

U.S. 'Will Not Tolerate' Cuban Attack on Flotilla

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Coast Guard to Escort Pilots' Memorial Fleet

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The United States yesterday warned Cuba it "will not tolerate" attacks on Americans joining in a memorial ceremony by small boats and planes in the Florida Strait on Saturday but toughened its efforts to keep participants from making forays into Cuban waters or airspace.

As the Coast Guard prepared to send 10 cutters to accompany a flotilla staging the defiant memorial for four exile pilots killed by a Cuban jet fighter last Saturday, the Havana government said it will "take whatever measures it needs to prevent a provocation and a violation" of its territory.

But a senior Cuban official also said

at a news conference that if the participants remain in international waters, "they should have no problem"—a result also sought and anticipated by the U.S. government.

"We don't expect the necessity to defend anyone in the flotilla from anyone," said a senior Coast Guard official who asked not to be named. He said the U.S. authorities were sending the escorts not because they expected trouble with the Cubans, but to discourage incursions in Cuban waters and because the boats involved "may not be properly prepared" for the 16- to 20-hour round trip between Florida and waters off Cuba's northern coast.

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The U.S. actions are meant to head off any confrontation between the Cuban military and the Florida-based exile organization Brothers to the Rescue, which helped organize the memorial after two of its unarmed Cessna planes were downed in fiery explosions from missiles from a Cuban MiG-29 six days ago. Cuba said the exile planes had violated its airspace by coming too close to its coast, but the U.S. government has said the aircraft were outside the 12-mile territorial limit and in any case were not properly warned in accordance with international law.

The Cuban American exiles, who strongly oppose the Communist government of Cuban leader Fidel Castro, announced earlier this week that they planned to sail in large numbers to the spot where the planes went down, as well as send some small planes flying to that area. What is billed as a memorial to those who died has turned into a media extravaganza and major headache for the Clinton administration.

"We will not tolerate the loss of American lives," White House press secretary Michael McCurry said. He said the administration had issued a "strong warning" to Cuba through diplomatic channels that it is not to "vio-

late basic norms of international conduct."

At the same time, the administration told Brothers to the Rescue to stay out of Cuban waters and airspace. It warned that the Federal Aviation Administration will be empowered to take extraordinary enforcement action to force the group to obey the civil aviation laws.

McCurry said Clinton ordered the Coast Guard to help direct the group to the site of the downings. They also will detect "any unauthorized incursions" by U.S. vessels into Cuban territory, he said.

"Firm legal action" will be taken against those who violate the orders to stay out of Cuban territorial waters and airspace, McCurry said. Those who violate FAA rules, he said, could lose their planes or boats, face prison, or large fines.

The orders were designed "to make sure there can be a safe, peaceful . . . and lawful event," McCurry said.

Clinton's orders go beyond normal operating procedures, which already make it illegal for Americans to violate Cuban territory. McCurry would not say what action the United States would take if Cuba moves on the protesters, but officials throughout government said they did not expect that would happen.

U.S. officials have repeatedly asked

the Brothers to stop flying into Cuban international airspace and cease what the U.S. sees as provocative actions. But after a session Wednesday with FAA officials and others, in which proposals were discussed to formally ban or restrict American air movements in the Florida straits on Saturday, Clinton rejected those ideas and instead authorized the warnings.

A senior official said yesterday that the United States "cannot be in the position, we think, of letting Castro dictate limits on American citizens' rights" to fly or boat in international waters.

The U.S. Coast Guard cutters will accompany a flotilla expected to number about 20 boats in the memorial. Coast Guard officials said they do not intend to forcibly stop any ship from crossing into Cuban waters but would "warn them and recommend they not proceed."

In order to keep troublemakers and small boats likely to sink or get in the way at bay, the Coast Guard declared an emergency "security zone" for Saturday to bar unauthorized vessels off to three miles off the Miami coast.

In Miami, many Cuban Americans supported the Clinton announcement.

"We are upbeat," said Jorge Mas Canosa, leader of the powerful conservative lobbying group Cuban American National Foundation. "I think they [the

Brothers to the Rescue] have the right to go there and President Clinton is showing some leadership. The presence of U.S. ships and planes is a warning to both sides."

Mas Canosa said the Brothers pilots will stay well outside the 12-mile limit.

As part of the ceremony, the exile planes plan to drop wreaths over the site where the planes were shot down, a spot that the Coast Guard will mark for them, and then fly back to be above the Orange Bowl at 5 p.m. when a memorial mass is to take place.

One factor that reduces the chances of a clash Saturday is the disagreement over the location of the incident a week earlier. Since the Cuban Americans say the planes were downed over international waters, the memorial action can take place with the Cuban government asserting that its territory was not violated this time.

In Havana, in what could be a bid for U.S. help in defusing the issue, senior Foreign Ministry official Carlos Fernandez de Cossio told a news conference the United States has the "capability to stop the Brothers to the Rescue from coming out again, to prevent another provocation."

In the United States, the FAA is-

sued beefed-up "cease and desist orders" that will make it easier to penalize and prosecute pilots who violate Cuban airspace. An unarmed Coast Guard C-130 cargo plane will keep track of the flotilla and a second C-130 will accompany the Brothers' planes, as will two helicopters with medical personnel aboard.

Officials said the Pentagon has prepared a military plan in case there's trouble. It involves an anti-aircraft cruiser and a guided missile frigate sent to the straits after the planes were downed, plus 13 Navy craft, including the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise, that have moved into waters about 200 miles away as part of what Pentagon officials called routine training exercises.

In a separate development, Pentagon officials confirmed that the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) operating at Holmstead Air Force Base near Miami had spotted the Cuban MiGs as they took off six days ago and that an unspecified number of Florida Air National Guard F-15A fighter jets were poised, engines running, to take off in pursuit. The planes were called off when the MiGs turned back south toward Cuba.

Rep. Dan Burton (R-Ind.), an outspoken Castro critic, charged at a hearing yesterday that someone in the military had requested that the jets come to the civilian planes' defense but that the request was turned down. "If that's the case, then those people didn't need to die," he said.

Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said there was no evidence to support Burton's assertion. Bacon said NORAD's job is not to protect civilian planes flying in international airspace, but instead to guard the United States against air attack.

Other Pentagon officials said NORAD was aware that the three Brothers planes were in flight and that they had deviated from their flight plan. They were also able to follow the conversation between the MiGs and their ground controllers, who gave the pilots permission to fire. Officials said, however, that the Cubans' intention to shoot was not evident until several minutes before they fired.

Correspondents John Ward Anderson in Havana and William Booth in Miami contributed to this report.