

Transcripts Show Joking Cuban Pilots

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*U.S. Pushes U.N. to Punish
Havana for Downing Planes*

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UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 27—The United States today produced what officials said were transcripts of radio conversations in which Cuban fighter pilots joked vulgarly Saturday as they fired missiles into two unarmed U.S. civilian planes.

"We took off his balls," the pilot of one Cuban MiG was quoted as saying after downing a plane that he earlier had identified as a blue and white Cessna. Another Cuban pilot, who reported shooting down the second Cessna, allegedly said, "This one won't mess around anymore."

Their remarks, released in English translation from what U.S. officials said were intercepts of Spanish-language radio transmissions, were the main exhibit put forward by U.S. Ambassador Madeleine K. Albright and other officials as the United States moved its campaign to punish Cuba to the United Nations.

In addition to the transcripts, U.S. officials released charts made by the Customs Service from radar readings that the officials said showed "without any doubt" that the Cessnas were over international waters when they were shot down.

Early this morning, after a marathon all-night session that included a major clash between the United States and China, the Security Council adopted a statement saying it "strongly deplores the shooting down by the Cuban air force of two civil aircraft . . . which apparently has resulted in the death of four persons."

The council's action drew an angry response from Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina, who arrived here after the statement had been adopted. He charged that the council had ignored his request not to act until he was able to present his government's case, and he accused the United States of delaying issuance of a visa in order to prevent him from reaching New York in time for the vote.

U.S. officials immediately denied the charge. They said the State Department had made every effort to expedite a visa for Ro-

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baina, who was in Copenhagen when the planes were shot down on Saturday, and that the delays in his arrival were due to several Cuban changes of plans, including Robaina's decision to go first to Mexico City rather than come here directly from Europe.

Robaina pointedly refused to request a meeting with the Security Council, charging that it is under American domination and thus offers his country "not security but insecurity."

Instead, he said he would concentrate while here on discussing the situation with countries from within the nonaligned movement that are friendly to Cuba, and he added that Cuba might seek a special meeting of the General Assembly, which includes all 185 U.N. members, to look into Havana's charges that the United States is aiding efforts to overthrow President Fidel Castro's communist government.

On Monday, Cuban officials in Havana said they had "unequivocal proof," including cockpit conversations and radar tapes, that the shot-down planes were in Cuban airspace and were warned before coming under attack. However, Robaina offered none of this alleged proof here today, confining himself instead to repeating charges of American plotting with anti-Castro Cuban exile groups.

In Miami today, the exile group Brothers to the Rescue said it planned to send boats and two more aircraft into the water and sky off Cuba next Saturday. "We are going into the same area we were in last week," said Jose Basulto, president of the group and one of the two men who were in a third plane that escaped the Cuban fire Saturday and returned to Miami. "It's our right to be there. Those are international waters. Nobody can prevent us by fear."

Word of the upcoming flights caught Clinton administration officials in Washington by surprise. Officials said they had assumed Brothers to the Rescue would not risk another flight in view of Cuba's demonstrated willingness to shoot them out of the sky. Pentagon spokesman Ken Bacon, asked to respond to Basulto's announced intention to try again, remarked "I would say he seems to be a slow learner."

But administration officials said there was little they could do to prevent U.S. civilian aircraft from taking off in Florida and flying south if the pilots were determined to do so.

Federal Aviation Administration officials were said to be considering a number of measures to restrict future flights. But administration officials said that ultimately the FAA is an administrative agency, not an armed force, with little more in its arsenal of potential punishments than license revocation and fines.



Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina brief reporters outside the U.N. Security Council chambers.

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Robaina said that if the threatened flotilla stays in international waters, Cuba will take no action. But, he warned, "I reiterate on behalf of the Cuban government and people, we will never permit our sovereignty and airspace to be violated."

In the meantime, the United States continued to press a multi-pronged offensive against Cuba that began Monday with the U.S. bid for a Security Council statement. As originally offered by the U.S. delegation, it would have condemned Cuba for shooting down the planes and set the stage for a possible U.S. move later to seek U.N. sanctions against Havana.

However, as negotiations within the 15-nation council moved into the early hours of this morning, the language calling for condemnation was changed to "strongly deplores" and other parts of the statement were softened. In addition, China, arguing that the accused government had a right to be heard, opposed a vote until Robaina had arrived.

That led to acrimonious exchanges between Albright and Chinese Ambassador Li Zhaoxing. In the end, Albright, who is this month's president of the council, forced China to go along by threatening to put the condemnation in a formal resolution. That would have forced China, a permanent council member with veto power, to veto the resolution or abstain. The Chinese chose not to take that route, but diplomats here said the incident

had left a residue of bitter feeling between the United States and China.

Later today, the United States followed up by releasing the radio transcripts, which U.S. officials described as "an official U.S. government document." The officials also said they were "fully confident of the documents' authenticity," and some acknowledged privately that they were intercepts gathered by U.S. intelligence sources.

The transcripts cover conversations between the pilots of two MiGs and their ground control, as well as between the Cessna and Cuban ground officials. In one conversation, Basulto is quoted as acknowledging that he was entering a danger zone while adding, "But we are willing to do it as free Cubans."

The remaining conversation deals with the jets tracking the civilian planes, identifying them clearly to their ground control as unarmed Cessnas and requesting permission to lock on them with their missiles and attack. After the civilian planes were downed, the pilots are quoted as laughing and engaging in banter that caused Albright to say, "I was struck by the job of these pilots in committing cold-blooded murder and their use of common vulgarity to describe what they needed to shoot down unarmed civilians."

"This isn't 'cojones,'" Albright said, referring to the pilots' use of the Spanish slang for testicles. "This is cowardice."