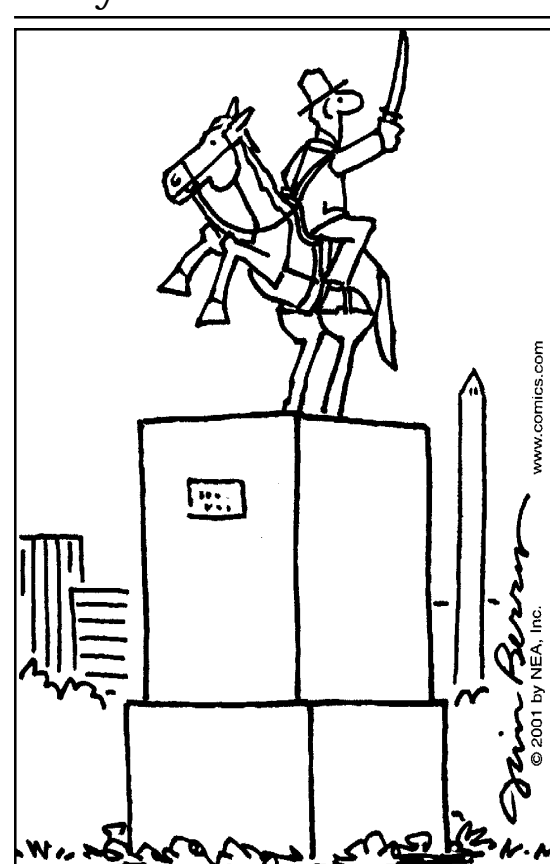
LIVING IN THE PRESENT

I have a special occasion coming up where I have to pick up a gift for my wife and, based on past experience, this is just one more opportunity to fail. It's not that my wife has everything she needs. It's more that I am totally ignorant of what's missing in her life, and she feels that divulging any hints invalidates the gift. That communication gap is why she now has a hydraulic lipstick applicator and a see-through nightie with happy faces on it, both unused. And I can't go the dinner and flowers route. It'll just remind her of the guys she used to date before she met me. So I'm sitting here trying to remember what she's said to me over the past few weeks in case there was a hint in there somewhere. I'm pathetic. My only hope is that she knows that and has already factored it into her expectation level.

QUOTE OF THE DAY: "A man's life is in three stages — youth, middle age, and 'you look good.'" — Red Green

Red Green is the star of "The Red Green Show," a television series seen in the U.S. on PBS and in Canada on the CBC Network, and the author of "The Red Green Book" and "Red Green Talks Cars: A Love Story."

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The Goodland Daily News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

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Published daily except Saturday and Sunday and the day observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Daily News, 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: daily@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: gdnav@nwkansas.com

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$22; six months, \$38; 12 months, \$72. By mail in Kansas, Colorado: three months, \$28; six months, \$50; 12 months, \$95. (All tax included.) Out of area, weekly mailing of five issues: three months, \$25; six months, \$40; 12 months, \$75.

Incorporating:

The Sherman County Herald
Founded by Thomas McCants
1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR
Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey
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Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company