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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505



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NIC 1513/96
06 March 1996

MEMORANDUM FOR: Intelligence Community

FROM: Randolph H. Pherson
National Intelligence Officer
for Latin America

SUBJECT: Chronology of Cuban Shootdown - 24 February 1996

1. Attached is the UNCLASSIFIED chronology of the shootdown of two civilian aircraft by a Cuban MiG on 24 February 1996. Also attached are two ~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~ documents: A map of "Approximate Paths Flown by US Civilian Aircraft and Cuban MiG, 24 February 1996" and an "Analysis of Cuban Statements on Downing of Two US Civilian Aircraft." All three documents have been fully coordinated within the Intelligence Community.

2. If you have any questions or comments, please call Randy Pherson, NIO/LA on

Randolph H. Pherson

Attachments:
As Stated

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SUBJECT: Chronology of the Cuban Shootdown - 24 February 1996

NIO/LA:RHPerson: (06 March 96 - G:151396.Doc)

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Internal Community

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Chronology of Aircraft Shootdown by Cuban MiG, 24 February 1996

- 0928¹ Brothers to the Rescue (BTTR) files six flight plans telephonically, initially for a 1015 planned departure.
- 1000-1300 Cuban fighter aircraft conduct air patrols in reaction to what they believe are incursions into Cuban territorial airspace by aircraft operated by BTTR. The Cuban aircraft return to their base making no contact with any aircraft.
- 1148 BTTR pilot updates three flight plans to reflect intended 1230 departure. Other three flight plans expire at 1215.
- 1313 Three US-based civilian aircraft belonging to BTTR depart Opa Locka Airfield, Miami:
They are identified as:

<u>Aircraft</u>	<u>Occupants</u>	<u>Tail Number</u>	<u>Transponder Codes</u>	<u>Color</u>
1	Jose Basulto Araldo Iglesias Andres Iriondo Silvia Iriondo	N2506	1222	Light Blue
2	Carlos Costa Pablo Morales	N2456S	1223	White and Blue
3	Mario de la Pena Armando Alejandre	N5485S	1224	White and Blue w/ Red Stripe

1456-1457 Pilot of Aircraft 1 informs the Havana civilian Air Traffic Control Center that the three planes intend to operate south of the 24th parallel. The Havana Control Center warns pilot not to fly south of the 24th parallel because the area was "active and dangerous." BTTR aircraft respond they are aware of the danger but will fly south of the 24th parallel anyway.

1504-1513* US Customs radar shows the three civilian aircraft operating south of the 24th parallel.

US Customs radar also shows two fast-moving aircraft airborne north of Havana. Subsequent information identifies them as a MiG-23 and a MiG-29 out of San Antonio de los Banos Airfield.

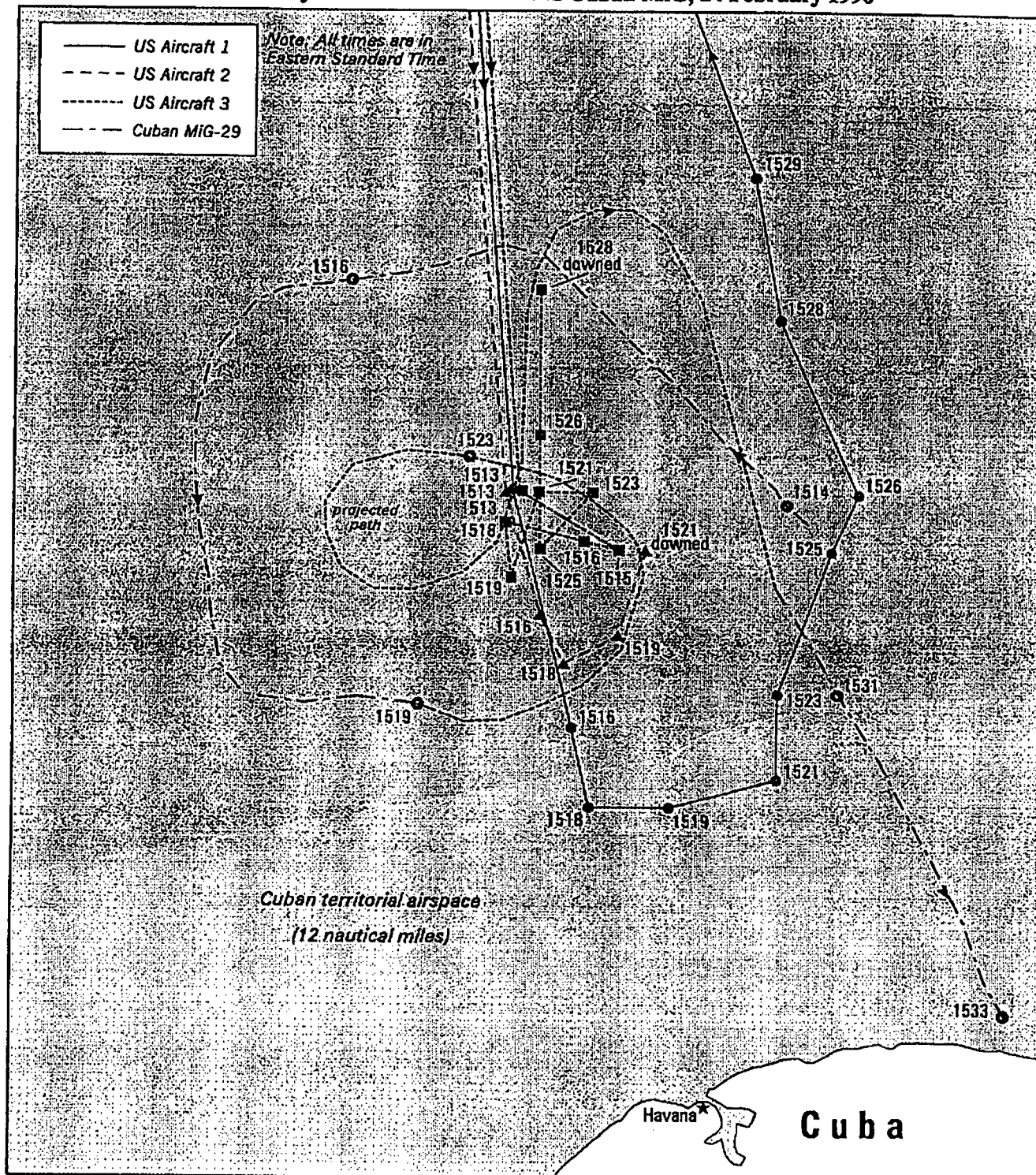
1515* US Customs radar shows Aircraft 1 approximately 1 nm north of Cuban territorial airspace (which extends 12 nautical miles from the Cuban coastline) and heading south. US Customs radar show Aircraft 2 and 3 several nautical miles north of Aircraft 1, further from Cuban territorial airspace.

¹ Eastern Standard Time

* Three minutes have been subtracted to reconcile a consistent three minute difference between times reported by Customs radar and other data sources.

- 1516* Data derived from US Customs radar shows Aircraft 1 entering Cuban territorial airspace.
- 1518 The Cuban MiG-29 pilot visually acquires a small aircraft.
- 1519-1520 Cuban fighters request permission to fire on a white and blue Cessna 337 aircraft. Cuban ground controllers give pilot authorization to destroy aircraft.
- 1521 MiG-29 pilot reports that Aircraft 2 has been destroyed.
- 1521* US Customs radar shows no Aircraft 2 on scope. US Customs radar last observes Aircraft 2 approximately 5 nm outside Cuban territorial airspace.
- 1523 The crew of a Norwegian-flagged cruise ship, located in international waters, sees the explosion of Aircraft 2 from 6-7 nm away, and places the shutdown at approximately 8 nm outside of Cuban territorial airspace. The crew of a US-registered fishing boat also observes the downing of Aircraft 2 in international waters. The fishing boat immediately alters course and proceeds to the crash site where the crew observes an oil slick and an orange float.
- 1523* Aircraft 1 reenters international airspace.
- 1524 MiG-29 pilot visually acquires Aircraft 3.
- 1526 Cuban ground controllers give MiG-29 pilot permission to destroy aircraft.
- 1528 MiG-29 pilot reports Aircraft 3 has been destroyed.
- 1528* US Customs radar shows no Aircraft 3 on scope. US Customs radar last observes Aircraft 3 approximately 16 nm outside Cuban territorial airspace.
- 1529 The crews of the cruise ship and the fishing boat observe a military jet firing a missile that destroys Aircraft 3. The cruise ship places the downing of the aircraft at about 11 nm outside of Cuba's 12 nautical mile territorial airspace. Approximately 15 minutes later, the cruise ship passed within 2-3 nm of the crash site and observes an oil slick but no debris.
- 1709 Aircraft 1 lands at Opa Locka Airfield in Miami, Florida.

Approximate Paths Flown by US Civilian Aircraft and Cuban MiG, 24 February 1996



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Analysis of Cuban Statements on Downing of Two US Civilian Aircraft (U)
(All Times Local)

Cuban Assertions

On 19 February, Cuba circulated information through the aviation information system that it was establishing a *dangerous zone from 21 to 28 February*. (Havana Tele Rebelde)

Havana's Flight Control Center received a flight plan at 9:33 am for Cessna-type aircraft due to depart Opa Locka. (Havana Tele Rebelde)

Between 10:15 am and 11:27 am on 24 February, three planes entered Cuban airspace, chased off by Cuban fighter. (MINREX note, dated 2/25)

At 10:40 am Cuban aviation authorities asked Miami air traffic control for information on the aircraft which had not reported their takeoff or contacted Cuban authorities. Miami replied that it had no information. (Havana Tele Rebelde)

At 12:25 Havana receives flight plans for three aircraft that were to take off from Opa Locka. (Havana Tele Rebelde)

At 1:21 pm, Havana air traffic control warned Cuban-American plane headed for Cuba that Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) north of Cuban territorial limit was "active and dangerous" (already on alert). Pilot replied that he understood the danger, but planned to go ahead. (MINREX note, dated 2/25)

At 3:15 pm, "it was learned from an internal communication of one of the Cuban-American pilots, that they were on their way to Havana." (MINREX note, dated 2/25)

Two Cuban-American aircraft violated Cuban airspace while the lead plane stayed back. (MINREX note, dated 2/25)

What We Understand

The Cubans activated a danger zone from 21 to 28 February from 8:00 am to 6:30 pm each day, according to an international notice to airmen filed with the FAA on 19 February.

At 9:28 am the Brothers to the Rescue filed six flight plans telephonically for a 10:15 am departure but we have no information confirming the planes actual departure.

US Government information reflects Cuban detection of one airspace violation at 10:46 am; two fighters noted on defensive patrol at 11:50 am. We have no information from US radar indicating any flights from Florida entering Cuban airspace during this time period.

At 11:48 a Brothers to the Rescue pilot updates three flight plans to reflect intended 12:30 pm departure. The planes do not actually depart until 1:13 pm, according to the FAA.

Reflected in transcripts released. In subsequent debrief, Brothers to the Rescue pilot in the plane, Jose Basulto, acknowledged that he received the warning. Note that Cuba's Havana Tele Rebelde chronology of 4 March has the conversation occurring at 2:57 pm.

US Government information indicates Cuban ground controller's belief that Cuban-American planes wanted to take a good look at the capital.

Customs radar track shows that the lead aircraft entered Cuban airspace, and that the other two did not.

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MiG-29 pilot claims he warned Cuban-American aircraft, but they ignored it; Foreign Minister Robaina says pilots "rejected all the efforts to make them land." Alarcon says "We, of course, have all the conversations between our authorities and the pilots recorded." The Cubans say the MiG made a "warning pass." (MiG pilot interview, 2/26; Robaina's press conference in NY, 2/28; Alarcon's press conference, 2/26, Tele Rebelde, 3/3)

Two planes downed between 3:21 pm and 3:28 pm on 24 February. (MINREX note, dated 2/25)

Incident occurred "between five and eight miles north of Baracoa Beach, west of Havana." (MINREX note, dated 2/25)

National Assembly President Alarcon discounts cruise ship account. Says video filmed by tourist. Smoke seen by cruise ship witnesses could have drifted north--outside territorial limit--from crash site. (Alarcon press conference, 2/26)

Alarcon claims Cuba has found wreckage from the downed aircraft in Cuban territory. He discounts Gulf Stream currents, which he says should carry objects north. (Alarcon's press conference, 2/26)

Conversations released by Brothers to the Rescue pilots reflect no indication of warning actions by MiG fighters. US Customs radar tracks show no evidence of MiG warning maneuvers. USG information shows no attempt on part of Mig pilots to establish radio contact with Brothers to the Rescue pilots before shutdown.

Times track with Caribbean Regional Operations Center.

US Customs radar indicates planes downed five and 16 miles outside Cuban airspace.

Norwegian cruise ship witnesses--including experienced professional seamen--estimate that first plane is downed approximately eight nautical miles from Cuba's territorial limit. The ship used its sophisticated Global Positioning System to pinpoint the downed aircraft's location.

US Government aware of Cuban claim that a suitcase containing leaflets was recovered during search and rescue efforts, despite other reports of lack of floating debris. Basulto denies carrying leaflets in subsequent debrief. US fishing vessel that also witnesses incident sees nothing but an orange float at first crash site.

Norwegian cruise ship passes within two to three nautical miles of second crash site; crew sees nothing but small oil slick (presumably through optical aids).

US Government aware of Cuban search and rescue operations seven to eight miles off Baracoa Beach.

US Coast Guard estimates current in Straits flowing 1.3 knots in easterly direction on day of shutdown, so debris could have skirted or floated into Cuban territory from inter-national waters where shutdown occurred. USGC Intelligence Coordination Center (ICC) based the estimate on data from a

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marker buoy dropped in vicinity of splashdown and allowed to drift overnight. ICC then put data from the buoy into its Search And Rescue (SAR) model to validate the estimate.

Fact that US requested permission to search in Cuban territorial waters means US accepts Havana's contention that shootdown occurred in Cuban airspace. (Alarcon press conference, 2/26)

US Coast Guard made request to have advance Cuban approval in event wreckage spotted in Cuban waters.

US, not Cuba, responsible for incident. Brothers to the Rescue have repeatedly violated Cuban sovereignty and disregarded US laws. (Alarcon press conference, 2/26)

Brothers to the Rescue have overflown Havana on at least two occasions, dropping anti-Castro leaflets. Group head Jose Basulto currently subject of FAA investigation for overflight of Havana on 13 July 1995.

US was aware of Brothers to the Rescue plan to violate Cuban territory on 2/24 because Cuban agent inside the group had warned FBI beforehand. (TV interview with Cuban agent Juan Pablo Roque, 2/26)

FBI spokesman denied the allegation. Roque contacted the FBI several days before the Brothers to the Rescue flight on 24 February, complained to his FBI contact that the Bureau owed him \$1,500. He did not pass any information to the FBI contact.



US has favored or covered up piracy in past. Orlando Bosch, mastermind of 1976 shootdown of Cubana aircraft near Barbados, wanders freely about streets of Miami. Luis Posada Carriles, who was also involved in Cubana case and is a fugitive from Venezuelan justice, lived in the US and now resides in Central America. (Alarcon press conference, 2/26)

Bosch was tried by a Venezuelan military tribunal in 1980 and acquitted due to a lack of evidence. He was tried in civil proceedings in 1986 and acquitted, due to insufficient evidence. Bosch spent 10 years in prison during proceedings. In 1987, a Venezuelan higher court upheld Bosch's acquittal and he was released. As of April 1992, Bosch was living in Miami under restricted parole (for crimes committed in the US). Posada Carriles escaped from Venezuelan prison before he could be tried. US had no information on his whereabouts in 1992.

US has never compensated families of victims on Iranian plane US shot down in 1988. (Alarcon press conference, 2/26)

US agreed to pay compensation, Feb 96.

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