

Tough Response Demanded

Exiles Call for Sanctions, Military Action

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MIAMI, Feb. 25—For the first time in an afternoon of rage, the angry chants in Spanish of "Castro murderer!" and "Blockade!" died down and a hush fell over the crowd of Cuban emigres.

The drone of engines filled the silence as Jose Basulto, the founder of a group of volunteer pilots called Brothers to the Rescue, played a tape of the cockpit conversations that immediately preceded Saturday's shoot-down by Cuban warplanes of two unarmed light planes north of Havana.

"Seagull Mike, are you with us?"

Basulto says on the tape over the engine noise. "Seagull Charlie, [this is] Seagull One." There was no answer.

Basulto, who said he had just seen a Cuban MiG jet fighter and a ball of smoke and flames in rapid succession, knew by then that his latest mission had ended in disaster.

Basulto, whose group has helped in the rescue of more than 7,000 rafters seeking to escape Cuba, has curried a strong following not only among Cuban exiles but in a wide swath of the local community. Half of those who volunteer to pilot Brothers to the Rescue Cessna 337s are not Cuban.

But at today's combination press

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conference and political rally, Basulto played to the anger of the Cuban exile community. Ats Opa-Locka Airport near Miami, the crowd demanded a tough U.S. response to the downing of two planes with four Cuban-Americans aboard.

The planes, Basulto insists, were on a "humanitarian mission" just north of Cuban territorial waters to search for rafters fleeing the regime of Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

At a minimum, prominent figures in the community said at the rally, the United States should immediately use its Navy to blockade Cuba, and some called for the kind of military action that was taken during the 1980s against Libya, when U.S. warplanes bombed targets including the tent compound of the country's strongman, Moammar Gadhafi.

"The community hopes that the United States might deem this to be a Libya-type situation and decide

to knock out [gun] emplacements," said former Miami mayor Xavier Suarez. In the face of "what can be considered an act of war against American citizens," he said, "there's a sense that something very, very drastic needs to be done." He said he favors an international blockade.

Others argued that the United States should arrange sanctions against Cuba as the government did against Haiti in an action that eventually led to military intervention.

Several people in the crowd called for Castro's blood. "I want to see him hang," said a young man in military fatigues. At one point, a chant of "war, war, war" went up.

"What is the response of the only superpower in the world?" demanded Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-Fla.). "Clinton has asked Cuba for an explanation. What a farce! It's about time for an American administration to protect the American people."

As he spoke, the crowd of several hundred people at the airport, the operational base of Brothers to the Rescue, waved Cuban flags and chanted denunciations of Castro.

"Wake Up Bill," read one placard directed at Clinton.

"What else does it take to call a murderer by his name?" shouted Sylvia Iriondo, founder of the Cuban emigre organization "Mothers Against Repression."

"Murderer! Murderer!" the crowd chanted in response.

The actions that the Clinton administration today decided to take—ending long-distance telephone service to Cuba, canceling

charter flights and restricting financial transactions—were deemed "too little, too late" by Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.).

"This is not what we want," she said. "There is a sense of sadness and also bitterness when we realize that even when four people are killed, it is still not enough for the U.S. government to get tough on Castro."

For the time being, the shared outpouring of grief and fury in the Cuban community seems to have masked deeper divisions over how best to deal with Castro: whether it is better to further isolate one of the world's last remaining communist governments or try to sow the seeds of democratic change through greater contacts. In the



Anti-Castro demonstrators, outside the Cuban mission to the United Nations in New York, protest Cuba's shooting down of private U.S. aircraft.

view of some Cubans, the kind of restrictions announced today by the Clinton administration could have a greater effect on the U.S.-based emigres who seek change in their homeland than on the entrenched power of Castro himself.

The organizers of Miami's annual spring carnival canceled the March 10 event out of respect for the four missing men, who are presumed dead. Known as Carnaval, the event annually draws more than a million visitors to Miami's Little Havana neighborhood in the nation's largest Hispanic festival.

Although the planes of Brothers to the Rescue had previously dropped leaflets over Havana last July and again in January, Basulto denied the Cuban government's assertions that "pirate" aircraft had flown into Cuban airspace in a deliberate "provocation" on the day that Cubans celebrate a carnival marking the start of the country's war of independence in 1895.

"This was assassination on the high seas . . . by a hit team of the Cuban air force," Basulto said. But he said his group "will continue" to practice what he calls nonviolence, and he asked people in Cuba "to rally behind us and face that government using civil disobedience."

Basulto acknowledged that Cuban air traffic controllers had warned him and the pilots of the two other planes not to continue flying south of the 24th parallel. He said he ignored the warning, as he had many times before. The next thing he knew, he said, he saw a Cuban MiG fighter plane fly across his path. Then, he added, "we saw a large ball of smoke and flames in the water. We in our hearts ceased to believe what we were seeing."