

Obama's adviser in Trinidad: the real face of "change"

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One telling measure of the real nature of the "change" that Obama is bringing to US-Latin American relations is the selection of his chief adviser for the Trinidad summit, Jeffrey Davidow.

A career foreign service officer, Davidow was assigned in 1971 to the US embassy in Chile as a political officer, a post often occupied by covert CIA agents. He remained in the country until 1974. This covered the period of the preparation of the US-backed military coup against the elected government of President Salvador Allende in September 1973 and the consolidation of General Augusto Pinochet's junta through bloody political repression.

US documents declassified when Pinochet faced the threat of a trial in Spain beginning in 1998, included memos from Davidow to the military regime warning against a "conspiracy on the part of the enemies of Chile to paint the junta in the worst possible terms." The memo preceded a campaign by the junta to murder such "enemies," including the 1976 Washington DC car-bombing that claimed the life of Orlando Letelier, a former senior minister in the Allende government.

Another memo assured the junta that "the government of the United States of course recognizes the internal security problems that are confronting Chile." The document, apparently memorializing a meeting Davidow attended with junta leaders, was written as tens of thousands of Chileans were being killed and tortured in detention camps.

According to the magazine *Milenio*, published in Mexico where Davidow was the US ambassador in the late 1990s, he was intimately involved as the political officer in Chile in the US government's handling of the "disappearance" of 31-year-old Charles Horman, an American journalist who was shot to death in the

Santiago soccer stadium in the aftermath of the 1973 coup. This tragic episode was dramatized in the Costa Gavras film *Missing*.

A State Department document issued three years after this murder cited "circumstantial evidence" that US intelligence provided the Chilean military with information about Horman, who sympathized with the Allende government, assuring his summary execution.

From Chile, Davidow was sent to South Africa, filling the same post as "political officer" from 1974 to 1976. These were the years in which the CIA, in league with the apartheid regime, organized a covert operation against newly independent Angola, unleashing a civil war that claimed some half million lives.

Davidow went on to become the chief State Department official on the Americas under the Clinton administration, playing a major role in the development of the Plan Colombia, the US-funded counterinsurgency operation that has killed thousands of Colombia's poor while driving an estimated 2.5 million people from their homes.

Obama, in his opening speech, proclaimed that the US and Latin America "can't be trapped" by history, suggesting that the slate can be wiped clean. The presence of a figure like Davidow as his chief adviser, however, demonstrates that this history is very much alive, and that behind the public relations mask provided by Obama, Washington is preparing new crimes against the peoples of Latin America.



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