

The Last Soldiers of the Cold War: The Story of the Cuban Five

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Here is the story of political prisoners finally freed in December 2014, after being held captive by the United States since the late 1990s.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, violent anti-Castro groups based in Florida carried out hundreds of military attacks on Cuba, bombing hotels and shooting up Cuban beaches with machine guns. The Cuban government struck back with the Wasp Network—a dozen men and two women—sent to infiltrate those organizations.

The Last Soldiers of the Cold War tells the story of those unlikely Cuban spies and their eventual unmasking and prosecution by US authorities. Five of the Cubans received long or life prison terms on charges of espionage and murder. Global best-selling Brazilian author Fernando Morais narrates the riveting tale of the Cuban Five in vivid, page-turning detail, delving into the decades-long conflict between Cuba and the US, the growth of the powerful Cuban exile community in Florida, and a trial that eight Nobel Prize winners condemned as a travesty of justice.

The Last Soldiers of the Cold War is both a real-life spy thriller and a searching examination of the Cold War's legacy.

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
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Ciro Messias says

O livro é sensacional, a história me prendeu de tal forma que passei madrugadas lendo, enquanto tinha que acordar às 5am para trabalhar. Só tenho uma pequena observação, mas lógico não depreciativa. Entendo que a história é longa e dar muitos detalhes é praticamente impossível, mas confesso que fiquei um pouco confuso na hora de guardar os nomes dos personagens. São muitas pessoas envolvidas na Rede, e nas organizações anticastristas. Tantas que tem momentos que me confundo de que lado afinal de contas a pessoa está. De resto, irretocável!

Mika Auramo says

Fernando Morais kirjoitti väkevän kirjan, jossa hän kertoo viiden Yhdysvalloissa toimineen kuubalaisagentin tarinan ja epilogissa paljastaa vielä, kuinka heille lopulta kävi. Kirjan nimen suomennos on onneton, eikä kyse ollut suinkaan ”viimeisistä mohikaaneista”.

Kyse on siis La Red Avispa – verkoston toiminnasta (mm. González, Hernández, Guerrero, Labañino ja Santos), sen vaikutuksista ja lopulta päättymisestä. Niin kuin historiaa tuntevat tietävät, että Yhdysvallat käy terrorisminvastaista sotaa toisaalla ja toisaalla rahoitetaan terroristien toimintaa niin kuin kymmenien vastavallankumouksellisten organisaatioiden Amerikoissa. Tämä kirja keskittyy muutaman avainhenkilön toimintaan ja soluttautumiseen vastavallankumouksellisiin organisaatioihin Floridassa menneinä vuosikymmeninä.

Kirja perustuu monipuolisiin lähteisiin ja kymmenien eri haastateltavien lausuntoihin, mm. pommiattentaatista kärkehtäneeseen El Salvadorilaiseen, joka tunki pariinkin otteeseen C-4-räjähdettä matkatavaroihin ja lähti hotelleja pommittamaan. Hän oli nimeltään Cruz Leon, josta tehdään varsinainen filmiaddikti ja terroristibimbo.

Sen sijaan Castron-vastaisen opposition toiminta näyttäytyy vain etäältä, esim. Cuban Council -verkosto 1990-luvun puolivälissä, johon oli sekaantunut niin kirkon miehiä kuin armeijan upseereitakin.

Lopulta päästään suureen oikeudenkäyntiin, kun Castro paljastaa antikommunistiset terroristiverkostot Clintonille. Seuraus ei ollutkaan toiveiden mukainen, ja FBI ratsasi johtohenkilöt eikä suinkaan kuubalaistaustaisia äärioikeistolaisia radikaaleja, jotka olivat ampuneet turisteja ja tehneet terroristihyökkäyksiä Kuubassa siviilikohteita vastaan. Seurasi siis suuri oikeussirkus, jossa tuomittujen penkillä olikin kirjan ”viisi sankaria”.

Kirja oli mielenkiintoista luettavaa, sillä historiallisiin tapahtumiin sai ikään kuin sammakkoperspektiivin, joka perustui vielä tarkkaan valittuihin lähteisiin ja haastatteluihin, jotka oli sijoitettu toimivasti. Rakenne on kronologinen, ja yllättävä kyllä sekä agentit että terroristit inhimillistetään vahvasti. Esimiehet jäävät kulusseihin, ja sen sijaan kuubalaisagenteista ja heidän läheistään annetaan paikoin perin yksityiskohtaisia tietoja ihan koti-ikävästä, toimeentulo- ja rakkaushuolistakin.

Juliana Yoshida says

Mais uma vez, Fernando Morais apresenta mais uma história verídica, bem relatada, com uma grande riqueza de detalhes e de fácil leitura. É o primeiro livro em que a história se passa totalmente fora do Brasil, tratando de um assunto delicado que é o relacionamento de Cuba e EUA. Os fatos são recentes e mostram todas as manobras e maquinário políticos, terroristas e anti-terroristas por trás dos bastidores. Leitura altamente recomendada!

Vitor Garcia says

Se você quer conhecer uma nova Cuba, totalmente diferente da que é pintada pelos meios de comunicações mundiais, esse é um excelente livro.

O livro narra de uma forma leve a operação Vespa, que infiltrou agentes da Inteligência de Cuba em organizações anticastristas da Florida. Baseando-se em uma série de documentos, fotos, entrevistas e gravações, o autor mostra como a operação foi realizada, desde a sua idealização até o julgamento dos "espiões cubanos" no começo do século pelo governo dos EUA, e como os EUA permitiram que as ações terroristas desses grupos continuassem atuando em Cuba.

Seja para estudo, seja para lazer, esse é um excelente livro para abrir os olhos com relação ao grande defensor dos Direitos Humanos e guerreiro contra terroristas que os EUA tentam parecer para o mundo.

John says

On February 24, 1996, three small planes set off from Florida, planning to enter Cuban airspace over Havana and drop propaganda leaflets. They were piloted by members of Brothers to the Rescue, one of the many anti-Castro organisations that were then not only trying to reverse the revolution in Cuba but create havoc in the country through terrorist attacks on hotels, beaches, tourist offices and even international flights. It was far from the first time the Brothers had overflown Cuba: and on each occasion although they'd been warned of the consequences they'd ignored the warnings. This time, because the overflights were to draw attention to the cancellation of a planned protest assembly in Cuba itself, they had not only been warned against flying by the US authorities, but the licence of José Basulto, the lead plot, had been suspended.

Nevertheless Basulto was at the controls of the third plane that crossed into Cuban airspace, and he was perfectly positioned to see what happened to the other two. This time, on being spotted by Cuban radar, the MIG jets sent to intercept them did not merely hassle the planes as they crossed the invisible frontier, but destroyed the first and then the second with air-to-air missiles. As he turned his own plane away to avoid the same fate, Basulto was heard on the radio to burst out laughing: the Cuban government had over-reacted and inadvertently given a huge boost to the Brothers' propaganda activities.

The US authorities ignored the proof supplied by Cuba that the planes had been downed in Cuban waters, claiming instead that they had still been in international airspace. Cuba was able to put in front of the news media a defector from the anti-Castro groups, Juan Pablo Roque, who said he personally had been warned against flying that day by the FBI, who already knew that the Brothers and the other groups had been smuggling explosives and weapons into Cuba. Not long afterwards, Fidel Castro sent his opposite number

Bill Clinton a 200-page dossier detailing the crimes carried by terrorist groups in Cuba. Soon after it was delivered, one of the groups destroyed the Cuban tourist office in Mexico City.

The downing of the two planes was to have huge consequences. First, Clinton set about intensifying the embargo against trade with Cuba which had been in place since 1962. By signing the Helms-Burton Act, he made international companies subject to the same sanctions as US ones, and this would eventually lead (for example) to the Credit Suisse bank being fined over half a billion dollars for so-called 'trafficking' with Cuba. Only a few similar interventions were needed to ensure that Cuba had – and still has – extreme difficulty in trading internationally, not only with the US itself.

Another consequence was that the US continued to turn a blind eye to growing terrorist attacks on tourists in or travelling to Cuba: there were 127 incidents in five years, including the machine-gunning of passenger ships and thirteen hijackings of Cuba-bound flights. As well as a number of deaths, there was severe damage was to the tourist industry which had become an important source of foreign income after the collapse of the Soviet Union (the main market for Cuba's sugar). Despite regular protests that the attacks were being coordinated from Florida, the US government asserted they were internal incidents carried out by Cubans. Of the men behind them, operating freely in the US, the most notorious was Luis Posada Cariles who years earlier had been found guilty in Venezuela of organising the bombing of a flight to Cuba in 1976, which killed all 73 passengers and crew. (He lives in Florida to this day, now aged 87, despite having admitted to the New York Times that he organised many of the attacks).

A third consequence of the downing of the Brothers' planes would not become apparent until later. It turned out that Juan Pablo Roque was not a turncoat, but a spy planted by the Cuban authorities, one of a dozen men and two women who were part of the 'WASP' network, operating clandestinely in the US to thwart the terrorist attacks coming from Florida. Another of the Cuban agents, Rene González, had been due to pilot one of February 24 overflights but managed to excuse himself after a prior warning from Havana. Rene originally left Havana in 1990, in a set up in which he posed as a deserter who stole a Cuban airforce plane and landed it in Florida. This apparently daring feat had given him huge credibility with the dissident Cuban groups, and he had soon been able to join them and start to spy on their activities. However, unknown both to the agents and to the groups they had joined, by 1994 WASP was being monitored by the FBI. Investigators had rented an apartment opposite the one where Rene lived, solely to keep watch on him.

Nevertheless, the agents continued their work and by 1998 had amassed a huge dossier of evidence on the Florida-based groups. In negotiations involving Gabriel García Márquez (a friend both of Castro and of Clinton), the cache of evidence was handed over to a high-level FBI delegation who made a secret visit to Havana in June that year. The implied understanding was that they would act on it by arresting leaders of the dissidents. Instead, however, in September of the same year, following a series of dawn raids, they charged and placed in custody all but three members of the WASP network. Some of those detained made plea bargains, but the group who would soon become known as the 'Cuban Five' were put before the courts and eventually sentenced to a range of prison terms from 15 years to life. The longest sentence was imposed on Gerardo Hernández, who was found guilty of sending the information to Havana that signalled the overflights of the three Cuban aircraft in 1994, and who was therefore held culpable for the four deaths when two of the planes were shot down (despite the plans for the flights being widely known and the pilots having been specifically warned against flying). All were found guilty of espionage against the US government, even though they had only ever targeted Cuban terrorists.

This book by Morais tells the story in detail, up to the time of the trial (with notes on what subsequently happened, including their release). He had the collaboration of Cuban authorities and access to a large part of the FBI evidence. It is a gripping read, and is likely to remain the definitive account of a story which,

eventually, had a reasonably satisfactory conclusion. Needless to say, twenty years after the events described here, Cuban tourism is prospering, despite the prolonged but failed efforts of Cuba's enemies in Miami.

The international campaign to free the 'Five' was eventually successful (after intervention by Pope Francis) when the three that had not yet completed their sentences were released on December 17, 2014. I am proud to say I was watching Cuban TV that day, rather stunned, as Raul Castro made the announcement that the Five were already back in the country. I saw the delight on the faces of Cubans, young and old, in the days that followed. As it happens, I'd met one of the Five, Fernando González, in Nicaragua after his release a few weeks before. I'd also met the mother of Rene González, Irma Schwerert, when she visited Nicaragua in the period before Rene's release from prison in 2011. Framed on the wall of our house in Masaya we have a poster of Obama which calls on him to 'Give Us Five'. Eventually, he did.

Shaun says

The Last Soldiers of the Cold War: The Story of the Cuban Five is a timely book given the recent conversations between the United States and Cuba (as of July 2015). It tells the story of more than just five men, instead telling the story of a group of men and women in Florida committed to their anti-Castro stance.

Most of the book covers events that took place in both Florida and Cuba by groups both supporting the Castro led government and opposing the government. It's well researched.

The book was very difficult to read and follow. There are many, many characters and most of them have multiple aliases. It's also not written in a very linear manor nor in a story telling "style". Fernando Morais is a journalist, and the writing reflects that. Incredibly detailed, which at times became tedious and unnecessarily detailed. Despite this, I was not aware of much of what was covered in the book, such as bombings in Cuba orchestrated by Cubans in Florida and Latin America. So I learned a lot from the book.

Overall, if you are interested in Cuban history with the United States post-1961 and pre-2015, you should definitely check it out.

I received this book for free through a Goodreads First Reads giveaway.

Gus Mendonca says

Fernando Moraes tem um grande talento para contar histórias mais estranhas que a ficção. Tive contato com a obra do autor pela primeira vez com "corações sujos", relato da seita de imigrantes japoneses que, após o fim da segunda guerra mundial, se recusavam a acreditar que o Japão imperial havia sido derrotado. "Os últimos soldados da guerra fria" com partilha com "corações sujos" a qualidade de sempre surpreender o leitor pelo absurdo das situações narradas. Eu desconhecia completamente as ações dos grupos cubanos de extrema direita nos EUA, assim como ignorava a operação de contra terrorismo que Cuba realizou em Miami. "Os últimos soldados" também serve com uma introdução as relações EUA-Cuba, notadamente no que diz respeito ao papel da comunidade expatriada em Miami na política externa norte-americana. Do ponto de vista da prosa e da pesquisa histórica, Moraes também repete as qualidade vistas em "corações": escrita ágil e ampla coleta de dados e entrevistas. De negativo apenas dois pontos: o epílogo poderia dar mais

informações acerca das organizações de ultra direita em Miami e destino de de seus dirigente, além disso, um defeito também de "corações", Moraes carrega suas narrativa com uma pletora de personagens, muitos dos quais não tem influência real na história construída. Os dois pequenos revezes, no entanto, não diminuem a qualidade do livro. Extremamente recomendado.
