



**\*For Immediate Release\***  
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**Opening Statement of Chairman Matt Salmon (AZ-05)  
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere Hearing:**

**A Closer Look at Cuba and its Recent History of Proliferation**

*As prepared for delivery*

Earlier this summer, on July 16<sup>th</sup>, the Panamanian government discovered and detained the North Korean flagged Chong Chon Gang cargo vessel traveling from Cuba. Found on board were 25 cargo containers of Cuban weapons and other U.N.-sanctioned items bound for the rogue regime in North Korea. In anticipation of the U.N. Security Council Sanctions Committee's impending report on the incident, I've convened our Subcommittee today to investigate further Cuba's recent history of military proliferation and non-compliance with U.N. sanctions, and to review the options available to the Subcommittee to attempt to hold Cuba accountable for their violations.

The facts in this case are not in dispute. At the time of their discovery, the Cuban foreign ministry said that the tanker was carrying 10,000 tons of sugar and 240 metric tons of "obsolete defensive weapons" including disassembled missiles, two MiG-21 jet fighters, and two disassembled antiaircraft missile complexes, "to be repaired and returned to Cuba." But here is what the Panamanian officials actually found hidden among the bags of Cuban sugar: night vision equipment, small arms and light-weapons ammunition, rocket-propelled grenades and artillery ammunition for anti-tank guns. This cargo is a clear violation of the U.N. sanctions imposed on North Korea after its series of nuclear-bomb tests.

This is a potentially groundbreaking case where a country in the Western Hemisphere is likely to be found in violation of U.N. Security Council sanctions on weapons proliferation. Many experts believe, and the Castro regime itself has actually admitted to the violation of international sanctions in this case. I am convinced that this case should and would be getting a lot more international attention if not for the daily and deadly news coming out of Syria, and now the heinous Al-Shabaab acts of terrorism at the mall in Nairobi, Kenya.

The narrative that defenders of the Castro regime would like us to believe is that much of the weaponry was to be repaired and/or modernized and returned to Cuba, and that it is no longer involved in such illicit activities. But at least in this instance, it is undeniable that they got caught red-handed in direct violation of the sanctions and they must be held accountable.

This Subcommittee has been told that knowing it is in violation of international sanctions, the Castro regime has begun a full “charm offensive” at the U.N. to convince the Sanctions Committee that it should in fact be applauded for its compliance and cooperation in this case, rather than punished and sanctioned for its intentional breach of the sanctions regime.

Failure to hold the Cuban government fully responsible will also be a slap in the face to our allies. If Cuba is allowed to get away with it this time, it would send a terrible message to Panama, which put its resources and reputation on the line to intercept this vessel. Even worse, other countries in the future might decide that it simply isn’t worth the cost and energy of pursuing similar violations -- to the benefit of the rogue regimes in North Korea and Iran.

Of further concern is that it appears that the Cuban military's rogue business activities are growing increasingly dangerous, yet current U.S. travel policy continues to feed the Cuban military's business interests. For example, U.S. travelers to Cuba stay almost exclusively at the Cuban military's 5-star hotels. I believe that this policy should be halted, and that remittances from the U.S. should not be allowed to further fuel the moribund Castro regime.

If Cuba is not properly reprimanded in the strongest terms available, it could very well embolden Venezuela and other ALBA states to find ways to help other rogue regimes. We know Venezuela has already been helping Iran skirt U.S. financial sanctions, allowing Cuba to get away with violating international weapons sanctions would send a dangerous message to the international community at large.

I very much look forward to hearing from our expert witnesses today as we delve further into these questions and how this Subcommittee can most effectively work to ensure International sanctions are upheld with meaningful consequences for any violations.”

*Rep. Matt Salmon (AZ-05) serves on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs as Chairman of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere. He is also a member of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce.  
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