

The U.S. charges Raúl Castro



Raúl Castro and Barack Obama at the 7th Summit of the Americas in 2015 (Source: [The White House/Commons](#))

The U.S. Department of Justice filed charges on Wednesday against former Cuban President and Army General Raúl Castro. The 94-year-old is accused of, as then-Minister of Defense, overseeing a chain of command that led to Cuban fighter jets shooting down two civilian aircraft in February 1996. Four people were killed in the incident, including three U.S. citizens.

The planes belonged to the Miami-based Cuban exile organization “Hermanos al Rescate” (Brothers to the Rescue). In addition to the shooting down of the planes, Castro and others are charged with four counts of murder. As U.S. Attorney General Todd Blanche stated, Castro is to be brought to the U.S. for trial—“either voluntarily or by other means.”

Havana Rejects Charges as Political Provocation

The Cuban government immediately rejected the charges. Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel [described](#) the move on Platform X as “a political action without any legal basis, aimed solely at creating a pretext to justify the madness of a military aggression against Cuba.”

In a statement, the Cuban government refers to the historical context: The organization “Hermanos al Rescate” committed more than 25 serious and deliberate violations of Cuban airspace between 1994 and 1996. At the time, Cuba had filed formal complaints with the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and had also directly warned the U.S. President of possible consequences.

Cuba's response was, according to the statement, therefore an "act of self-defense" covered by the UN Charter, the 1944 Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation, and the principles of air sovereignty and proportionality. The International Civil Aviation Organization, however, had concluded that the aircraft were over international waters at the time of the shootdown.

Documents prove: Washington saw the shootdown coming

Declassified documents from the U.S. National Security Archive shed a nuanced light on the events leading up to the shootdown. According to these documents, high-ranking officials in the Clinton administration had not only anticipated the scenario of a shootdown but had also issued internal warnings about it, without, however, taking the necessary decisive action.

As early as one month before the incident on February 24, 1996, an official from the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) described a Cuban shootdown as a realistic "worst-case scenario" in an internal email. The FAA had repeatedly warned the founder of "Hermanos al Rescate," José Basulto, for repeated and, in the agency's assessment, provocative overflights of Cuban territory—including the dropping of thousands of leaflets over Havana—and had even considered suspending his pilot's license. However, his pilot's license was not revoked. Basulto was allowed to continue flying, even though, according to the records, he had repeatedly submitted false flight plans.

In its statement, the Cuban government accuses the U.S. of having itself killed nearly 200 people and [destroyed](#) 57 ships in international waters in the Caribbean and the Pacific—far from U.S. territory—through the "disproportionate use of military force" due to alleged links to drug trafficking that were never proven. Under international law, this constitutes extrajudicial executions, and under U.S. law, murder. It is "great cynicism" that this very government is now bringing charges, the statement reads.

"Psychological Operation"

The charges against Castro come against a backdrop of sharply heightened tensions between Washington and Havana. Observers draw parallels to the Trump administration's actions against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, who was abducted earlier this year during a U.S. special forces operation in Venezuela.

Frank Mora, a former high-ranking U.S. defense official and now a lecturer at Florida International University, described the charges to the *New York Times* as a "psychological operation." He said the aim was more to intimidate the leadership in Havana. Analyst Brian Fonseca told the *Miami Herald* that it was a "symbolic step" for the radical exile community in Miami.

Protest planned outside U.S. Embassy

The indictment is part of an economic blockade that has intensified since the start of Trump's second term, during which Washington once again placed the socialist Caribbean island on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism and imposed a de facto oil embargo in January—a

move condemned by UN experts as a violation of Cuba's human and development rights. After the attacks on Venezuela and Iran, Trump threatened that Cuba would be "next." Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants, is considered the architect of this policy.

Coinciding with the announcement of the U.S. indictment, the Cuban government announced commemorative events for Raúl Castro's 95th birthday on June 3. A protest rally is planned for Friday morning at the "Anti-Imperialist Tribune" in front of the U.S. Embassy in Havana. ([Cubaheute](#))