

Cuba says US waging 'cyberwar' against Havana

March 9 2011, by Isabel Sanchez

Cuban authorities are accusing the United States of waging "cyberwar" against the communist-ruled island -- an effort that Havana claims includes an American contractor on trial for espionage.

In recent weeks, state media has shown comments from Cubans contacted by alleged US agents who, according to reports here, were seeking to set up [communications networks](#) to promote subversive activities.

The reports came as a verdict was awaited in the trial for US national Alan Gross, 61, accused of crimes against the Cuban state.

Cuban media began airing in February a report, presented as a "leak" from the interior ministry, where a computer security expert described US efforts to subvert the Havana regime.

The expert identified Gross as part of an effort to create a technological platform that could be used to establish "a network of virtual mercenaries" who could use the Internet to attack the government.

Cuban authorities say the efforts by Gross -- who according to US officials was providing computers and cell phones to Cuba's Jewish community to help it communicate with the outside world -- was part of a new strategy by Washington to foment subversion.

On Monday, state-run television showed a report from a so-called "agent

Raul," whose real name is Dalexi Gonzalez, who said he was contacted in March 2008 by US agents seeking to set up a [satellite communications](#) network accessible to Cubans.

Gonzalez said he was contacted by Robert Guerra of Freedom House, a US pro-democracy group that Havana claims is linked to the CIA and the State Department's Agency for International Development.

Daniel Calingaert, who oversees Freedom House's civil society and media programs, said Guerra "did in fact travel to [Cuba](#) as part of a Freedom House program" but was an outside expert for the organization at the time.

Calingaert said the program's goal is "to help Cubans get access to the Internet and generally promote the free flow of information."

"Obviously in any other context this would be perfectly normal. But Cubans get into trouble for doing this kind of thing," he told AFP, without addressing the allegations of links to the US government.

Cuban media have also showed other reports suggesting Washington is financing Cuban dissident groups.

US officials have called for the release of Gross, and said the case has hurt efforts to normalize relations between Washington and Havana.

Cuban prosecutors are seeking 20 years in prison for Gross, who was working under contract with the State Department as a contractor when he was arrested in late 2009.

He was charged with "acts against the independence and territorial integrity of the state."

A Havana court declared his trial "closed" after two days on Saturday and said Gross was ready for "sentencing," adding that its "verdict will be made public in coming days," according to an official statement read on Cuban television.

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