

US government honors one Latin American torturer and frees another

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Two incidents this month demonstrate the sinister reality behind the official pretense that the US government stands for democracy and human rights in its foreign policy. In one case the government plans to bestow one of its highest honors on a CIA agent fired for covering up torture and murder in Guatemala. In the other case, the State Department has ordered the release of a notorious Peruvian torturer after he was initially detained by the FBI at the Houston international airport.

On March 23 the CIA will award the Distinguished Career Intelligence Medal to Terry R. Ward, 62, former chief of the Latin American Division, in a closed ceremony at the agency's Langley, Virginia headquarters. Ward is being cited for "exceptional achievements" during a 30-year career in CIA covert operations.

Ward began working as a US secret agent in Laos in the early 1960s, when that country, bordering on Vietnam and Cambodia, was a battleground between US-backed royalist forces and the Vietnamese-backed nationalist Pathet Lao. In 1965 he shifted to Latin America, which became the focus of his subsequent career. Press reports cite postings in Argentina (1965-68), the Dominican Republic (1968-70), Bolivia (1970-72), Venezuela (1973-75), Peru (1976-77), and Honduras (1987-89). From 1990 to 1994 he was head of the Latin American Division.

There is a glaring 10-year gap in Ward's official career, from 1977 through 1986. This corresponds to the period of the most intensive US involvement in counterrevolutionary warfare and terrorism in Central America, first in supporting the right-wing death squad regime in El Salvador, then in backing a policy of mass murder against the insurgent Indian population in Guatemala, and finally in the illegal war against the

nationalist Sandinista government in Nicaragua, which extended from 1983 to 1989. Given Ward's record, and his subsequent promotion to head the Latin American Division, it is only reasonable to assume that he played a significant role in those bloody events.

Press criticism of the award has been limited, however, to the circumstances of Ward's firing from the agency, which came in 1995. Persistent inquiries and a hunger strike by Jennifer Harbury, a US lawyer who had married Guatemalan guerrilla Efraim Bamaca Velasquez, resulted in the release of secret intelligence data which confirmed that the CIA had long known of the murder of Harbury's husband.

Both Efraim Bamaca Velasquez and a second man, Michael Devine, an American citizen and hotel-keeper in Guatemala, were murdered on the orders of Guatemalan Col. Julio Roberto Alpirez, a paid CIA informant. The killings, which came after terrible torture, were carried out with the knowledge and approval of Alpirez's CIA controllers. A senior State Department official, Richard A. Nuccio, revealed the US government's role in these killings and the fact that Ward, as head of the CIA Latin American Division, had concealed these facts from Congress. Ward was fired for the cover-up, while Nuccio was stripped of his security clearance as punishment for exposing it.

CIA officials told the press that the medal for Ward was recommended by former colleagues within the CIA's Directorate of Operations and personally approved "without hesitation" by James Pavitt, the CIA's deputy director for operations. The *Washington Post*, which reported the story March 10, said the award was widely regarded as an attempt by career CIA officials to repudiate the actions of former Director John Deutch, whose firing of Ward was considered a cave-in to human rights critics of the agency.

Jennifer Harbury has denounced the award. In a letter to the *New York Times*, published on March 17, she wrote: “This month marks eight years since the ‘disappearance’ of my husband, Efrain Bamaca Velasquez. He was secretly detained and executed on orders of Guatemalan military officials. According to witnesses and United States government files, several of the officers were paid informants and liaisons for the Central Intelligence Agency ...

“A United Nations truth commission found the Guatemalan military guilty of genocide. More than 200,000 citizens were killed and 660 villages were massacred in the civil war that began in 1960.

“The CIA's failure to notify Congress or to control our ‘assets’ in Guatemala was deadly. My husband was alive in captivity for over a year, with CIA knowledge. We could have saved him. Instead he was tortured, drugged, held in a full body cast, then either thrown from a helicopter or dismembered.”

In the second case, which occurred March 9, the FBI detained Ricardo Anderson Kohatsu, a retired major in Peru's Army Intelligence Service, at a Houston airport. Anderson was detained as he was returning to Lima, Peru from a meeting in Washington DC. The FBI intercepted him after human rights groups complained to the Justice Department and sought his arrest under the 1992 Torture Victim Protection Act, a law which the US government has never before invoked.

The torture victim is Leonor LaRosa, who worked with Anderson in Peruvian military intelligence. In 1997 she and another female intelligence operative, Mariela Lucy Barreto, were suspected of leaking information about plans by President Alberto Fujimori's government to silence opposition journalists. The two were kidnapped and taken to army detention cells.

Barreto's headless and handless corpse was later found in a ditch. LaRosa was tortured with electric shock, raped, beaten and left with spinal cord injuries which have confined her to a wheelchair. She identified Anderson and three other intelligence agents as her attackers. A reluctant Fujimori government brought the four to trial and they were convicted, but the country's highest military court overturned the conviction of Anderson and one other agent, and they were set free.

LaRosa's case has been cited repeatedly by human rights groups and in official US State Department human rights reports. But Anderson entered the United

States without incident to appear at a panel on wiretapping conducted by the Washington-based Organization of American States. Human rights groups learned of his presence and demanded his arrest as a test case of the 1992 law, and the Justice Department obliged.

However, Undersecretary of State Thomas R. Pickering overruled the Justice Department action, declaring that Anderson had a G-2 visa which gave him diplomatic immunity. This was despite the fact that Anderson was not in Washington as a representative of the Peruvian government, but only as a private citizen—similar to the status of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet when he was detained in Britain. Only hours after Anderson's detention, the military torturer was released, put on a plane and sent back to Lima.



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