

Neurologists Debunk US Report on Cuban 'Sonic Attack' Theory

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According to several neurologists, the U.S. report misinterpreted test results and overlooked common disorders and psychological explanations.

Neurologists have challenged claims by the United States that its diplomatic core in Havana, Cuba suffered brain injuries after being allegedly targeted by Cuban officials with a sonic attack.

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This March, a medical report by the University of Pennsylvania commissioned by the U.S. government claimed that staff at the U.S. embassy in Havana had suffered concussion-like injuries after hearing strange noises.

However, on Tuesday, specialists in neurology, neuropsychiatry, and neuropsychology from the U.S., the United Kingdom, and Germany contested the results, and questioned the validity of the study, citing several flaws.

In four letters to the Journal of the American Medical Association, several specialists argued the University of Pennsylvania team misinterpreted test results and overlooked common disorders or psychological explanations that could have

explained their symptoms.

Robert Shura, a U.S. certified clinical neuropsychologist who works at the Salisbury veterans medical center in North Carolina, explained how the study misinterpreted the cognitive tests performed on the U.S. diplomats.

According to Shura, a score in the bottom 5 percent typically means there is a problem, but the study established that those who scored in the bottom 40 percent were “impaired.” This assessment, Shura and two other colleagues contend, is “inappropriate.”

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A common disorder that was unaccounted for is inner ear damage. Doctor Gerard Gioanoli of the Ear and Balance Institute in Louisiana said “given that almost all of the patients complained of hearing loss and balance problems, I am extremely suspicious of an inner ear insult in this group of patients... I do wish they would be more thoroughly evaluated.”

University of Edinburgh neurologist Jon Stone and neuropsychiatrist Alan Carson argued that Smith’s team too easily dismissed functional neurological disorders that can be triggered by sudden noises which, combined with anxiety, can lead to persistent neurological problems.

“Functional neurological disorders are common genuine disorders that can affect anyone, including hard-working diplomatic staff,” they said.

In September 2017 the U.S. government decided to drastically reduce its staff in the Caribbean island after 24 [diplomats](#) reported concussion-like symptoms, including headaches, dizziness, difficulties in sleeping, and lack of balance.

The U.S. accused the Cuban government of orchestrating a sonic attack. A claim Cuban authorities vehemently denied.
