

CIA terrorist Posada Carriles on trial for lying to immigration

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Luis Posada Carriles, the Cuban-born terrorist who worked for the CIA, went on trial this week in a Texas court for lying to immigration authorities.

While he is wanted in both Venezuela and Cuba for his role as the principal organizer of a September 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed all 73 people aboard, the federal prosecutor made it clear that the Obama administration has no intention of holding Posada Carriles responsible for that and other heinous acts of terrorism.

Posada Carriles “can do anything he wants to the Cuban regime,” assistant US Attorney Timothy Reardon declared in his opening remarks Wednesday. The only issue, he said, was that he lied under oath during an immigration interview conducted in El Paso, Texas in 2005.

He is charged in an 11-count indictment with perjury, obstruction and naturalization fraud.

Posada’s defense attorney, Arturo Hernandez, insisted that his client has “always been on the side of our country” and that while he may have told some lies while seeking US citizenship, he “substantially told the truth”. He charged that the only reason Posadas is on trial is because he has become “a political hot potato for the government.”

The remark made by the prosecutor—who is a leading figure in the Justice Department’s counterterrorism unit—is breathtaking.

Luis Posada Carriles is without question responsible for one of the worst terrorist atrocities committed in the Western Hemisphere, unsurpassed at the time in terms of its death toll.

He has been the central figure in innumerable plots that have included the terrorist bombings of tourist hotels in Cuba in the 1990s, attempted assassinations of Cuban President Fidel Castro and a long series of armed attacks on Cuban soil over the course of his more than four decades as an operative and “asset” of the US Central Intelligence Agency.

The assertion by the government’s representative that he can “do anything he wants” against Cuba represents an explicit guarantee that he will not be held accountable for

any of these crimes. It constitutes an admission that Washington and the Obama administration, while purporting to wage an international “war on terrorism”, remain sponsors of state terrorism and protectors of terrorist criminals.

Only one of Posada’s many crimes will figure in the trial, the 1997 bombing of hotels in Havana and the Cuban beach resort of Varadero in which an Italian tourist, Fabio Di Celmo, was killed. Posada is accused of perjury for lying to immigration officials by claiming that he had no role in the bombings.

In an 1998 interview with the *New York Times*, however, he bragged about his responsibility for the terrorist attacks, calling the death of the tourist a “freak accident” and affirming that he “sleeps like a baby” despite the killing. It is expected that recordings of the *Times* interview will be introduced as evidence.

Just last month, the Cuban government sentenced Francisco Chavez Abarca, a Salvadoran citizen, to 30 years in prison for his part in the 1997 bombings. Abarca acknowledged that Posada hired him to carry out the terrorist attack, which the Cuban daily *Granma* reported was financed by the Cuban-American National Foundation, a exile lobbying group with strong ties to both the Democratic and Republican parties.

During a Washington press conference last week, Livio Di Celmo, the brother of the murdered Italian tourist, denounced the nature of the charges brought against Posada.

“He is not being charged as a terrorist but rather as a liar,” he said. “My family and I are outraged and disappointed that a known terrorist, Luis Posada, is going to trial for perjury and immigration fraud, not for the horrific crime of masterminding the bombing of a civilian airliner.”

The trial, he added, was “too little, too late,” and “doesn’t do anything for the credibility of this country fighting terrorism.”

In addition to lying about the bombings, Posada is charged with entering the US illegally, lying to authorities about how he entered and carrying a false Guatemalan passport.

Posada's attorney told the judge earlier in the proceedings that he intended to challenge the evidence against Posada on the bombing charges by indicting the Castro regime in Cuba and presenting evidence that it had lied about other matters.

US District Court Judge Kathleen Cardone responded that Hernandez could challenge any evidence, but that examples of alleged lies told by the Cuban government were "irrelevant."

Hernandez also attempted, unsuccessfully, to exclude from the jury anyone who admitted knowledge of the 1976 airliner bombing, insisting that familiarity with this "heinous act" would irreparably prejudice them against his client.

Among those killed in the bombing of Cubana Airlines Flight 455 were all 24 members of the Cuban fencing team, most of them teenagers, who were returning home after winning the Central America championship. Also killed were several 18- and 19-year-old Guyanese medical students going to school in Cuba.

At the time of the bombing, Posada had already been working with the CIA for a quarter of a century, since his participation in the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961.

By the agency's own admission in a declassified document posted this week by the National Security Archive, Posada had been on the CIA payroll for nearly a decade.

The documents also make it clear that Washington was deeply implicated in the airline bombing, having been informed about it months beforehand—likely by Posada himself—and, just five days before the attack, issuing a US visa to one of the Venezuelans who placed the bomb on the plane.

The government of Venezuela, where the Cubana flight originated and where Posada is a naturalized citizen, has repeatedly demanded that the US extradite the CIA terrorist to face a court's decision in the case that he eluded by escaping from prison with US assistance in 1985.

Washington is obligated under multiple treaties, including the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, to comply with Venezuela's request. It has refused to do so, however, on the grounds that Posada could face torture if sent back to Venezuela.

This spurious ground for shielding the Cuban-born terrorist is outrageous, particularly given his and Washington's own record.

There is no evidence of systemic torture in Venezuela, as opposed to in the US itself, where torture was adopted as a state policy and detainees have been subjected to "extraordinary rendition" to other countries for the specific purpose of torturing them.

As for Posada, during his stay in Venezuela, he became chief of operations for the hated secret police force known as DISIP, personally supervising the torture of left-wing

opponents of the government.

After his escape from the Venezuelan prison, Posada was quickly brought back under the protection of the CIA, turning up in El Salvador, where he helped organize the agency's dirty Contra war against Nicaragua and worked with the secret police of El Salvador in a murderous counterinsurgency campaign. He subsequently moved to Guatemala, where he played a similar role.

In 2000, he was arrested in Panama while attempting to assassinate Fidel Castro by planting hundreds of pounds of explosives in a crowded university lecture hall where the Cuban president was to speak. He was then released from prison in 2004 by Panama's outgoing President Mireya Moscoso in an action that subsequent Panamanian officials have deemed an abuse of authority.

After his release, Posada made his way to the US, where his attempt to resume public activity as an anti-Castro militant brought him afoul of the US government and the immigration authorities.

With no other country willing to accept Posada and both the Bush and Obama administrations refusing to either comply with international law and extradite him to Venezuela or try him here for terrorism, the immigration charges amount to a convenient stalling tactic.

If convicted, the 82-year-old Posada would face up to eight years in prison, in all probability an effective life term.

Above all, Washington wants to ensure that he is never brought before a court that would try him for his real crimes and thereby lay bare decades of state terrorism carried out by the United States government, terrorism that has continued and escalated to this day.



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