

[Key address by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at a massive demonstration commemorating the 25th anniversary of the terrorist act against a Cubana jetliner off the coast of Barbados. Revolution Square, October 6, 2001 \[1\]](#)

Date:

06/10/2001

Fellow countrymen:

History can be unpredictable and move along strange labyrinths. Twenty-five years ago, in this very same square, we bid a final farewell to a small number of caskets. They contained tiny fragments of human remains and personal belongings of some of the 57 Cubans, 11 Guyanese --most of them students on scholarships in Cuba-- and five North Korean cultural officials who were the victims of a brutal and inconceivable act of terrorism. What was particularly moving was the death of almost the entire Cuban juvenile fencing team, both women and men, coming home with every single one of the gold medals awarded in this sport at a Central American and Caribbean tournament.

A million of our fellow countrymen, --as many as today-- with tears filling their eyes and running down their cheeks, gathered here to bid a more symbolic than actual farewell to our brothers and sisters whose bodies rested on the ocean floor.

Nobody, except for a group of friendly personalities and institutions, shared our pain and sorrow. There was no upheaval around the world, no acute political crises, no United Nations meetings, nor the imminent threat of war.

Perhaps, few people in the world understood the terrible significance of that event. How important could it be that a Cuban jetliner was blown up in mid-flight with 73 people aboard? It was almost a common occurrence. Thousands of Cubans had already died in La Coubre, the Escambray Mountains, the Bay of Pigs, and in hundreds of other terrorist acts, pirate attacks and similar actions, had they not? Who could pay any attention to the denunciations of this tiny country? All that was needed, apparently, was a simple denial from the powerful neighbor and their media, which inundate the world, and the matter was forgotten.

Who could have predicted that almost exactly 25 years later, a war with totally unpredictable consequences would be on the verge of breaking out as a result of an equally heinous terrorist attack, which claimed the lives of thousands of innocent people in the United States? Back then, in what now appears to be a tragic omen, innocent people from various countries died; this time, there were victims from 86 nations.

Then, as now, there was hardly anything left of the victims. In Barbados, not a single body could be recovered and in New York, only a few were and not all of them identifiable. In both cases, the families were left with an appalling emptiness and infinite grief; a deep indignation and an unbearable sorrow was brought on the peoples of both nations. It had not been an accident, a mechanical failure or a human error; these were both deliberate acts, planned and executed in cold blood.

There were, however, a few differences between the monstrous crime in Barbados and the abhorrent, unimaginable terrorist attack against the American people. In the United States, the act was the work of fanatics willing to die alongside their victims, while in Barbados it was the work of mercenaries who did not run the slightest risk. In the United States, the main goal of the perpetrators was not that of killing the passengers. They hijacked the planes to attack the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, albeit absolutely mindless of the death of the innocent traveling with them. In Barbados, the basic objective of the mercenaries was to kill the passengers.

In both cases, the anguish suffered by the travelers in those final minutes of their lives, particularly the passengers on the fourth plane hijacked in the United States –who already knew what had happened in New York and Washington– must have been unbearable, the same as that of the crew and passengers of the Cuban plane during the desperate attempt to land when it was clearly impossible for them to do so. There were clear demonstrations of courage and determination in both cases as well: in Barbados, we learned of them through the recorded voices of the Cuban crew; in the United States, through subsequent reports on the attitude assumed by the passengers.

There is moving filmed footage of the horrific events in New York. As for the explosion of the plane off the coasts of Barbados and its plunge into the sea, there could not be, and there is not, so much as a photograph. The only testimony lefts are the recordings of the dramatic communications between the crew of the doomed aircraft and the Barbados airport control tower.

This was the first time in the history of Latin America that such an act had been promoted from abroad.

Actually, the systematic use of such politically motivated ruthless and fearsome practices and procedures was initiated in this hemisphere against our country. But, it was preceded in 1959 by another equally absurd and irresponsible practice: that of hijacking and diverting planes in mid-flight, a phenomenon that was practically unknown in the world at the time.

The first of such acts involved a DC-3 passenger plane bound from Havana to the Isle of Youth. It was hijacked by a few former members of Batista's tyranny repressive corps, who forced the pilot to change course and fly them to Miami. This happened on April 16, 1959, less than four months after the triumph of the Revolution. The perpetrators were never punished.

Between 1959 and 2001, a total of 51 Cuban jetliners were hijacked and most of them diverted to the United States. Many of these hijacked aircraft were never returned to our country despite the fact that not a few pilots, guards and other people were murdered or injured. Also, several planes were destroyed or seriously damaged in frustrated hijacking attempts.

The consequence of this was that the plague of "skyjacking" soon spread throughout the United States itself. For the most varied reasons, a number of individuals –the vast majority of them mentally unbalanced, thrill-seekers or common criminals, from both the United States and Latin America– started to hijack airplanes using guns, knives, Molotov cocktails, and on a number of occasions, simple bottles of water, which they claimed contained gasoline and would be used to set fire to the plane.

Thanks to the painstaking care of our authorities, not a single accident occurred upon landing. The passengers always received proper treatment and were immediately returned to their places of origin.

The majority of hijackings and diversions of Cuban aircraft took place between 1959 and 1973. Faced with the risk of a major catastrophe in the United States or Cuba –given that there were even hijackers who, once they had the plane under control, threatened to fly it into the Oak Ridge nuclear power station [in the United States] if their demands were not met– the Government of Cuba took the initiative of approaching the Government of the United States --led at the time by President Richard Nixon, with William Rogers as Secretary of State-- and proposing an agreement to deal with cases of aircraft hijacking and maritime piracy. The proposal was accepted, and the agreement was quickly drawn up and signed by representatives of both governments on February 16, 1973. It was also immediately

published in our country's press and given wide coverage.

That rational and well thought-out agreement established heavy sanctions against hijackers of planes and boats, and it did serve as a deterrent. From that date forward, there was a considerable reduction in the hijacking of Cuban planes, and for more than ten years, every attempted hijacking in our country was foiled.

However, the brutal terrorist attack that led to the explosion of the Cuban plane in mid-flight dealt a devastating blow to that exemplary and effective agreement. The Cuban government, faced with this inconceivable act of aggression that had taken place as part of a new wave of terrorist acts unleashed against Cuba in late 1975, denounced the agreement, in full accordance with the clauses stipulated therein. Nevertheless, it did continue to abide by the procedures set forth to prevent the hijackings of U.S. planes, including the application of heavy sanctions, which had been considerably stepped up as a result of the agreement, with sentences of up to 20 years imprisonment. Even before the agreement was signed, Cuban courts had been applying the sanctions provided in our own Penal Code against hijackers, although these had been less severe.

Despite the rigorous application of sanctions, a few other American jetliners were hijacked and diverted to our country. Then, the Government of Cuba, after issuing duly advanced warnings, decided to return two hijackers to the United States; thus, on September 18, 1980, they were delivered to the authorities of that country.

Our records show that between September 1968 and December 1984, there were 71 cases of airplanes hijacked and diverted to Cuba. Sixty-nine participants in these hijackings faced trials in courts of law and were given prison sentences ranging between three and five years. Subsequently, after the signing of the 1973 agreement, sentences ranged between 10 and 20 years.

As a result of these measures adopted by Cuba, the fact is that for the last 17 years there has not been a single further hijacking or diversion of an U.S. plane to Cuba.

On the other hand, what has been the stance of successive U.S. administrations? Since 1959, until today, the U.S. authorities have not sanctioned a single one of the hundreds of individuals who have hijacked and diverted dozens of Cuban aircraft to that country, not even those have committed murder in the course of the hijacking.

It is impossible to conceive of a greater lack of basic reciprocity, or a greater incitement to the hijacking of planes and boats. This unbending policy has remained unchanged throughout more than four decades and continues to be maintained today, without a single exception.

The constructive agreement on the hijacking of planes and boats signed between the governments of Cuba and the United States, whose results were immediately evident, was seemingly accepted by the top leaders of the terrorist groups. Some had actively cooperated or participated in the organization of irregular warfare through armed gangs that, at times, had expanded to the six former provinces of Cuba. The majority of them had been recruited by the U.S. government in the days of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Missile Crisis, and in later years. They participated in all manner of violent actions, particularly assassination plots and terrorist attacks, that did not leave out a single sphere of the country's economic and social life, a single method, a single procedure, a single weapon.

They were taken to all kinds of institutions, schools and training programs, sometimes to be trained, sometimes to be kept busy.

Dramatic events like the assassination of President Kennedy led to in-depth investigations, like that carried out by an U.S. Senate Committee. The embarrassing situations and major scandals that resulted forced a change in tactics, although there was never really any change in the policy towards Cuba. As a consequence, after periods of relative calm, new waves of terrorism have continued to break out.

This is exactly what happened in late 1975. The Church Commission had presented its famous report on assassination plots against the leaders of Cuba and other countries on November 20 of that year, therefore, the Central Intelligence Agency could not continue assuming direct responsibility for assassination plots and terrorist acts against Cuba. The solution was simple: their most trustworthy and best-trained terrorist personnel would adopt the form of independent groups, which would act on their own behalf and under their own responsibility. This led to the sudden emergence of a bizarre coordinating organization, called the CORU, and made up by the main terrorist groups in operation, which as a rule were fiercely divided, due to leadership ambitions and personal interests. A wave of violent terrorist actions was then unleashed. To mention just a few, chosen from among the numerous and significant terrorist acts carried out during this new stage, I could point out the following that took place in a period of just four months:

- * A pirate attack by speedboats from Florida against two fishing boats, leading to the death of a fisherman and serious damage to the boats, on April 6, 1976.
- * A bomb planted in the Cuban embassy in Portugal, which caused the death of two diplomatic officials, serious injuries to others, and the total destruction of the premises, on April 22.
- * An explosive attack against the UN Cuban Mission, causing serious material damages, on June 5.
- * The explosion of a bomb on the cart carrying the luggage that was about to be loaded on a Cubana Airlines flight at the Kingston, Jamaica, airport on July 9.
- * The explosion of a bomb in the British West Indies Airways offices in Barbados, which represented Cubana Airlines in that country, on July 10.
- * The murder of a fishing industry specialist during the attempted kidnapping of the Cuban Consul in Mérida, Mexico, on July 24.
- * The abduction and vanishing of two Cuban embassy officials in Argentina, on August 9; both disappeared without a trace.
- * The explosion of a bomb in the Cubana Airlines offices in Panama City, causing considerable damage, on August 18.

Obviously, this was real war. Numerous attacks were aimed at commercial airlines.

Even the New York Times and the U.S. News and World Report, two of the most prestigious publications in the United States, described it as a new wave of terrorism against Cuba.

The groups that made up the CORU, which began to operate in the first months of 1976, although it was not officially founded until June of that year, issued public statements in the United States claiming responsibility for every one of the terrorist acts they perpetrated. They sent their war dispatches –as they themselves called them– from Costa Rica to the Miami press. One of their publications printed in the month of August an article entitled "War Dispatch" recounting the destruction of the Cuban embassy in Colombia. That was the day they did not hesitate in publishing a particularly significant communiqué signed by the five terrorist groups that made up the CORU: "Very soon we will attack airplanes in mid-flight."

To carry out their attacks, the CORU terrorists freely used as the main bases for their operations the territories of the United States, Puerto Rico, Somoza's Nicaragua, and Pinochet's Chile.

Less than eight weeks later, the Cuban jetliner would be blown up in mid-flight off the coasts of Barbados with 73 people aboard.

Hernán Ricardo and Freddy Lugo were the two Venezuelan mercenaries who planted the bomb during the Trinidad and Tobago-Barbados leg of the flight. They got off the plane in Barbados and returned to Trinidad, where they were arrested and immediately confessed to their involvement.

The Barbados police commissioner declared before an investigative committee that Ricardo and Lugo had confessed that they were working for the CIA. He added that Ricardo had pulled out a CIA card and another one where the rules for the use of C-4 plastic explosives were described.

On October 24, 1976, The New York Times indicated that "the terrorists who launched a wave of attacks in seven countries during the last two years were the product and instruments of the CIA."

The Washington Post noted that confirmed contacts with the U.S. embassy in Venezuela "cast doubt" on the statement issued on October 15 by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, with regard to the claim that "no one related to the U.S. government had anything to do with the sabotage of the airplane" from Cuba.

A correspondent from the Mexican daily Excelsior commented from Port of Spain that "with the confession made by Hernán Ricardo Lozano, the Venezuelan detained here in Trinidad, about his responsibility in the attack on a Cubana aircraft that crashed off the coast of Barbados with 73 people aboard, a major anti-Castro terrorist network that is somehow linked with the CIA is on the verge of exposure."

Le Monde wrote that the CIA connection with Cuban-born terrorist groups that moved about freely on U.S. soil was public knowledge.

Many of the world's most respected news publications expressed the same view.

Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch, who masterminded the terrorist crime, had links with the CIA dating back to 1960. They were arrested and submitted to a dubious trial plagued with irregularities amidst enormous pressures. The Venezuelan magistrate, Dr. Delia Estaba Moreno, initiated legal proceedings against them for murder, manufacture and use of firearms, and forging and carrying of false documents. But, her honesty and integrity provoked a violent reaction among the Cuban-Venezuelan extreme right.

General Elio García Barrios, the presiding judge of the Military Appeal Court, maintained a steadfast and determined stance, thanks to which the two terrorists were forced to spend a number of years in prison. But, the Miami terrorist mob took revenge by riddling one of his sons with bullets in 1983.

Posada Carriles was rescued by the Cuban-American National Foundation, that sent 50,000 dollars via Panama to finance his escape, which was successfully carried out on August 18, 1985. In a matter of hours, he turned up in El Salvador. He was visited there, having barely arrived, by the top leaders of the Foundation. Those were the days of the dirty war in Nicaragua. He immediately began to execute important tasks under direct orders of the White House, in the air supply of weapons and explosives to the Contras in Nicaragua.

The cold figure of 73 innocent people murdered in Barbados could not possibly express the significance and magnitude of the tragedy.

Certainly, Americans will better understand by comparing the population of Cuba 25 years ago with that of the United States on September 11, 2001. The death of 73 people aboard a Cuban jetliner blown up in mid-flight is to the U.S. people as if seven American jetliners, with over 300 hundred passengers each, had been destroyed in full flight the same day, at the same time, by a terrorist conspiracy.

We could still go further and say that if we were to consider the 3,478 Cubans who have perished in

over four decades as a result of acts of aggression --including the invasion by the Bay of Pigs as well as all the other terrorist acts sustained by Cuba, which originated in the United States-- it would be as if 88,434 people had died in that country, that is, a figure almost similar to the number of Americans who died in the Korean and Vietnam wars combined.

This denunciation we are making here today is not inspired in either hate or rancor. I understand that American officials do not even want to hear us raise these embarrassing issues. They say that we simply should look ahead.

However, it would be senseless not to look back at the sources of errors whose repetition should be avoided, and at the causes of major human tragedies, wars and other calamities that, perhaps, could have been prevented. There should not be innocent deaths anywhere in the world.

This massive demonstration against terrorism has been called to pay homage and tribute to the memory of our brothers and sisters who died off the coasts of Barbados 25 years ago, but also to express our solidarity with the thousands of innocent people who died in New York and Washington. We are here to condemn the brutal crime committed against them while supporting the search for ways conducive to a real and lasting eradication of terrorism, to the prevalence of peace and against the development of a bloody and open-ended war.

I am deeply convinced that relations between the terrorist groups created by the United States in the first 15 years of the Revolution, to act against Cuba, and the U.S authorities have never been severed.

In a day such as this, it is only right that we ask what will be done about Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch, the main culprits of the obnoxious terrorist act perpetrated in Barbados; and what about those who planned and financed the bombs that were set up in hotels of the country's capital and have been restlessly trying, for over four decades, to murder Cuban leaders.

It is not too much to ask that justice be done, for these professional terrorists, acting from inside the very territory of the United States, have not ceased to apply their despicable methods against our people to sow terror and to destroy the economy of a harassed and blockaded nation, one from which terrorist devices have never come --not even a gram of explosives-- to blast in the United States. Never has an American been injured or killed, nor has a facility big or small in that large and rich country ever suffered the least damage from any action coming from Cuba.

As we are involved in the worldwide struggle against terrorism, --committed to take part alongside the United Nations and the rest of the international community-- we have the full moral authority and the right to demand the end of terrorism against Cuba. The economic warfare, itself a genocide and a brutal act to which our people have been subjected for more than 40 years, should also end.

Our brothers and sisters who died in Barbados are no longer only our martyrs, they are also symbols in the struggle against terrorism. They rise today like giants in this historic battle for the eradication of terrorism from Earth, that repulsive procedure that has caused so much damage to their home country and brought so much suffering to their closest relatives and their people that have already written unprecedented pages in the history of their Homeland and their times.

The sacrifice of their lives has not been useless. Injustice starts to shake before the eyes of a forceful and virile nation that 25 years ago cried out of indignation and sorrow, and that today cry out of emotion, of hope and pride in remembering them.

History, that can be unpredictable, has wanted it that way.

Fellow countrymen:

On behalf of the martyrs of that day in Barbados, let us say:

Socialism or Death!

Homeland or Death!

We shall overcome!

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