

Alleged Cuban agent: FBI offered immunity

In testimony in federal court, an FIU professor accused of being a Cuban intelligence agent said he thought he had immunity from prosecution when he spoke to two FBI agents.

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A college professor charged with being an illegal Cuban agent testified Thursday that he only divulged details about his past with the Havana government because he believed FBI agents had promised he would not be prosecuted.

"I did consider it as a promise," said Carlos Alvarez, who was indicted along with his wife, Elsa, on charges of being longtime Cuban intelligence operatives. "Otherwise, why would I have said the things I said about my past life? I said a lot. I said everything, basically."

Alvarez, a psychology professor at Florida International University, testified in federal court in Miami during a hearing on his motion to throw out his purported confession as evidence. The motion contends that the FBI agents made promises of immunity from prosecution and that he also had no real choice in deciding whether to speak with them.

"I felt that if I refused to talk with them, I would be in trouble," he said.

NO ADMISSION

Alvarez did not specifically admit Thursday that he or his wife were Cuban intelligence agents as alleged by prosecutors. They have pleaded not guilty to the charges and face trial in early 2007.

FBI agents Albert Alonso and Rosa Schureck both testified that they made no firm promises to Alvarez and insisted that he was told he was free to leave the interviews, conducted June 22-23 and July 1, 2005, at a hotel in the Miami area. Two of the sessions were videotaped.

Alonso and Schureck said their goal in meeting with Alvarez was not to gather evidence in a criminal case, but to persuade him to become a double agent who would keep his alleged links to Cuba's intelligence service while secretly working for the U.S. government to gather information about leader Fidel Castro's government.

"We did not promise him anything," Schureck said. "We were approaching Mr. Alvarez not only to talk to him but to solicit his cooperation with the government of the United States."

OFFER WAS REJECTED

The two FBI agents said Alvarez ultimately refused their offer, and he and his wife were arrested about six months later.

The alleged confession is a keystone to the prosecution's case, lending importance to the hearings on whether it will be allowed as evidence.

In his testimony Thursday, Alvarez said the two agents repeatedly invoked his family, including his 13-year-old daughter, in saying his truthfulness and willingness to cooperate would determine their future.

The professor also testified that he was led to believe he would not face criminal charges if he gave the FBI agents what they wanted.

"I felt that, first of all, I would not be arrested. My family would continue the life we were living . . . There would be no scandal," he said.

The FBI agents testified earlier that they made no such threats or promises.