

Case of the Brothers to be taken to the Bush Administration

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The non-governmental organization Judicial Watch (JW), based in Washington, last week decided to present to the new administration of President George W. Bush the case of the Brothers to the Rescue pilots killed by Cuban MiGs in international waters on February 24, 1996.

"Under the Clinton administration, the Justice Department has not taken any significant action, from a legal standpoint, against those directly responsible for the shooting down of the two planes and the deaths of its crews", said one JW letter personally given to Bush the previous January 5.

This inexcusable attitude, JW's letter continued, has been maintained by the Clinton administration, despite the Cuban government being condemned for the shooting down of the planes in international waters, as concluded in an investigation undertaken by the International Civil Aviation Organization, an agency of the United Nations.

The letter recalled that the Cuban dictator Fidel Castro publicly accepted responsibility for the downing of the planes, in statements made to Time magazine, and the United States television network CBS.

In December 1999, the Cuban-American Congressman Lincoln Díaz-Balart sent a letter to state and federal prosecutors of the United States, calling for Castro to be charged with murder for the downing of the planes. But that request has so far been unanswered.

Lawyers for Brothers to the Rescue have also put forward that Castro be charged before Florida's federal prosecutors, to no avail.

Judicial Watch wants the Bush administration, which takes office next January 20, to analyze the elements that the president of Brothers to the Rescue, Jose Basulto, has accumulated over the downing of the planes.

"The Brothers to the Rescue have hard evidence that was gathered in the last five years, which clearly identifies those responsible for the downing, and those who had prior knowledge of the attack, as well as those involved in the politically motivated cover-up of this atrocity," said Basulto.

The downing of the planes unleashed a series of political events whose consequences have extended to the present.

The most significant was the passage of the controversial Helms-Burton law, which until that moment President Clinton had refused to sign. Moreover, as a result of the shoot-down, a federal judge ordered the Cuban government to compensate the families of the victims. The money for such compensation has been taken from Cuban state funds that were frozen in U.S. banks. In a series of responses and counter responses to this measure, Cuba cut direct telephone communications with the U.S. on December 15, a measure that is still in force.

The latest revelation about the downing of the planes occurred in recent days, in the continuing trial of a group of alleged Cuban spies in Miami. Several members of the so-called Red Wasp participated in operations prior to the downing of the planes, and received promotions for the mission executed. Next February 24 marks the fifth anniversary of the downing of the planes, and the death of the four crew members. Apparently there are still some chapters yet to be known about that murder, executed in cold blood by Cuban fighter pilots.

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