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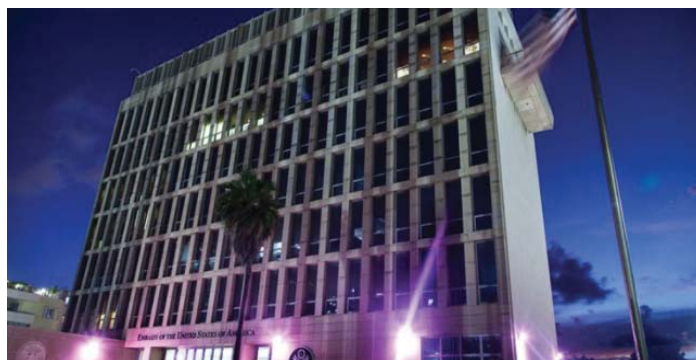
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FEATURED Q&A

Who or What Is Behind the 'Sonic Attacks' in Cuba?



Following a series of bizarre ailments afflicting diplomats, the Trump administration reduced the size of the staff in the U.S. Embassy in Havana (pictured above) and expelled a similar number of Cuban diplomats from Washington. // File Photo: U.S. State Department.

Q The U.S. State Department in early October expelled 15 Cuban diplomats in protest of what it said was Cuba's failure to protect American envoys in Havana from a series of mysterious attacks that caused hearing loss and other ailments.

The order came after a U.S. decision to reduce the size of its embassy in Havana by 60 percent. What do the decisions to expel and withdraw diplomatic staff indicate about the future of U.S.-Cuban relations? How well are the two countries working together to solve the mystery? Who or what might be behind the attacks, and what would be the potential motive for staging them?

A Daniel P. Erikson, managing director of Blue Star Strategies and former White House and State Department advisor on Latin America during the Obama administration: "The mystery of the apparent sonic attacks in Cuba has only deepened in the days since the United States decided to draw down most of its embassy staff in Havana and asked the Cuban Embassy in Washington to implement a commensurate reduction in staff. Simply put, the central question surrounding the 'Cuban sonic attacks' can be broken into three parts. Were there attacks? Were they sonic? And were they perpetrated by Cuba? On the first point, there seems to be little question that U.S. diplomats were targeted for harassment, beginning at the end of 2016 and continuing on an intermittent basis through August of this year. The evidence related to the second question is more mixed; some diplomats reported hearing piercing noises while others did not, and a recent New

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

At Least 13 Inmates Killed in Mexico Prison Riot

The riot happened in a state prison in the city of Cadereyta, in Nuevo León State. A spokesman said authorities were forced to use lethal force to quell the riot at the overcrowded prison.

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BUSINESS

JBS' Batista Brothers Charged With Insider Trading

Prosecutors allege the brothers knowingly sold shares of the meatpacking company before their plea bargain was announced.

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ECONOMIC

Ending NAFTA Would Harm U.S.-Mexico Ties: Foreign Minister

Ending the North American Free Trade Agreement would harm the countries' cooperation in other areas, such as fighting drug trafficking, said Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray.

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Videgaray // File Photo: Mexican Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

At Least 13 Inmates Killed in Mexico Prison Riot

At least 13 inmates were killed in a prison riot Tuesday in the Mexican city of Cadereyta in Nuevo León State, the Associated Press reported. The riot ended in lethal force, according to spokesman Aldo Fasci. He added that the death toll could climb, because eight more inmates were in critical condition following the riot. Hours of negotiations and police forces using non-lethal weapons to quell the riot were ultimately unsuccessful, Fasci said. Authorities saw through video monitors that at least one prisoner had been killed, and guards had been taken hostage and were being beaten on the roof. Authorities decided to move forward with lethal force in order to protect additional guards and prisoners, said Fasci. The riot began when members of one of the prison's half-dozen gangs, which are normally kept apart, began protesting late Monday. The protests eventually died down, but early Tuesday morning, fighting broke out, and one prisoner was killed. When police first tried to intervene using non-lethal force, 150 prisoners attacked them with metal tools and rubble from

work carried out at the prison. No guards were killed, but one was seriously injured. Fasci said the prison holds 4,000 inmates and was not designed to hold that many prisoners.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Ending NAFTA Would Harm U.S.-Mexico Relations: Videgaray

Ending the North American Free Trade Agreement would bring U.S.-Mexico relations to a breaking point and would affect the two countries' cooperation in other areas, such as fighting drug trafficking and stemming illegal immigration, Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray said Tuesday. Videgaray made the comments after U.S. President Donald Trump said he might want to scrap the accord. The United States, Mexico and Canada begin a fourth round of talks today in Washington as they renegotiate NAFTA. Also on Tuesday, Thomas Donohue, the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, accused the Trump administration of making "poison pill proposals" to sabotage the negotiations. The chamber has argued that NAFTA is critical to U.S. industries, including manufacturing and agriculture.

NEWS BRIEFS

Brazilian Congressional Report Calls for Shelving Charges Against Temer

A Brazilian congressional report on Tuesday recommended that President Michel Temer not face charges for alleged obstruction of justice or membership in a criminal organization, Reuters reported. The report, which was written by Congressman Bonifacio de Andrada, said the allegations against Temer were unfounded. He also recommended not pursuing charges against two of Temer's cabinet ministers, who were facing allegations stemming from the corruption case involving bribes paid by Brazilian meatpacker JBS.

IMF Expects 2,300% Inflation Rate in Venezuela Next Year

The International Monetary Fund said Venezuela's annual inflation rate may jump to more than 2,300 percent next year, the highest estimate for any country tracked by the IMF, according to the organization's latest World Economic Outlook report, which was published Tuesday, Bloomberg News reported. GDP is expected to contract another 6 percent next year after shrinking an estimated 12 percent this year. Venezuela's central bank stopped publishing inflation data in December 2015.

White House Asks Congress for \$4.9 Billion Loan for Puerto Rico

The Trump administration on Tuesday asked the U.S. Congress for a \$4.9 billion loan help Puerto Rico's government pay its bills in the wake of Hurricane Maria, Reuters reported. The loan would help with "short-term liquidity problems" such as paying pensions and payroll, an administration official told the wire service. Puerto Rico, which is weighed down by some \$72 billion in debt, would not be able to use the money for debt service, the official said.

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 1

York Times survey of scientific experts in acoustics concluded that 'scientists doubt a hidden ultrasound weapon can explain what happened in Cuba.' The third question, regarding the Cuban government's potential culpability, is the most puzzling. Cuba's initial reaction—which included a meeting between Raúl Castro and the U.S. charge d'affaires, cooperating with the FBI, and an emergency visit to Washington by Cuban foreign minister Bruno Rodríguez to discuss the matter with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson—all indicate high levels of concern. But rather than concede that Cuba's vaunted security apparatus may have been asleep at

the switch, the Cuban government has now started to dismiss the claims as 'tall tales.' And finally, will the U.S. and Cuban governments be able to steer through this crisis, successfully conclude the investigation and focus on cooperating to advance long term strategic interests? That remains another mystery."

A **Vicki Huddleston, retired U.S. ambassador and former chief of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana:** "Given that all but a few of the sonic incidents occurred in the private homes of principally intelligence and

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BUSINESS NEWS

JBS' Batista Brothers Charged With Insider Trading

Brazilian prosecutors have charged Wesley and Joesley Batista, respectively the former CEO and former chairman of JBS, the world's largest meatpacker, with insider trading, the Financial Times reported Tuesday. The two are already under arrest, and in May sparked a major political scandal in Brazil after details emerged of the brothers' plea bargain testimonies, in which the two alleged that they discussed bribes with Brazilian President Michel Temer. Prosecutors on Tuesday said the brothers knowingly sold



Wesley Batista // File Photo: JBS.

shares of JBS before news broke of the plea bargain, avoiding some 138 million reais in losses and making some \$100 million after trading in foreign currency. The share and currency trades were allegedly made without the knowledge of Brazilian authorities and were made after the Batista brothers had already negotiated their plea bargain with authorities. "The defendants minimized losses through the purchase and sale of shares and profited by buying dollars, based on privileged information they had about the plea bargain agreement they had negotiated with the prosecutor general," the public prosecutor's office said in a statement. Wesley and Joesley Batista said foreign exchange transactions and share trades were routine business for the large international meatpacking company. The brothers' investment company, J&F, is facing 10.3 billion reais in fines over 25 years, and JBS is divesting assets in order to pay the penalties.

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security officers more than a year ago, and given the U.S. government's blatantly political response in the last few months—well after the damage was done—this mystery is unlikely ever to be solved. But a logic process that focuses on motive, means and opportunity points to three suspects. Those

“This mystery is unlikely ever to be solved.”

— Vicki Huddleston

with motive are: Cuban hardliners opposed to the Obama-Castro opening, militant Cuban exiles who in the past have perpetrated attacks against Cubans and Americans, and an enemy or competition state, such as Russia, China, North Korea or Venezuela. Of this group, all had means and opportunity, except radical Cuban-Americans, unless they colluded with a rogue Cuban element or an unfriendly state. Given the rapprochement with the United States, it appears the Cuban government lacked a motive to carry out such attacks, but it is likely that it was complicit in covering up the perpetrator, because it is embarrassed to admit that there is a rogue faction within the government or that it is dependent on the largess of whichever state carried out the attacks. The tragedy is that conservative Cuban-Americans, led by Senator Marco Rubio, have used these mysterious attacks to trash U.S.-Cuba relations. In so doing, they have given Russia and China more influence, harmed American and Cuban families by denying them the right to visit and to immigrate, and wrecked a process that was leading toward greater social and economic freedom in Cuba.”

A Frank Calzon, executive director of the Center for a Free Cuba:

“Let's get the context straight. The 'other ailments' include concussions and brain trauma, which, even if they are mild, is a serious matter. The administration's decision means the White House no longer ignores actions harmful to the United States, like the attempted smuggling of missiles and war planes to North Korea under tons of sugar, Russian spy ships back in Havana, the harboring of American terrorists wanted by the FBI, the stealing of an American Hellfire missile used at a NATO exercises in Europe, and the deployment of thousands of Cuban soldiers in Venezuela—all of which were swept under the rug by the previous administration. The future of bilateral relations will depend on Raúl Castro. Cuba and the United States are not jointly responsible to solve 'the mystery.' If Cuban diplomats were harmed in Washington, no one would expect Cuba to share responsibility for the investigation. Cuba is a police state where U.S. diplomats are under constant surveillance and are required to rent their homes from the regime. Cuba hires out hundreds of Cubans to work inside the U.S. Embassy and many, if not all, are the eyes and ears of the regime there. How many would not have been hurt if all diplomats had come home earlier? If Cuba cannot fulfill its international responsibility to guarantee the diplomats' safety, the embassies should be closed. The idea that Havana ended its Cold War against the United States, in exchange for Obama's concessions, is not supported by the facts.”

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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