

Posada Carriles case

# Venezuela demands US hand over CIA terrorist for trial

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The Venezuelan government Wednesday filed extradition papers with the US State Department demanding that Luis Posada Carriles be handed over to stand trial for the 1976 terrorist bombing of a Cuban airliner in which 73 people lost their lives.

The formal extradition request follows last month's refusal by the Bush administration to place Posada under preventive arrest in the terrorism case. The administration spent nearly two months claiming that it did not know whether or not Posada was even in the country. Then, after the Cuban-born terrorist gave a public press conference in south Florida, it ordered immigration authorities to hold him on the minor charge of entering the US illegally. Washington is currently considering his request for political asylum.

Venezuela's latest request was accompanied by 520 pages of documentation spelling out the charges against Posada and providing extensive evidence against the long-time CIA operative.

"The countdown has begun to see how many more minutes the United States and its government will continue protecting a terrorist," said Venezuela's deputy foreign minister, Delcy Rodríguez.

Venezuelan government officials have referred to Posada as the "Latin American Osama bin Laden" because of his well-established involvement in multiple terrorist incidents, for the most part directed against Cuba.

Posada, who was recruited by the CIA in 1961, is a fugitive from Venezuelan justice. He escaped from prison with US assistance in 1985 while awaiting trial for his role in the airline bombing.

While the American media and US officials routinely speak of the CIA terrorist having been acquitted by Venezuelan courts, the facts show otherwise. The evidence against him is overwhelming, and the contradictory judicial rulings in Venezuela in the 1970s and 1980s involved not his guilt or innocence, but rather whether a military or civilian court had jurisdiction.

Thus far, Posada has not been questioned by US authorities on the bombing or his other terrorist activities. His lawyer, Eduardo Soto, has instructed his client to answer questions only on his sneaking into the US. Soto has claimed that his client played no role in the 1976 bombing and that Venezuela lacks jurisdiction, because the airplane was destroyed off the coast of Barbados.

In addition to filing the appeal for political asylum, Soto has claimed that Posada never gave up his US residence, a ploy that

appears calculated to drag out the proceedings.

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Alí Rodríguez refuted the claim by Posada's lawyer that he never gave up his US residence. Referring to the period in the 1970s when the CIA agent took up Venezuelan citizenship and became a senior official in the country's political police, he said: "Posada Carriles lived for many years in Venezuela, his home was here, he was employed and working in Venezuela, and was involved in many criminal acts of torture, persecution and murder in our country."

As for Venezuela lacking jurisdiction, the very fact that Posada broke out of prison and fled the country to escape trial makes this claim absurd. The two Venezuelan men convicted as the "material authors" of the bombing—Ricardo Lozano and Freddy Lugo—were both employees of a private security firm formed by Posada after he left the Venezuelan secret police. Both spent 20 years in prison. They were found guilty of placing the explosives on board the aircraft, but they named Posada and his fellow anti-Castro Cuban terrorist Orlando Bosch as the organizers of the attack. The bomb itself was probably the work of Posada, who was trained as an explosives expert by the CIA and the US military.

While Washington rejected Venezuela's May 14 request for Posada's preventive arrest on the grounds that Caracas failed to provide sufficient evidence, there is no significant section of Venezuelan society that disputes the clear case for the terrorist's extradition. Even rightist and centrist parties that fulminate against the country's president, Hugo Chavez, grudgingly acknowledge that Posada should be sent back to face trial.

Venezuela's right to seek extradition is firmly grounded on three separate treaties: a bilateral agreement between the two countries that goes back more than 80 years, and 1971 and 1997 accords covering terrorist attacks on aircraft that were signed by both countries.

Washington claimed Venezuela failed to provide sufficient evidence to justify Posada's arrest, but there is more than ample proof of his guilt within the secret files of the CIA and FBI. Bits and pieces of this body of evidence have been uncovered even as the controversy has unfolded.

A declassified CIA document made public June 9 cited a trusted US intelligence informer in Venezuela who reported that Posada had spoken of plans to "hit" a Cuban airliner just days before a bomb blew Cubana Flight 455 out of the sky on October 6, 1976.

The document, released by the National Security Archive, a Washington-based non-governmental organization, included a report from the informer—"a former Venezuelan government official" deemed "a reliable reporter" by the CIA—on a \$1,000-a-plate dinner held to support Cuban terrorist Orlando Bosch and his organization.

Bosch was quoted as saying, "Now that our organization has come out of the Letelier job looking good, we are going to try something else." The remark came just weeks after the September 21, 1976 car bomb assassination in the streets of Washington of the former Chilean government minister and opponent of Chile's military dictatorship, Orlando Letelier. Several Cuban exiles participated in the bombing, which also claimed the life of Letelier's 25-year-old American co-worker, Ronni Moffitt.

The same informant said that a few days later Posada declared, "We are going to hit a Cuban airplane...Orlando [Bosch] has the details."

Other documents further substantiate Posada's work as a CIA agent, including the period—1967-1974—when he was a senior official in the Venezuelan secret police, DISIP, although detailed information on that period remains heavily censored.

Another declassified memo quotes sources reporting that the bombing was organized by the Cuban terrorist umbrella group led by Bosch, CORU. Bosch spent 11 years in a Venezuelan prison for the bombing, before he was released thanks to the intervention of then-US ambassador Otto Reich, who went on to become the chief advisor on Latin America to the current Bush administration.

Arrested upon his return to the US and described by the Justice Department as an "unreformed terrorist" who merited deportation, Bosch was nonetheless pardoned by President George H.W. Bush in 1990 and granted permanent US residency two years later.

While the Venezuelan government has invoked Washington's obligations under international law, US officials have responded with denunciations and threats against the government of President Hugo Chavez, indicating there is little likelihood the Bush administration will hand over Posada.

The administration has waged a continuous destabilization operation against Chavez, backing an abortive coup in April 2002 and providing a steady stream of funding to groups seeking his ouster. Washington's aim is to bring a more pliant regime to power in a country that provides 15 percent of US oil imports.

The latest salvo in this offensive came from Gen. John Craddock, chief of the US Southern Command, which oversees US military operations in Latin America. In an interview Monday with the Miami Spanish-language daily *El Nuevo Herald*, Craddock charged that Venezuela's attempts to "influence" neighboring countries were creating a "destabilizing situation" in the region. "There is a threat to democracy in Venezuela," he said, adding that recent Venezuelan arms purchases represented a "concern."

Venezuela's information minister responded to Craddock's remarks by declaring that the US government is "destabilizing" the world by means of illegal wars and violations of human rights.

Beyond its animosity toward the Venezuelan government, the Bush administration has other motives for flouting international law and preventing the terrorist from going to trial. There are immediate political considerations, which always play a

disproportionate role in US foreign policy.

Handing over Posada to Venezuela would create an uproar within Florida's anti-Castro Cuban exile circles that form a key base of support for the Republican Party in general, and for the president's brother, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, in particular. Beyond the anti-Castro exiles, such a move would provoke extreme hostility from the entire right-wing constituency to which the administration appeals.

There is still another factor: Posada knows too much. Blocking his extradition lays the Bush administration open to the charge of hypocrisy in its claim to be waging a "global war on terrorism," but sending this CIA-trained terrorist into an open courtroom poses even greater dangers.

Posada was involved in state repression, torture and killing in Venezuela that also linked him to crimes against humanity elsewhere in Latin America. In his book *The Condor Years*, John Dinges writes that during this period, Venezuela's "intelligence service, manned by CIA-trained officers, many born in Cuba, had become a virtual subsidiary of the CIA."

He further recounts that Vernon Walters, then CIA deputy director, facilitated meetings between the Venezuelan DISIP and Chile's DINA secret police to coordinate Operation Condor—a campaign of cross-border repression that led to the abduction, torture and execution of thousands of opponents of Latin America's military regimes.

This included the Letelier assassination, which was then one of the worst single terrorist acts carried out on US soil.

After he was sprung from his Venezuelan jail cell in 1985, Posada moved on to El Salvador, where he played a key role in the illegal covert operation overseen by Oliver North to supply the contra mercenaries attacking Nicaragua.

Subsequently, he was responsible for fatal terrorist attacks in Cuba and the attempted assassination of Fidel Castro in Panama.

His connections with senior officials in the current administration are extensive and underscore the criminality that pervades the government in Washington.

He undoubtedly collaborated with CIA Director Porter Goss, who helped coordinate anti-Castro activity out of Miami in the 1960s, and with National Security Director John Negroponte, who oversaw the contra support operation from the US Embassy in Tegucigalpa in the 1980s. He and his close accomplice Bosch have repeatedly benefited from the interventions of the Bush family, both the current and former president, as well as the Florida governor.

Posada is not, as the US media habitually portrays him, merely an aging "Cuban militant" or "anti-Castro exile." He is a creature of the American state, a man whom the US intelligence services have protected and relied upon in carrying out systematic acts of state terrorism over the course of four decades.



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