

# The US indictment of Raúl Castro and the record of CIA terror against Cuba

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On May 20—marking 124 years since the US ended its military occupation of the island and the Cuban Republic was formally proclaimed in 1902—the Trump administration delivered its most naked threat yet against the island.

The U.S. Justice Department unsealed an indictment on murder and conspiracy charges against Raúl Castro, 94, in connection with the 1996 downing of two aircraft operated by the Miami-based exile group Brothers to the Rescue.

Retired from public office for nearly a decade, Castro previously served as Cuba's president and leader of its ruling party. He was one of the *comandantes* of the guerrilla army led by his brother Fidel that came to power in 1959.

Hours before the indictment was announced, Secretary of State Marco Rubio posted a Spanish-language video addressed directly to the Cuban people, demanding regime change and advocating the policy of recolonization that Washington is pursuing across Latin America.

The unsealing of the indictment in Miami Wednesday resembled less a legal proceeding than a campaign rally with Washington's counterrevolutionary agents gathered to cheer for Donald Trump and applaud the prospect of direct US military intervention against Cuba.

Amid this right-wing celebration, one question was noticeably ignored: Who will be held accountable for the 65 years of unrestrained US violence, killings and terror against Cuba?

The indictment against Raúl Castro is an abominable act of political propaganda to justify a planned military aggression against an impoverished nation of less than 10 million people.

The three-decade-old incident referred to in the indictment is the February 24, 1996 shutdown of two Brothers to the Rescue planes over the Straits of Florida, which has been systematically misrepresented by every US administration since Bill Clinton's. The Clinton administration, the Republican Party and the corporate media all denounced it as "cold-blooded murder," invoking international statutes barring the use of military force against civil aircraft. The CIA insisted that José Basulto, the pilot of the plane that escaped, and the others were not paid US intelligence agents.

None of this was true. The Cuban Embassy in the United States responded to the indictment by recalling that Cuba had formally denounced more than 25 territorial violations by Brothers to the Rescue between 1994 and 1996—protests that Washington systematically ignored.

Far from being a humanitarian organization, Brothers to the Rescue used its aircraft to conduct repeated hostile overflights of Cuban territory, on occasion buzzing Havana and dropping leaflets calling on Cubans to rise up against the government. Basulto, himself a veteran of the CIA-organized Bay of Pigs invasion, had bragged of being trained in terror techniques at the U.S. Army School of the Americas in Panama. He participated in the shelling of a Havana hotel from a boat and later provided CIA-directed support to the Contra terrorist movement in Nicaragua.

His group's activities were a calculated provocation, designed to trigger a US military attack on Cuba. The shutdown was an act of self-defense against a sustained, US-backed campaign of aggression.

The Clinton administration did not retaliate militarily, but it reversed its opposition to the Helms-Burton bill, which imposed punishing new sanctions against foreign corporations doing business in Cuba and prohibited any lifting of the US embargo.

## The indictment as a pretext for war

Now, 30 years later, the Trump administration reaches back to this manufactured incident to indict Castro, with boundless cynicism. The indictment follows precisely the template used against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, indicted on fraudulent narco-terrorism charges before being abducted in the January 3 US military assault on Caracas.

The indictment was prepared by a working group set up in March by U.S. Attorney Jason Reding Quiñones in the Southern District of Florida to pursue cases broadly against Cuban officials. The son of Cuban refugees, Reding was the first prosecutor named in Trump's second term following a long career in the U.S. Army and Air Force.

Not only was he promoted to reserve colonel last month, but he currently serves as "senior reserve legal adviser" for the U.S. Central Command on the war crimes being conducted by the US and Israel across the Middle East, including in the war against Iran.

The indictment must be seen alongside the Trump administration's broader manufacturing of a case for war that has been going on for months. An *Axios* report recently claimed, on the basis of unnamed White House officials citing classified intelligence, that Cuba had acquired more than 300 drones from Russia and Iran and had been "discussing plans" to attack the US military base at Guantánamo Bay, US naval vessels and Key West, Florida.

The Cuban Embassy exposed the report's own internal absurdity: "Axios fabricates a 'drone threat,' only to confess paragraphs later: 'US officials don't believe Cuba is actively planning to attack.'" The Cuban government added that "Cuba is the country under attack," referring to the US energy embargo imposed in January, threatening punitive tariffs against any country that sells Cuba oil, that has left the island's electric grid in a state of collapse.

## The record of US terrorism and aggression against Cuba

May 20 would be an appropriate date to indict those responsible for one

of the most sustained and ruthless campaigns of terrorism in modern history: that of US imperialism against Cuba.

The date marks the proclamation of the Cuban Republic in 1902 following the end of the Spanish-American War, when the US took possession of the Spanish colonies of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines.

U.S. Marines then occupied the island between 1917 and 1923, suppressing strikes and protecting US corporate interests.

The formal end of the US military occupation was accompanied by the imposition of the Platt Amendment, granting Washington the unrestricted “right” to intervene militarily in Cuban affairs whenever it saw fit. The Fidel Castro government removed May 20 from the official calendar, a recognition that the “independence” of 1902 was a colonial arrangement in republican dress.

The 65 years of uninterrupted US terror against Cuba, like the current escalating drive for regime change, were aimed at eliminating every obstacle to the restoration of the kind of relationship that prevailed under the Platt Amendment and the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista before 1959. The aim is to restore the colonial-style relations that allowed US banks and corporations to control Cuba’s land, utilities, railroads and the sugar industry, while giving the Mafia free rein to run the brothels and casinos frequented by US politicians and businessmen. Batista killed 20,000 people to maintain that order.

When Fidel Castro overthrew Fulgencio Batista’s US-backed dictatorship in 1959, Washington’s response was immediate. Declassified CIA documents confirm that US covert operations against Cuba began before Castro had even aligned with the Soviet Union—meaning the attacks had less to do with Cold War ideology than defending US corporate plunder of the island.

The record of subsequent US terrorism is among the most extensively documented in modern history, starting with the March 1960 bombing of *La Coubre*, a French ship carrying arms Cuba had been forced to purchase from Europe, after Washington refused to sell weapons. The bombs were deliberately timed to detonate in succession, so that rescue workers responding to the first explosion would be caught by the second. Over 100 people died; hundreds more were wounded.

The largest intervention was the April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion with a CIA-organized and financed force of approximately 1,400 Cuban exile mercenaries. Cuba defeated it in the greatest US military debacle in the region, but not before 176 were killed and over 300 wounded. Afterwards, the Joint Chiefs of Staff drafted Operation Northwoods in March 1962—a proposal, since declassified, to stage false-flag terrorist bombings in US cities and hijackings of US planes to provide pretexts for a US military assault on Cuba.

The 1975 Church Committee substantiated eight CIA attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro between 1960 and 1965, documenting the use of exploding seashells, toxic cigars, poison pens and collaboration with Mafia figures. Cuban counterintelligence has documented 638 separate assassination schemes in total.

In a particularly sinister plot, Cuba attributes the 1971 African swine fever outbreak and the 1981 dengue hemorrhagic fever epidemic, which killed 158 people including 101 children, to deliberate US-linked introduction.

Documented tallies assembled from Cuban government records and first-person testimonies—compiled by researchers, including Keith Bolender, and extensively cross-referenced against individual incidents in the declassified record—put the death toll of US-directed or US-linked terrorism against Cuba since 1959 at more than 3,000 killed and nearly 2,100 injured.

Not one perpetrator of these crimes has been held criminally responsible by the US government. The networks that trained, organized, financed and shielded them from prosecution were built and defended by the CIA and

the US state as a whole.

The career of Luis Posada Carriles stands as the clearest case. Born in Cuba and trained by the CIA at Fort Benning, Georgia, Posada helped organize the Bay of Pigs invasion and subsequently became one of the most prolific terrorists in the history of the Western Hemisphere, operating for decades with the knowledge, protection and at times the active direction of US intelligence. He was a central organizer of the 1976 bombing of Cubana Airlines Flight 455, the deadliest act of aviation terrorism in the Americas prior to September 11, 2001, which killed all 73 passengers aboard, including the entire Cuban national junior fencing team.

Venezuela, where the 1976 bombing was planned and where Posada had been a naturalized citizen, arrested him in connection with the attack and held him for years before he escaped from prison in 1985 while still awaiting trial.

He organized the 1997 Havana hotel bombing campaign that killed Italian tourist Fabio Di Celmo and, in November 2000, was arrested in Panama City with 200 pounds of explosives in a plot against Fidel Castro. He was pardoned by outgoing Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso in 2004 under intense US pressure.

Under sustained international pressure, the Bush administration arrested Posada but refused extradition requests from Venezuela and Cuba. José Pertierra, the Washington attorney representing Venezuela’s interests, noted with mordant irony: “The only evidence I have seen of torture in Cuba comes from the US military base at Guantánamo Bay.”

The only charge ultimately presented by the US government against Posada was for perjury: lying to immigration officials about his role in the Havana hotel bombings during a naturalization hearing. In 2011, a federal jury in El Paso acquitted him even of that. Posada Carriles died in 2018 at the age of 90, peacefully, in a veterans’ care home in Florida.

Now, with this record entirely unexamined, the same government announces a criminal indictment against Raúl Castro for ordering the interception of aircraft operated by a network headed by one of Posadas’ closest collaborators.

What is unfolding against Cuba is not an aberration. It is the concentrated expression of a broader drive by US imperialism to destroy every challenge to its global hegemony—the same drive that produced the destruction of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria, the genocide in Gaza, the siege of Iran and the seizure of Venezuela’s Maduro.

On May 14, the Cuban government received CIA Director John Ratcliffe in Havana, where the latter demanded “fundamental changes” in a meeting with Raúl Guillermo “Raulito” Rodríguez Castro, the former president’s grandson, and Interior Ministry officials. The meeting signals that the nationalist strategy has arrived at its historical dead end: The Castroite leadership that survived six decades of CIA terror now sits across the table from the CIA’s director, negotiating the terms of its own submission. The working class in Cuba and internationally must draw the political conclusions.

Meanwhile, the “left” nationalist governments in Mexico, Brazil and Colombia have been entirely complicit in the regime change operation and fuel blockade starving Cuba.

The way forward lies in the independent political mobilization of the US, Cuban and international working class: dockworkers, transport workers, oil workers and others refusing to enforce the blockade and opposing a military attack on Cuba as part of their struggle against the capitalist system that makes imperialist war and terror defining features of political life.





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