



# International Policy BRIEF

*News and analysis from the staff of the Center for International Policy*

---

## **Cuba Should Not be on the Terrorist List**

**By Wayne S. Smith**

**January 2010**

Cuba's inclusion on the U.S. list of "state sponsors of terrorism" has become a flash-point issue in U.S.-Cuban relations. As the result of the thwarted effort on Christmas to bomb an American airliner landing in Detroit from Amsterdam, the Obama administration on January 5 called for the implementation of new security measures in the cases of passengers bound for the U.S. from some fourteen countries, including all those on the U.S. terrorist list. That of course includes Cuba. As Eugene Robinson put it in an article in *The Washington Post* that same day, however, Cuba is perhaps the only country on the list that absolutely should not be. "Cuba," Robinson said, "presents a threat of terrorism that can be measured at precisely zero."

Cuba responded to the new U.S. measures with a protest note that same afternoon condemning Cuba's inclusion on the list of 14 countries and demanding its immediate exclusion from the list of "state sponsors of terrorism," given that there is no evidence whatever to justify placing it on that list. On the contrary, the note states:

"Cuba condemns all acts of terrorism, in every form and manifestation. Cuban territory has never been utilized, nor will it ever be utilized for organizing, financing or executing terrorist acts against any country, including the United States."

The Center for International Policy has long followed the question of any possible Cuban involvement in terrorism. It prepared a definitive report in November of 2004, the overall conclusion of which was that "the State Department's reasons for keeping Cuba [on the list] do not withstand the most elementary scrutiny."

Every year since then, CIP has closely analyzed the State Department's annual reports on the subject. It found them to be without merit, presenting no credible evidence that Cuba was involved in terrorist activities in any way. The reports did frequently bring up the presence in Cuba of members of the Basque ETA guerrilla organization and the Colombian FARC and ELN. At first, there were suggestions that they were there against the wishes of the Spanish and Colombian governments and were involved in terrorist activities. As both the Spanish and Colombian governments said otherwise, however, i.e.

### **Center for International Policy**

1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 801, Washington, DC 20036

Telephone: (202) 232-3317 • Facsimile: (202) 232-3440 • Email: [cip@ciponline.org](mailto:cip@ciponline.org) • Web: [www.ciponline.org](http://www.ciponline.org)



that the ETA, ELN and FARC personnel, were there with the acquiescence of their governments, and as it became clear that they were not involved in terrorist activities, the State Department reports changed their tune. The report in 2006, for example, acknowledged that members of these organizations were living in Cuba legally and went on to say that: “there is no information concerning terrorist activities of these or other organizations on Cuban territory....The United States is not aware of specific terrorist enclaves in the country.”

Interestingly, in 2008, the State Department report went so far as to say that “Cuba no longer actively supports armed struggle in Latin America and other parts of the world.” It then again complained that Cuba was continuing to provide safe haven to members of the ETA, the FARC and the ELN, but did not suggest that their status had somehow changed, i.e., that they were involved in suspicious activities or were there against the wishes of the Spanish or Colombian governments. In short, their presence, while objectionable to the U.S. perhaps, still seemed not to be used to charge Cuba with being a terrorist state. That may have changed, however, given the sharp disagreements over the new security measures called for by the U.S. On January 5, for example, a State Department spokesman stated to AFP that “Cuba is a country that supports terrorist activities and therefore its citizens and travelers in air transit should be subjected to supplementary controls for security reasons.”

And also on January 5, another State Department spokesman was quoted as saying that Cuba’s designation as a “state sponsor of terrorism” was “well-earned.”

This more accusatory rhetoric is unfortunate. It has no basis in fact and therefore undercuts the whole policy’s credibility. A policy based on false premises will itself be seen as false. And that is indeed the case with the U.S. policy of placing Cuba on the terrorist list. It is time for the Obama administration to realize that this is entirely counterproductive – and especially now, given the new situation we face. The new security measures resulting from Cuba’s inclusion on the list could adversely affect the flights between Havana and Miami that carry thousands of Cuban-Americans to visit families on the island. That would benefit no one.

The State Department report in 2008 also mentions that the Cuban government continues to permit some U.S. fugitives to live legally in Cuba. As CIP has consistently pointed out in its responses, however, this in no way opens Cuba to the charge of being a terrorist state, not unless there had been “repeated support for international terrorism” and that the fugitives themselves had committed terrorist acts of an international character. That has not been the case.

Ironically, one must note also that in over fifty years, the U.S. has never extradited a single Cuban and of course there are many, such as Orlando Bosch, guilty of terrorist acts against Cuba.

In sum, the U.S. accomplishes nothing by keeping Cuba on its terrorist list. It simply makes itself look foolish, for other states know full well that the charge is phony. If it is ever to move toward a more sensible approach in its relations with Cuba, a very useful first step would be to remove Cuba from that list.

For additional information on this subject please visit:  
<http://ciponline.org/cuba/cubaproject/Nov%20IPR.pdf>