The atmosphere of tension between Cuba and the US facilitates the transmission of collective hysteria

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Interview with Dr. Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa by Russia Today.

Valdes-Sosa is the director of the Neuroscience Center of Cuba and leads the group of Cuban experts that investigates the supposed acoustic attacks against US diplomats.

RT: Hello. We welcome you to the program Interview. We are broadcasting once again from Cuba. At this time, Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa accompanies us. He is the General Director of the Cuban Neurosciences Center, and a very respect Cuban scientist in the U.S. academic and scientific circles. He is also one of the most outstanding specialists of the multidisciplinary team created by Cuba to investigate the alleged sonic attacks suffered by U.S. diplomats stationed in Havana.

Of course, that will be the topic of our interview. First, I want to thank you for receiving RT at your office and for granting us these minutes to dialogue.

Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa: It is a pleasure.

RT: I want to start precisely with that multidisciplinary team of outstanding specialists. How was it formed? Which criteria followed Cuba to put together this team? What is the purpose of having different specialists?

Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa: Taking into account that the information received from the U.S. Government was very imprecise, the intention was to create a multidisciplinary team capable of tackling different aspects, some of those suggested by the Cuban side considering that there was a group of people with some health conditions and because all hypotheses needed to be analyzed.
Cuban Neurosciences Center

That is why otorhinolaryngologists were included in the first place, but also audiologists, clinicians. As it was

reported that there was brain damage, neurologists were included, neurophysiologists, I mean, specialists in neurosciences and neurophysicists, epidemiologists. Such a team was created so that it could be capable of analyzing, in a comprehensive way and from different angles, anything that could have happened to these diplomats. We started from the basis of examining the truth, of finding an actual explanation for the symptoms these people were reporting.

RT: The Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, informed that the U.S. counterpart gave very little information and that you, as specialists, as doctors, had no access to the allegedly attacked people. I want to ask you, how much does this affected the investigation?

Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa: That is, evidently, a significant limitation. We understand they intended to protect the privacy and the information on patients. That is a general principle we respect. Nevertheless, anonymously, they could have share more clinical data. It is very difficult to reach firm conclusions counting on the poor amount of information they delivered.

We analyzed the clinical data, which are very superficial. There are no elements indicating an objective proof. In Medicine, even though doctors listen to the symptoms patients refer, were are interested in measurements, if it is possible. In the case of hearing, there is equipment to do it; as well as for brain functioning, evaluations can be done with different techniques: images, electrical registers such as the electroencephalogram. It is possible to conduct clinical examinations. Nevertheless, none of those data was given to us. That is why it is hard to know if the same complaints were present in all cases, or, if the cases reporting hearing loss or complaints were a limited amount. I mean, it is hard to diagnose without knowing. Despite that, the Cuban multidisciplinary team examined all possibilities. Based on such poor amount of information we expanded the spectra of possible explanations.

RT: It is clear that the information was insufficient, but which information did they share?

Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa: Some reference to clinical data. Some reference to symptoms. However, they send neither objectives results of laboratory tests, nor a single audiogram. The criterion to determine hearing loss, or a hearing condition, is an audiogram.

It is a curve where the degree of hearing loss in each of the frequencies of the audible spectrum is expressed. That test even allows identifying the cause of the problem, because the curve takes different shapes according to the different causes of a condition. It is not the same when there is a hearing loss in the high or low frequencies, or if it is a uniform hearing loss. Such information was not shared with us. It very difficult to investigate a fact thoroughly when you lack data. We had not a single image. I have to repeat this, because it is a standard practice in medical investigations: you can use information eliminating all references to the name of the individual, in order not to violate the privacy of such patient. That would have been very useful to get to the causes that may have produced a condition in this group of people.

RT: According to many, this has been a denouncement, or let’s say, a very poorly told story. I want to ask you, because you are an expert involved in the investigation. Which are the most significant inconsistencies you have detected in the U.S. government denouncement regarding this?

Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa: The first inconsistency is to have identified this as a sonic attack. The reasons are very simple.

Sound can be classified in different spectra. There are audible sounds, which go from 20 Hz to 20 kHz, approximately. Of course, that sound can damage the hearing, but it would need to be very intense. It is a fact that nobody in the surroundings of the diplomats heard such loud sound. It is impossible to induce such a loud sound without other people hearing it. Of course, a device can be put directly into the ear, for example an earphone connected to a laptop. However, that would require the participation of such individual. From the outside, without the cooperation of the individual, as in the case of an alleged sonic attack, the sound would have needed to be so intense that many people would have heard it.

I have read media speculations, because media outlets have speculated a lot about this. They have state that the attacks could have been produce with non-audible sounds. In this case, there are two areas: ultrasounds, which are sounds of a very high frequency over the ones the human ear can hear; or infrasounds, which are very slow frequencies.

Those two cases are implausible, because you cannot selectively attack a person with these sounds. Ultrasounds dissipate very quickly, any barrier attenuates it rapidly, and the same happens if it is distant. Therefore, it is impossible that a diplomat could be in a room and someone outside of it could manage to attack him. It is impossible to do it with an ultrasound, because the intensity to produce a hearing damage would not reach that person. Infrasounds is very slow, and has a very large wavelength, therefore it is not possible to direct it. An infrasound source emitting waves would affect a very large radius. Therefore, even from the point of view of Physics, many physicists in the world only by reading the news have reach to this conclusion: it is not possible to associate this with an acoustic attack. Considering elements known to Physics, it is baseless. On the other hand, the U.S. Government gave some audio samples, which were leaked to the media. It was ridiculous, because if they could damage people, everyone that listened to them in Internet would have suffered from damages.

The result of the samples' analysis conducted by physicists and technicians was that it was impossible that those samples could contain sounds harmful to the human hearing. It is simple: those samples contain different sounds of animals, steps, which were more intense than the allegedly "mysterious" high frequency sound that was said to be causing the damage. The point is that if those ambient sounds such as steps, registered in the samples were more intense, then those would have produce the damage, and such ambient sounds do not harm human hearing. It is not consistent to affirm that there was a sonic attack, according to the data conveyed.

RT: Which methodology you used to conduct this investigation? Which source did you consulted? Which interviews you did? Which data you collected? I ask you this in order to see how credible your results are.

Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa: Firstly, we examined thoroughly the data provided by the U.S. and tried to extract of it as much information as possible. This information, as I have said, was very limited, but we had to consider it, because that was the basis we had.

Secondly, Cuban doctors and investigators identified the people living in the surroundings of the diplomats' residences, as well as people that work in the areas were the alleged aggressions occurred. We analyzed if there were damaging agents or something acting against health in those places, because in the case of an epidemic, people nearby would have been affected. The audio samples taken by the U.S. government were examined.

RT: And the people were not affected?

Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa: No, they were not affected. I can assure this, all results were negative. I mean, there no evidences, because if there would have been an intense sound coming from a source producing hearing damage, somebody else would have been impacted because the reported areas are much frequented, as in the case of the hotels. Moreover, there is no increase in the amount of hearing loss cases. Considering that there are dozens of diplomats affected, which is not a small amount, you would think there has to be Cubans affected, and there is none. That is why it is unlikely that a sounding source could be the cause. We examined other hypothesis, for example the possibility of an intoxication that could provoke some symptoms. Nevertheless, the cases appeared throughout a large timeline. A mass intoxication can be produced by contaminated food or something like that, but generally, food intoxication does not produce those effects. We thought of a possible infection, because there are new viruses in the Caribbean such as Zika, Chikungunya, among others, but they do not produce these symptoms. Besides, the events' timeline does not match this explanation. Therefore, after checking all medical causes to the symptoms reported which are discomfort, dizziness, nausea, hearing discomfort, and the alleged brain concussion; we found out there is no coherent medical explanation for them.

International experts we have exchange with concurred with us. We have consulted U.S. and Europeans neurophysiologists, neurologists, physicists. In conclusion, there is no coherent explanation for this array of incidents.

RT: As you said, those sound samples were posted on the Internet. We were also able to listen to them in TV channels here and people made many jokes about it. I wanted to ask you, returning to something you have already explained, but in order to state that clearly. Can these consequences –dizziness and brain concussions– be caused by the sounds of crickets or steps?

Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa: There is no evidence, considering the symptoms referred by the U.S. and even less in the medical conclusion contained in the report we received. These conclusions are very superficial. They state that one case had brain concussion, or that there were cognitive impairments, but that can go from attention problems

to memory issues…

It is not possible to explain that. In the recordings, there were indeed sounds unidentified at the beginning. They were not clear environmental sounds and they seemed to be of a high frequency, but afterwards they resulted to be similar to crickets' sounds. That is no logical reason to cause all these symptoms. It has to be considered that in the range of ages of the majority of people that referred symptoms there can be an array of natural diseases, even more if they have carried out military service. For example, gunshots and intense sounds at times produce acoustic traumas, which, over time, evolve and turn into tinnitus or a whistling or intense sound within the ear. People also suffer from high blood pressure. I mean, there is an array of illnesses and some people in the referred group may have felt symptoms produced by these diseases and not because of an external agent. The fact that some may have felt ill because of that could have implied the rest of the group to be part of a phenomenon.

RT: An important point would be to know if Cuba has technology to cause that. Can a private citizen import it to Cuba?

Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa: Our government has stated that it is forbidden to import such technology into the country.

Besides, the sonic weapons I have seen in Internet are big devices, which would be visible if they are deployed and used. In addition, Cubans are very talkative. If someone would have seen such a thing, he or she would have talked about it. My point is that this is a James Bond movie scenario. This actually does not correspond with Cuba's reality. I think such interpretation came from people living in the world of diplomatic tensions, maybe in the world of intelligence services. They may have overelaborated this on the basis of people with maladies for different causes. Moreover, there have been elements analyzed by our psychologists and scientists, and others from different countries: the so-called mass hysteria, which has different names but is a collective disease with a psychogenic origin.

There are strong evidences that it can produce in people the appearance of actual symptoms, which are not the result of a disease. I was reviewing literature and there have been outbreaks of alleged neurological diseases, showing all symptoms, in schools in the U.S. In one of those cases, the symptoms would have led to think it was epilepsy; another seemed to be the Tourette's syndrome, which causes tics and neurological conditions of a more motor nature. Then, some people seemed to be affected because they referred to have the symptoms, and had them. Nevertheless, an objective examination would disprove it. In the case of epilepsy, the electroencephalogram would show epileptic spikes because in epilepsy there are very great energy beams that are easily detected; and none of the cases had it, although they had the symptoms. There are references to a mass contagion phenomenon, mainly if there is anxiety, stress, suspicions which would be normal after all those years of difficult relationship between Cuba and the U.S. and mainly for people involved in this, particularly at this point when there is a turn towards the cooling of the relationship by the new Administration.

That creates a tense atmosphere, which can facilitate the transmission of that kind of mass hysteria. We are not stating that people were not feeling maladies. That would be insensitive, inhuman. We are not stating that there has not been people with real diseases within this group, which could have happened. What we are saying is that the explanations given regarding sonic weapons, and other medical explanations considered by us do not explain this symptomatology. Consequently, it is probable that the issue has been amplified; there could have been an overreaction due to the communication between those people and maybe because of the conditions and the fact of being in a strange country. All these can happen. Scientific literature refers this and many scientists we have talked to or that have declared their opinion to media outlets have supported this hypothesis as a possible explanation.

RT: Almost all scientific outlets and experts related with this topic agree with the opinion of the Cuban team of expert, to which you belong, which assure there was none acoustic attack. Nevertheless, have you heard of any institution, outlet or scientist with a different opinion, substantiating with evidence that there were attacks?

Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa: All scientists that have spoken about this have been categorical about the impossibility of this. I read an AP report of an interview with a U.S. scientist, a physicist specialized in sounds, who stated that what appeared in the recordings could not cause damages, but there may be sounds not contained in the samples that could have produce them. That is a very irresponsible statement. It is like saying "Well, there may exist something, although I haven't saw it". That is the kind of comment someone would do to be in the newspapers, but that is not a serious assessment. Apart from this exceptional opinion, the rest of the scientists that have talk about this have reached the conclusion that this cannot be a sonic attack. Of course, many scientists who have an objective position towards this do not doubt that the diplomats felt maladies, on the basis that it is not normal to have so

many people feeling bad. We, or at least myself, have no doubt at all that some of those diplomats, or the majority or all of them, felt bad for one reason or another. However, we have to consider that the U.S. Government said that there are sonic attacks, and that is how the topic appeared in the news. We cast doubt on that. We are convinced about this. It is not consistent with scientific evidence. Any other explanation would differ to sonic attack.

RT: The topic has been not only manipulated, but also there have been intentions of giving this issue an excessive media coverage. There have been many speculations about it. Some U.S. media outlets have stated that many of the affected were related to intelligence activities within Cuba. Others think it is a pretext to deteriorate even more the relationship with Cuba. I want ask you, apart from science, as a person that have been involved in this. What do you think of all these statements?

Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa: I cannot tell because I not acquainted with the jobs those affected individuals had.

Nevertheless, if we speculate that they would have been related to intelligence activities, it can be said that they would have been more tense and anxious than the rest. Secondly, probably as part of their professional background they have been exposed to high noises such as gunshots, because all agents have to train and to practice shooting.

In our Center we have an engineer that got an acoustic trauma during his military service because of practicing shooting, and years later he started to suffer from tinnitus. If that were the case, it would match what we are explaining. It is evident that magnifying this can only occurred when there is an interest in damaging bilateral relationships.

Actually, there is a significant group of U.S. scientists that have approached Cuba and were happy with the scientific exchange that was unfolded during the Obama Administration. They are worried about this may be the purpose. I believe that during the last years of the Obama Administration the U.S.-Cuba collaboration was visible; for example when fighting Ebola in Africa, which was a threat for the entire humankind. We are collaborating, and we can keep on doing so, regarding infectious diseases.

As a precedent, we received the visit of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is a governmental U.S. entity, to help investigate when we had in Cuba an outbreak of epidemic neuropathy. At that time, we observed that they are very professional. That is why it is incomprehensible for us that in these circumstances we have not been able to establish collaboration at that level, which would have been as professional and rigorous as for that investigation years ago.

There is collaboration regarding the therapy and cure of cancer; we are exploring the cooperation for the diagnosis, treatment and cure of the Alzheimer’s disease, which is an scourge and a great problem for humankind. U.S. scientists we know are very preoccupied because all this can create an atmosphere in order to rollback and stop the rapprochement and collaboration. Actually, a serious investigation would have started with sharing more information, even with creating a bilateral medical and scientific team to evaluate this.

We could have invited third parties, I mean, international agencies to evaluate this. A meticulous investigation could have probably drawn the conclusion that there was no reason to proceed as the U.S. government has. However, none of these happened. This would lead to think that this matches the interests of some sectors that have the goal of deteriorating the Cuba-U.S. relationship.

RT: Once again, I thank you for spare a few minutes of your time and for receiving us at your office in order to establish this dialogue with our audience.

Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa: It was my pleasure.