

Venezuela wants CIA terrorist extradited

Bush administration forced to detain Posada Carriles

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18 May 2005

Federal agents detained the anti-Castro Cuban terrorist Luis Posada Carriles in Miami Tuesday shortly after he held a press conference where he told reporters that the government was not looking for him and he felt no need to hide.

The arrest, in which Posada was whisked away in a Blackhawk helicopter to an undisclosed location, followed weeks of implausible denials by the US State Department that it had any knowledge as to his whereabouts or even whether he was in the country.

Venezuela's government last week issued a formal request for Posada's extradition from the United States to face trial on charges of organizing the 1976 bombing of a civilian Cuban airliner in which all 73 passengers were killed. At the time of the terrorist attack, the Cuban exile was both a long-time asset of the US Central Intelligence Agency and a former senior official in DISIP, Venezuela's secret police.

Washington's pretense that it had no idea of whether Posada was in the US was definitively shattered Tuesday with the publication of a front-page interview with the 77-year-old terrorist in the *Miami Herald*. The newspaper reported that the interview was conducted in Miami in a "luxury condo—just a few blocks from offices of the Department of Homeland Security."

Posada's presence was hardly news in Miami, where his arrival in late March was widely reported by the Cuban-American media. Fundraising events were organized on his behalf, and over a month ago, the terrorist's lawyer held a press conference to announce that he had initiated proceedings with the government to secure him political asylum in the US.

Nonetheless, the *Miami Herald* interview—both its content and where it was held—exposed the obvious: Posada was not hiding and did not feel he had to, because he was in the country under the protection of the US government.

"The anti-Castro militant said he has come to realize that the US government is not looking for him," the newspaper reported. The article stated further, "Homeland Security officials have said they are not actively looking for Posada because there are no warrants for his arrest in the United States."

The issue raised was why no such orders existed. Posada was a fugitive. He had been in hiding since he was suddenly pardoned by Panama's then-President Mireya Moscoso as the result of a deal in which US influence and a payoff of \$4 million both reportedly figured.

He had been jailed in Panama with three other right-wing Cuban exiles in connection with a 2000 plot to kill Fidel Castro by planting

20 pounds of explosives in a crowded auditorium where the Cuban president was to speak—a crime that would have claimed many victims. His co-conspirators were allowed to return to the US with no questions asked by the authorities.

From Panama, he traveled on a false US passport to Honduras, where he went into hiding amid a nationwide manhunt. From there he made his way to Guatemala, where he lived underground, protected by the Cuban exile organizations and the Guatemalan right.

Upon learning of his presence in the US last month, the government of Venezuela issued an arrest warrant for Posada. And on May 13, it formally requested that Washington detain and extradite him to face murder and treason charges in connection with the 1976 airline bombing.

Posada had clearly created political problems for the administration. Bush's vows to hunt down terrorists and to hold countries that harbor them equally guilty were made a mockery by the open presence of one of the world's most notorious international terrorists in Miami. The appearance of the *Miami Herald* interview removed the last vestige of deniability for the administration. It could hardly claim any longer that it did not know where he was.

Apparently, Posada was aware that his position had become untenable. At the hastily organized press conference Tuesday, he told reporters that he was dropping his bid for political asylum in the US and was preparing to leave the country. He claimed that he was doing so to prevent the Castro regime in Cuba from exploiting the controversy over his presence.

The arrest in Miami coincided with one of the largest demonstrations in Cuban history. An estimated 1.2 million people participated Tuesday in a massive "march against terrorism," demanding that the Bush administration detain Posada. Marchers filed by the US interests section in Havana carrying placards bearing the photographs of Cubans murdered in the bombing of the Cubana Airlines DC-8 after it took off from Barbados bound for Venezuela in 1976. Many of them were young athletes on the Cuban fencing team.

Having attempted to overthrow the government of President Hugo Chavez in April 2002 and carried out continuous political attacks and pressure on Venezuela ever since, it is certain that the White House would be loathe to hand Chavez a political victory.

The Homeland Security Department issued a statement Tuesday that suggested Washington intends to violate its extradition treaty with Venezuela. It declared, "As a matter of immigration law and policy, ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] does not generally remove people to Cuba, nor does ICE generally remove people to

countries believed to be acting on Cuba's behalf."

The Bush administration and its supporters have denounced the close ties between the Castro government in Cuba and the Chavez government in Venezuela as an "axis of subversion" in Latin America.

The question of what to do with the terrorist, however, presents the administration with a dilemma. He has been detained by immigration authorities, who can hold him for 48 hours while determining his status.

To grant him asylum or allow him to quietly slip away to another country would further expose the hypocrisy of the Bush administration's "global war on terrorism," which has served as a pretext for US military aggression for the past three and a half years.

But handing Posada over for trial in Venezuela poses unacceptable risks for Washington as well.

Recently released CIA and FBI documents obtained by the Washington-based National Security Archives confirm the obvious: Posada conducted his terrorist acts as an agent of the CIA.

The declassified documents flesh out Posada's long association with American intelligence, from his recruitment to the CIA's Brigade 2506 for the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba to his training by the CIA and the US Army in demolitions in the 1960s and his subsequent involvement in a series of terrorist attacks on Cuba by CIA-sponsored exile groups.

The documents also provide clear evidence of Posada's guilt in the bombing of the Cubana airplane.

A document issued by the FBI in November 1976 cites as its source one Ricardo Morales Navarrete, an officer in charge of a counterintelligence section of the Venezuelan secret police agency DISIP. It established that Posada took part in at least two meetings to plan the bombing of the Cubana airplane. "Some plans regarding the bombing of a Cubana airlines airplane were discussed at the bar in the Anauc Hilton Hotel in Caracas, Venezuela, at which meeting Frank Castro, Gustavo Castillo, Luis Posada Carriles and Morales Navarrete were present," the document states. "Morales Navarrete told the source that another meeting to plan the bombing of a Cubana airliner took place in the apartment of Morales Navarrete in the Anauc Hilton. This meeting was also prior to the bombing of the Cubana airliner on October 6, 1976. Present at this meeting were Morales Navarrete, Posada Carriles and Frank Castro..."

A declassified CIA file dated October 1976, states "We have determined that this agency had a relationship with one person whose name has been mentioned in connection with the reported bombing.... Both Lugo's and Lozano's [the two Venezuelan suspects arrested in Barbados for planting the explosives on the plane] employer in Caracas is Luis Posada Carriles, former head of the Counterintelligence Division of the Directorate for the Services of Intelligence and Prevention (DISIP), the Venezuelan civilian security service. Posada is a former agent of CIA...."

The document gives no clear idea of when Posada ceased being a CIA agent, but makes clear that he maintained contact with the agency right up until months before the airliner bombing. Another document records Posada's involvement—after his escape from a Venezuelan prison in 1985—in the illegal operation to supply the Nicaraguan contras, indicating that the CIA ties never ended.

Among his more recent terrorist actions are the 1997 bombing attacks against Havana hotels that claimed the life of Italian tourist Fabio di Celmo and the 2000 assassination attempt against Castro in Panama.

Also convicted as an organizer of the 1976 Cubana airline bombing was Orlando Bosch, who was sprung from prison thanks to the intervention of then-US Ambassador to Venezuela Otto Reich, who went on to become the top US official on Latin America in the Bush administration's first term.

In 1990, Bosch was released from prison and granted permanent residency in the US by Bush's father—then-President George H.W. Bush—over the protests of the US Justice Department, which described him as "a terrorist, unfettered by laws or human decency."

It should be noted that the airline bombing, organized by these long-time agents of the CIA, took place when Bush senior was director of central intelligence.

The current president's brother, Jeb Bush, owes his governorship in the state of Florida in no small degree to the backing of the same right-wing Cuban exile groups that have supported Posada and Bosch over the years. It was for this reason that Jeb Bush spearheaded the campaign for his father to grant US asylum to Bosch, who was implicated in some 30 terrorist acts in addition to the Cubana airline bombing.

After he became governor, Jeb Bush's first appointment to the Florida State Supreme Court was Bosch's lawyer. The relatively inexperienced attorney, Raoul Cantero, happened to be the grandson of the former US-backed Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista, and his legal career is tied closely with the terrorist anti-Castro network in south Florida. Cantero's father was an intelligence officer in Cuba's Bureau for Repression of Communist Activities, or BRAC, which was infamous for its assassination and torture of the regime's opponents.

Aside from any political fallout within the Republican Party's right-wing Cuban base in Florida, the extradition of Posada to Venezuela has the potential of publicly exposing not only the crimes of the CIA, but also the extensive and intimate ties of the Bush family and the current president to state-sponsored terrorism.

For that reason alone, Washington may have to continue protecting its long-time agent Posada—or at least ensuring his silence.



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