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**“A Closer Look at Cuba and its Recent History of Proliferation”
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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer you this testimony.

On July 15, 2013, the North Korean-flagged ship Chong Chon Gang was seized by Panama for smuggling “undeclared military cargo” through the Panama Canal. Panama reported that the captain had attempted suicide and that the vessel’s 35 crewmembers had been detained after violently resisting efforts to take the ship to port for inspection. Furthermore, it said that the ship’s declaration indicated it was only carrying 10,000 tons of sugar plus two thousand empty polyethylene bags. However, hidden behind over 200,000 bags of sugar were two containers full of weapons and military equipment. Because this presumably violates United Nations’ sanctions on North Korea, the matter is under review by a U.N. panel of experts.

Panamanian news sources reported that Cuban officials had initially said the ship was loaded with donated sugar “for the people of North Korea” and quickly requested it be released, pledging there were no drugs on board. Two days later, facing the inevitable, Cuba’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement saying the ship had left Cuba with a cargo of primarily 10,000 tons of sugar and “240 metric tons of obsolete defensive weapons” bound for North Korea, “to be repaired and returned to Cuba.” It said the containers held “two anti-aircraft missile complexes Volga and Pechora, nine missiles in parts and spares, two Mig-21 Bis, and 15 motors for this type of airplane,” all manufactured midway through the past century. Further, it stated: “The agreements are subscribed by Cuba based on the need to maintain our defensive capacity to preserve national sovereignty. The Republic of Cuba reiterates its firm and unwavering commitment with peace, disarmament, including nuclear disarmament, and respect for international law.” Soon North Korea’s news agency quoted its Foreign Ministry: “This cargo is nothing but aging weapons to be sent back to Cuba after overhauling them according to a legitimate contract.” A verbal note from North Korea’s embassy in Havana said that the ship did not seek to endanger the security of the Panama Canal and that North Korea hoped for “amiable cooperation” to resolve the case “diplomatically.”

When the long and effortful process of unloading the ship had been completed, Panama’s government issued a statement reporting the weaponry already acknowledged by Cuba as well as a variety of small arms and light weapons, different types of ammunition and

artillery as well as generators, batteries, night vision equipment, and more. Analysts took special note of two reported missile radar systems and of photos posted online by Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli showing equipment that may be used to acquire or track targets for interception by surface to air missiles.

Experts reported that the ship had crossed the Panama Canal on June 1, 2013 and had again been spotted in Panamanian waters near the Canal on July 13, 2013, anchoring in Cuba during the interval. It was probably no coincidence that a delegation from North Korea led by the General Staff of its Army had left for Cuba on June 26th for a visit of several days to boost “the friendly relations between the two armies and peoples” and “stand together in the anti-imperialist joint front.”

To those of us familiar with the nature of the Cuban regime, the only surprise in finding Cuba secretly trading weapons with North Korea and probably flaunting UN sanctions is that it was caught. North Korea and Cuba, it turns out, have much in common. Both have been ruled for over half a century by ruthless family dynasties at the helm of military dictatorships. Both have imposed totalitarian rule that controls all aspects of the lives of their people —this thanks to the vast repressive apparatus they command. Both of their so-called “socialist” command economies allow profit-making capitalist networks exclusively for the enrichment of the ruler and select loyal associates. Both have managed to bring their countries to near economic collapse, yet maintain privileges for the ruling elite as misery is spread amongst the people.

Until recently, both were the last two nations entrenched in orthodox communism, at least in theory. Cuba has, as of late, shed its usual Marxist-Leninist rhetoric to craft “an updated model,” yet its Constitution still has the Communist Party as “the highest leading force of society and of the state” while its goal remains “the construction of socialism and the progress toward a communist society.” Both preach Third World solidarity and are shrouded in small nation defiance against the United States. Importantly, they share what Cuba’s Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs explained in 2003 is a joint struggle against U.S. imperialism, the “common enemy.”

Cuba and North Korea have both perfected the art of milking the international community for massive aid and subsidies, favorable terms of trade, enormous loans they default on, and, at least in the case of Cuba, investment partnerships which they have mostly ended gobbling up. Both have repeatedly flaunted basic rules and standards of civilized nations, are guilty of multiple crimes against humanity, have longstanding relationship with fellow rogue states, have promoted subversion and terrorism, and have a very long history of actively working against U.S. interests worldwide. Also, they share the bad habit of taking hostages as bargaining chips to use against the U.S. government. The most recent victims are Alan Gross, held in Cuba since 2009, and Kenneth Bae, held in North Korea since 2012. Both had traveled to help minority communities and were sentenced to 15 years of prison for violating the respective Stalinist laws.

For all of the above, it is obvious why ties between North Korea and Cuba are longstanding and tight. In the 1960s, North Korea reportedly opposed Cuba’s efforts to

have the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) side with the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, semi-retired dictator-in-chief Fidel Castro, who now shares his “reflections” on world events in Cuban official media, wrote that apparently in the early 1980s “Compañero Kim Il Sung, a veteran and impeccable combatant, sent us 100,000 AK rifles and their corresponding park without charging a cent.” Not that what Fidel Castro says can be believed; he is a chronic prevaricator. Just this past July 28th he wrote about the Panama seizure: “In recent days there was an attempt to slander our Revolution, trying to portray (President Raul Castro) as tricking the United Nations and other heads of state.”

All indicates that North Korea-Cuba relations improved after the fall of the Soviet Communist empire and the end of its gigantic subsidies to Cuba. Subsequent news reports, especially from the official media of both countries, provide plenty of evidence of a growing friendship. This is particularly evident since July 2001, when a Cuban military delegation led by the Chief of Staff of Cuba’s Armed Forces traveled to Pyongyang to “strengthen relations between their armed forces.” His host was the Chief of Staff of the Korean People’s Army. The Cuban spoke of the “unbreakable friendship between the two countries” and the importance of his visit for “further consolidating and developing the friendship and solidarity ... advancing under the uplifted banner of socialism.” The North Korean Vice-Marshal Kim Yong Chun stated that his country would always “stand by the people and army of Cuba,” noting that “friendly relations have been put on a higher plane under the profound care of Kim Jong Il and Fidel Castro Ruz.”

On February 7, 2002, North Korea’s official news agency reported that Fidel Castro had sent a congratulatory message for the “Beloved Leader” Kim Jong Il on his 60th birthday praising his devoted efforts to foil “the hostile acts of the imperialist powers”... “that earned Cuba’s admiration and respect.” Castro reiterated the “strong will to steadily expand and strengthen fraternal ties and cooperation between the peoples, parties, and governments of the two countries.”

In the U.S., in February 2003, the directors of the Defense Intelligence Agency and the CIA told Congress that North Korea had a ballistic missile, apparently yet untested, capable of hitting the western United States and possibly targets farther inland. North Korea had expelled U.N. inspectors and was reportedly taking steps to restart plutonium-production plus pursuing a uranium-enrichment program. In Vienna, the 35-nation board of governors of the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency issued a resolution reporting to the Security Council North Korea’s violations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and other accords. Cuba and Russia refused to endorse it.

A few months later, on October 5, 2003, David Kay, Special Advisor on Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction Search, appeared on ABC News with George Stephanopoulos (“This Week” program) and offered an example of the United States’ “remarkable” findings in Iraq: evidence “of North Korean missiles going to Cuba.”

This didn’t stop the allies from moving forward, after all, nobody seemed to take much notice or care. North Korea’s Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Choi Su Hon, traveled to Havana in June 2004 “to strengthen” relations” with instructions from Kim Jong Il to

“develop mutual ties in various spheres.” That November (2004), Vice-Marshal Kim Yong Chun, Chief of Staff of North Korea’s Army, led a delegation of senior generals that spent five days evaluating Cuba’s military infrastructure—including an aerial defense unit—and touring manufacturing and assembly facilities of the “Unión de Industrias Militares,” the island’s defense industry conglomerate. They met with President Fidel Castro, Defense Minister Raúl Castro, and the heads of all branches of Cuba’s military establishment. Cuba’s state-run media described “the friendly atmosphere characteristic of relations between the armed forces of both countries” and reported “consensus on all issues” plus a “strengthening military cooperation.” Cuba awarded medals to the North Koreans for the “Order of Solidarity” and “Fraternal Combat” and a statement was made that “the Cuban army and people will fight shoulder to shoulder with the Korean army and people in [an] anti-U.S. joint front.”

The visit to Cuba coincided with that of China's president Hu Jintao. Hu extended an economic lifeline to the Castro regime, committing as much as US\$1.5 billion in Chinese government-backed investments reportedly to exploit Cuba's strategic nickel and cobalt ores. Any link to the North Koreans and their interest in the Cuban military infrastructure are unknown, but not unthinkable.

In May 2009, North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Ui-Chun paid an official visit to Cuba and signed a bilateral agreement with his Cuban counterpart, Bruno Rodriguez, to increase cooperation and enhance ties. He declared that they shared “the same goals in the fight against the imperialist Yankees” and in the construction of socialism.” The two ministers then met in Pyongyang on September 4, 2009 to discuss ways to enhance the bilateral relationship.

The above sets the backdrop for the July 15, 2013 seizure of the North Korean vessel carrying concealed weapons from Cuba. Early that same month, a military delegation of the highest level had paid an official visit to Cuba. The visit lasted several days, it is unclear how many, and was led by North Korea's four-star general and Army Chief of Staff Kim Kyok Sik. He highlighted the friendship between the two countries and said he was there “to find colleagues in the same trench.” The visit included meetings with Cuban President General Raúl Castro and the highest-ranking Cuban military officers plus armored vehicle inspections and tours of military facilities. Cuba’s state media reported the military-to-military exchange as strongly fraternal and including “detailed information on combat readiness, staff training, and use of the technology and weaponry.”

Four weeks after the ship was seized, North Korea celebrated “Cuba solidarity” month, with Cuba’s ambassador to Pyongyang reportedly announcing: “The friendly relations between the two countries have grown strong in the protracted and rigorous struggle against the U.S. imperialists, the common enemy, and become a model for the world people.”

But, behind the scenes, extreme damage control seems to have been put in place. Forty-one days after the seizure of the Chong Chon Gang, Division General Pedro Mendiondo Gómez, head of Aerial Defense and of the Air Force was reportedly killed in a car accident

with his wife and parents-in-law on Sunday morning, August 25th. The General was apparently the man charged with the weapons seized in Panama. Cuban media reported the accident, but offered no details of the location, circumstances, or anything else. It is impossible to tell if this was just a convenient coincidence or something more sinister. But, in Cuba, these timely “accidents” are not rare; Brian Latell, university professor and Latin America specialist with 35 years of service in the CIA and the National Intelligence Council, describes several such killings in compelling detail in his book, *Castro's Secrets: The CIA and Cuba's Intelligence Machine* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). In July 2012 the Cuba Archive project, which I head, published a report detailing many such cases among not just regime opponents, but also of high-ranking officials who've come under suspicion or fallen in disgrace. Meanwhile, in late August, Kim Kyok Sik, the North Korean General Staff of the Army who had just returned from Cuba, was quietly removed from his post, his fate unknown.

What explains the arms trafficking? The military-to-military visits described above point to deliberate and concerted efforts. We know North Korea's motives. Rogue states such as Syria, Burma, and Iran have helped it violate the sanctions regime. In May of this year, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation said Iran and North Korea, with their missile and nuclear programs, were continuing to violate United Nations sanctions through established channels that allow them to both export weapons and import “items they need for their weapons industry.”

Regarding Cuba's motives, it is entirely feasible to imagine the Castro regime would risk getting caught. First, it is in desperate need of any hard currency it can get to feed its faltering economy and keep the Castro dictatorship in power; this would be true whether the shipment was for North Korea or ultimately for another such ally. The Venezuelan economy is in dire straits and its massive subsidies for Cuba probably in decline. Second, the regime is emboldened by the impunity the international system has afforded even its worst crimes against humanity.

North Korea's bad behavior is widely known. Cuba's, however, is clouded by very effective propaganda and disinformation. But the facts are there for those who look, starting with Fidel Castro's request to Khrushchev to launch a missile strike against the United States during the October Missile Crisis of 1962 was well documented by the Soviets. Cuba's support of rogue states is also legendary and well documented. In May 2000, Fidel Castro visited Iran, Libya, and Syria—who, like Cuba, are designated by the U.S. government as state sponsors of terrorism. In Iran, he gloated that the United States was weak and would soon be brought to its knees. Just last August 28th the Cuban Foreign Ministry issued a warning against an attack on Syria with a "vehement rejection of any attempt to undermine the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Syria and the self-determination of its people."

Cuba under the Castro brothers has trained thousands of guerillas and terrorists from all over the world and sponsored subversion and terrorism in most nations of this hemisphere, including the United States, as well as in the Middle East and Africa. It has ties to terrorist groups responsible for countless deaths worldwide. It harbors dozens of fugitives from

U.S. justice, including terrorists who killed Americans, and members of ETA (Basque Fatherland and Liberty) guilty of crimes in Spain.

Cuba is successful in confusing people thanks to its powerful and effective public relations' empire, designed to mold world opinion. It has dedicated huge resources and diligent efforts to building and maintaining a large and competent diplomatic corps, intelligence network, and gigantic state-run worldwide propaganda machine operating in many languages —radio stations, publications, websites, blogs— and through many cultural, artistic, academic, and sports organizations, etc. This is all directed at the media, multilateral agencies, academia, governments, international organizations, agencies, community groups and influential individuals, especially in key countries. A 1984 CIA report declassified in 2003 provides ample detail of its reach by then.

Required resources are available for the ruler's priorities. The Cuban economy is almost entirely controlled by the military, under Raúl Castro. The GAESA and CIMEX corporate conglomerates operate through capitalist-style corporations and control all hard currency operations. Plus, the Castro brothers divert money to global safe havens and operate a worldwide corporate network that assures ready access to vast funds for priority projects. It also serves as a safety net in case they must leave. I described this in my paper published in 2005, "Fidel Castro Inc.: A Global Conglomerate." Finally, all tactics are fair game —lies, manipulation, deception, disinformation, blackmail, espionage, coercion, even assassination, are used to further the regime's objectives.

For Cuba and North Korea, partners in crime, nothing is too outrageous. There's a saying in Spanish, "Dios los cria, ellos se juntan." ("God creates them, they find each other.")