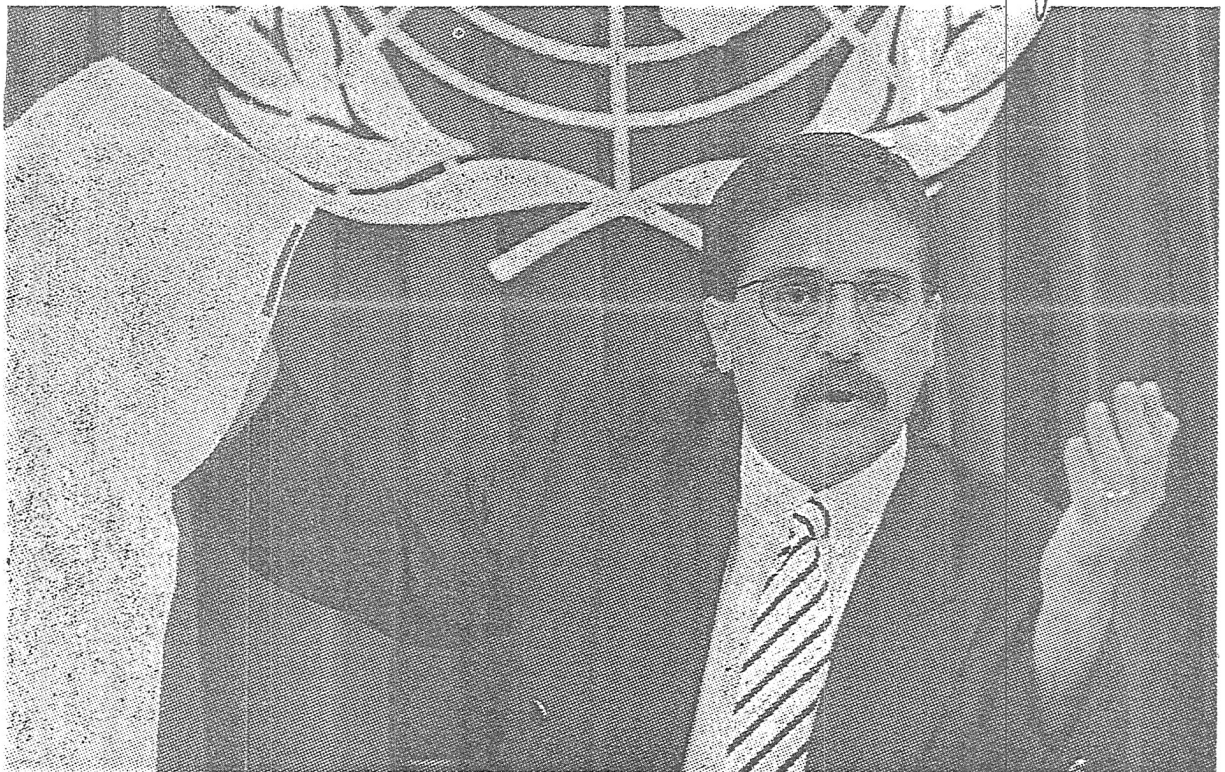


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AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina holds up a fax message containing Cuban transcriptions of radio conversations by MiG fighter pilots involved in the Saturday shoot-downs. He said they contradict U.S. translations.

A16 THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 1996

Cuban Aide Defends Air Attack

*Supporting Evidence
Not Presented to U.N.*

By John M. Goshko
Washington Post Staff Writer

UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 28—Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina insisted today that his country was justified in shooting down two unarmed U.S. civilian planes last Saturday, but he said Cuba's promised proof that the

planes were in Cuban airspace would not be presented at this time.

In a news conference, Robaina accused the United States of failing to control what he said were "more than 25 violations of Cuban sovereignty and jurisdiction over the past 20 months carried out with impunity from U.S. territory. These incidents have taken place regardless of our repeated warn-

ings that we were not going to tolerate them any longer."

Robaina spoke a day after the 15-nation Security Council issued a statement under U.S. pressure "strongly deploring" the attack on two Cessna planes operated by Brothers to the Rescue, an exile group opposed to President Fidel Castro's communist government. Four people apparently were killed in the incident.

On Tuesday, the United States also released transcripts of what U.S. officials said were intercepted radio conversations between Cuban ground control and the pilots of two MiG fighters. The English translations of the purported conversations quoted the pilots as laughing and exchanging vulgar jokes as they shot down one of the Cessnas.

Asked about the U.S. evidence, Robaina replied that the exile planes "refused to obey orders to leave our airspace and said they were proud of it."

He added: "We ran out of alternatives. It is all there in recordings and maps to show how the Cuban side came to its final conclusions. My country has many more things—all the conversations, all the maps—to give

to international organizations and not just from the incident [last Saturday]."

But when reporters asked him to produce this evidence or describe how it refutes the American claims, Robaina said, "We are ready to present the evidence. But we don't have to place it in opposition to the American side. We'll see who has more evidence and who has the truth."

The minister also repeated his accusations that the United States had denied Cuba a forum to defend itself by forcing the Security Council to issue its statement before he was able to arrive in New York.

"We came to the United Nations with the intention of speaking to the Security Council, but as you know, such a Security Council did not want to wait for us and was not interested at all in what the Cuban foreign minister had to say on behalf of his country," Robaina said.

He said Cuba is conferring with representatives of the 110-nation Non-Aligned Movement, many of which are friendly toward Havana, about the possibility of calling a special meeting of the General Assembly to hear Cuba's side of the dispute. All 185 U.N. members are represented in the assembly.

"We are not seeking any action by the General Assembly," Robaina said. "We simply want the international

community to listen to Cuba's story. We are not asking the General Assembly to condemn anyone or pass a resolution. . . . We just want to make it understood that attempts to destroy our revolution are being encouraged, promoted and tolerated by the United States and that Cuba is ready to defend its sovereignty and airspace."

Before his news conference, Robaina also engaged in a war of words with U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine K. Albright. In the transcripts released by the United States Tuesday, one of the Cuban MiG pilots, after firing a missile into one of the Cessnas, allegedly spoke of shooting out the civilian plane's "cojones"—a slang Spanish term for testicles.

"This isn't 'cojones,' this is cowardice," Albright said Tuesday in reference to the pilot's remark.

Today Robaina shot back, "I just want to reply that we have always had plenty of the first, and we have never suffered from the latter." He added that Albright's use of the term was inappropriate "in diplomatic circles and even nasty for a lady."

"I thought that was a little chauvinistic," Albright replied when informed of what Robaina had said.

In a related development, the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva released a report today saying Cuba continues to practice widespread violation of the human rights of its people. But it said international support for the economic reforms being attempted by the Castro government is the best way to bring about change, and it called the U.S. embargo of Cuba "a relic of the Cold War" that should be eased.

Meanwhile, in Miami, the FBI confirmed that Juan Pablo Roque, a Cuban

exile and Brothers pilot who apparently was planted inside the organization by the Cuban government, also had provided information to the FBI on the group. Paul Philip, special agent in charge of the Miami office, said Roque, who reappeared in Cuba one day before the downings, had been paid \$6,720.42 for information he gave them.

The Brothers organization continued with plans to fly two planes on Saturday to the area about 12 miles from the Cuban coast where the planes were shot down. Another anti-Castro exile organization also plans to send a several-ship flotilla to the spot. After the visit, a rally is planned in a Miami stadium.

Jose Basulto, a founder of the Brothers who plans to pilot one of the planes Saturday, said he did not expect to be protected by U.S. military aircraft. Nor did he want to be stopped by Washington.

Clinton administration officials were meeting today with the Federal Administration Administration and other authorities to determine if it is possible, or advisable, to try to stop the expedition, perhaps by restricting the airspace between the Florida coast and Cuba.

If the exiles' plan goes ahead, the U.S. Coast Guard will be responsible for ensuring their safety in international waters. The Navy also is patrolling the Florida Straits with two ships, one a nuclear-powered antiaircraft cruiser, the other a guided missile frigate. Both were sent to the region after the civilian planes were downed.

Staff writers William Booth in Miami and Ann Devroy and Don Phillips in Washington contributed to this report.