

[Democracy lessons for Fidel Castro](#)

The US' tendency to demonise and formulate assassination attempts on Fidel Castro shows a glaring double standard.



Austin, Texas - In the 1950s, my father's uncle Benito was summoned to Havana by Santo Trafficante Jr, Mafia boss for the southeastern United States and Cuba and a childhood friend of Benito's from the Ybor City neighbourhood in Tampa, Florida.

In Havana, Benito was tasked with surveillance duties at the Sans Souci night club and casino run by Trafficante, a close friend of pro-US Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. Trafficante had inherited the position from his father, the Sicilian-born Santo Trafficante Sr, who had been appointed by organised crime icons, Meyer Lansky and Lucky Luciano, to oversee gambling and drug operations in the Cuban capital, which served as a storage facility for heroin en route from Europe to the US.

Benito's responsibilities at the Sans Souci included sounding an alert if the wife of a casino patron or other relevant figure arrived at an inopportune moment. Prospects for job security were slashed with the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, however, and Benito returned to Florida to sell furniture while Trafficante enhanced his CV by becoming an accomplice of the CIA in the mission to assassinate Fidel Castro.

As journalists Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St Clair note in their book *Whiteout: The CIA, Drugs and the Press*, anti-Castro plots concocted by the Agency ranged from "tr[ying] to devise a way to saturate the radio studio where Castro broadcast his speeches with an aerosol form of LSD and other 'psychic energisers'" to sabotaging his appearance before the United Nations in New York in 1960 by "plac[ing]

thallium salts in Castro's shoes and on his night table in the hope that the poisons would make the leader's beard fall off".

As for Trafficante's contributions to the effort, he delivered six lethal CIA-manufactured botulinum pills as well as a box of toxic cigars to an ally within the Cuban government in 1961. The plan fell through.

According to Cockburn and St Clair, US Attorney General Robert Kennedy, "who was obsessed with the elimination of Castro, told [CIA director] Allen Dulles that he didn't care if the Agency employed the Mob for the hit as long as they kept him fully briefed".

Lest US taxpayers worry that government expenditures over the years have been wasted on projects that do not reinforce national security, a 2006 article in the Guardian entitled "638 ways to kill Castro" outlines additional CIA assassination schemes:

"Knowing [Castro's] fascination for scuba-diving off the coast of Cuba, the CIA at one time invested in a large volume of Caribbean molluscs. The idea was to find a shell big enough to contain a lethal quantity of explosives, which would then be painted in colours lurid and bright enough to attract Castro's attention when he was underwater. Documents released under the Clinton administration confirm that this plan was considered but, like many others, did not make it far from the drawing-board. Another aborted plot related to Castro's underwater activities was for a diving-suit to be prepared for him that would be infected with a fungus that would cause a chronic and debilitating skin disease."

Entertainment value aside, such endeavours might of course also be construed as illegal according to international law - just as the blowing up of 73 people on board a Cubana de Aviacion flight might, under objective scrutiny, qualify as terrorism.

The accused mastermind of the latter event, which occurred in 1976, is Luis Posada Carriles: ex-CIA asset, Bay of Pigs veteran, Havana hotel bomber, and would-be Castro assassin. A Cuban exile and Venezuelan national, Posada was recently acquitted by a Texas court on charges related not to terrorism, but rather to lying to US immigration authorities about how he entered the country.

Despite Venezuela's 2005 extradition request to try Posada on 73 counts of murder, the New York Times described him last year as having "lived freely in Miami since 2007" and as "spending his days painting landscapes, which are sold by the dozens at shows in Miami frequented by a shrinking, but powerful group of hardened anti-Castro exiles".

One can speculate as to the reaction in the US had, for example, Mohammed Atta survived 9/11, fled to Caracas, and commenced a tranquil life as a watercolour artist, interrupted only by a trial in which he was acquitted of lying to Venezuelan officials by telling them he had swum to the country from New Jersey.

Among the ranks of Cubans who have not evaded long-term castigation by the US justice system, meanwhile, are the Cuban Five - now reduced to Four with the release on probation of René González - who were incarcerated in 1998 on charges of spying against the US after they infiltrated Miami-based groups dedicated to overthrowing Castro.

As Noam Chomsky has pointed out, the Five were in fact, "exposing to the US government crimes that are being committed on US soil[,] crimes the US government is tolerating and theoretically should be punishing itself". It also bears reiterating that the Cubans have not devised 638 ways to assassinate the US president.

This past October, the Wall Street Journal's Mary O'Grady - free-market fanatic, apologist for right-wing extremism in Latin America, and hallucinator of an alliance between Castro and the US State Department - detected further proof of the superior Cuban determination to subvert democracy. In an article entitled "Cuba's Repression Escalates", she complained: "The non-governmental organisation Capitol Hill Cubans has reported that in the first 12 days of September, [Cuban] authorities detained 168

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peaceful activists".

This is approximately the same number of persons who, according to a WikiLeaks cable released in April, were held for varying numbers of years at a certain illegal US detention facility on Cuban soil despite US knowledge of their innocence.

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