

US deports Salvadoran war criminal Vides Casanova

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General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, who headed the Salvadoran National Guard (1979-89) and was Minister of Defense (1983-1989) during the CIA and Pentagon's dirty war in El Salvador (1979-1992) was deported to San Salvador on Wednesday April 8 after the Board of Immigration Appeals refused to overturn a Florida immigration judge's order of deportation.

Upon his arrival in San Salvador, Vides Casanova, 77, was met by a protest demonstration of torture survivors and their supporters, denouncing the general and demanding justice. Many were holding signs with the photos of victims of National Guard and Army death squads. It is estimated that the Salvadoran civil war killed 75,000 people, disappeared 10,000, and displaced more than one million.

The Salvadoran civil war took place while Democrat Jimmy Carter and Republican Ronald Reagan occupied the White House. The US had been unable in July 1979 of preventing the overthrow of Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza by the Sandinista Liberation Front. Amid a rising revolutionary upsurge in El Salvador against the corrupt, US sponsored tyranny of General Carlos Humberto Romero, Washington adopted the bipartisan policy of "no more Nicaraguas," and became fully embroiled in the civil war on the side of a military-fascist junta that it installed to replace the discredited Romero in October 1979.

The White House armed and advised Vides Casanova's National Guard and the Army death squads that disappeared, tortured and murdered tens of thousands. Upon taking power, the so-called "revolutionary junta" appointed Vides (then a colonel) National Guard commander. In 1983, Vides was promoted to general and installed as defense minister, replacing General José Guillermo García.

In 2013, federal immigration Judge James Grim in

Miami Florida ruled, on the basis of witness testimony and documents, that Vides had known of and participated in the torture and killings of tens of thousands between 1979 and 1992, and, in what is considered an unusual interpretation of the law, ordered Vides Casanova's deportation.

Commenting on the deportation order, Almudea Bernabeu, an international attorney at the California-based Center for Justice and Accountability (which fought for this result), said, "This is great news. It's been over 12 years since Vides Casanova and Luis Guillermo Garcia (a former general) were exposed as being responsible for ordering the torture of civilians in El Salvador...It took a humongous effort on behalf of the victims to get to this point of getting the US government to start deportation proceedings."

In 1992, a truth commission report revealed the role that the National Guard played in the disappearance, rape and execution on December 2, 1980 of three American nuns and a lay worker—Maura Clarke, Jean Donovan, Ita Ford and Dorothy Kazel—who worked among refugees in El Salvador. The truth commission concluded that Vides covered up and impeded the investigation into these killings, with the objective of absolving the National Guard and the Army of the crime.

Also participating in Vides Casanova's cover-up was the US government itself, which sought to prevent any challenge to Washington's continued funding of the Salvadoran military and its death squads. General Alexander Haig speculated, for example, that the four women had been killed for running through a military checkpoint. Four national guardsman convicted of their murder testified in 1998 that they were given assurances that they were carrying out "orders from above" and nothing would happen to them.

The truth commission report also describes how Vides Casanova covered up and impeded the investigation of the disappearance of law students, Francisco Arnulfo Ventura and José Humberto Mejía, from the parking lot of the US embassy in January 1980. Both are still missing. Vides Casanova had actively participated in the investigative cover-up that took place, absolving the National Guard and government forces of all culpability. By this time, Vides Casanova had settled in the United States with permanent resident status.

These acts are merely the tip of an iceberg of crimes against humanity that Vides Casanova committed, participated in and covered up.

In 2002, a Florida jury found Vides and Gen. Jose Guillermo Garcia, another former Salvadoran defense minister, civilly liable for the torture of three Salvadorans, including Carlos Mauricio, a professor of Agricultural Sciences, kidnapped by a death squad and tortured by the military under Vides Casanova. Carlos Mauricio is active in the struggle against the sinister “School of the Americas,” a torture, repression and counterinsurgency academy ran by the Pentagon. There is evidence that the killers of the nuns, and many of those that formed the Army death squads, had been trained at the School of the Americas, including Vides and García.

In 1985, Vides Casanova took a break from directing death squads and the National Guard to address the School of the Americas (now renamed Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation). Other graduates included El Salvador’s most infamous torturer, Roberto D'Aubuisson (a.k.a. Major Blow Torch, for his preferred torture technique). They, and others, were trained in torture and mass terror. D'Aubuisson was involved in the assassination of San Salvador Archbishop Oscar Romero in March of 1980.

The case against Vides Casanova in the US courts began in 2009, when the Department of Homeland Security charged him with “ordering, inciting, assisting or otherwise participating” in acts of torture extrajudicial killing, all violations of the INA immigration law (Immigration and Nationality Act) and the 1980 Refugee Act that blocked abusers of human rights from immigrating into the US.

In reality, these laws have repeatedly been observed in its breach; the US houses and protects from

deportation and extradition thousands of torturers and butchers who acted on behalf of US imperialism, such as Luis Posadas, Orlando Bosch and other participants in the 1976 bombing of the Cubana de Aviación passenger airliner and the bombing of Havana hotels.

Vides Casanova himself protested that, since he had acted in accordance with US policy at the time, he ought not to be deported.

As the former defense minister’s lawyer, Diego Handel, argued, “The United States government was an active participant on the side of the El Salvadoran government.” He charged that it was unfair to deport Vides Casanova under conditions in which none of the US officials who were complicit in the regime’s war crimes had ever been called to account.

Even after the 2012 deportation decision, the US Justice Department refused to release its records on the immigration hearings for Vides Casanova to *New York Times* reporter Julia Preston, arguing that the court decision was not final and that it was protecting Vides Casanova’s “privacy.”

Vides Casanova was well known by the US State Department, having visited with US officials repeatedly during the dirty war. His admission as a green card holding immigrant was surely no oversight or mistake.

Whatever reasons the Obama administration had for deporting Vides Casanova, a wealthy man who married into the coffee oligarchy of El Salvador, he will not be tried in El Salvador because of a general amnesty covering the crimes committed under the US-backed dictatorship.



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