

French pilots flee Dominican Republic in “Air Cocaine” affair

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In the so-called “Air Cocaine” affair, two French pilots appealing a 20-year sentence on cocaine smuggling charges in the Dominican Republic, Pascal Fauret and Bruno Odos, were sprung from the country on October 24-25 and returned to France. Individuals linked to French and Dominican military and police rescued the two men in blatant violation of Dominican sovereignty.

One member of the plot, Christophe Naudin, said that “some 10 people” including him took part in the operation, which involved “many former marines [and] some other military personnel ... mainly from the naval air arm,” the *Aéronavale*. Naudin, who trains police and Gendarmerie officers, worked with the neo-fascist National Front (FN) Eurodeputy Aymeric Chauprade, who taught geopolitics at the *Collège interarmées de défense* (CID, French Joint Defence College) and has extensive contacts within the French military.

The pilots’ support committee praised the role of Fauret and Odos as pilots in the NATO war in the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia, where they were authorised to carry and fire nuclear weapons on the orders of the French president.

According to a source close to the enquiry cited by *Le Monde*, “Dominicans and agents of the French state ... participated in this extraction, without receiving the official go-ahead from their respective states.”

The group transported them to France via the Franco-Dutch island of Saint Martin and the French overseas department of Martinique, from which they took a regular flight to France.

The two pilots returned to a hero’s welcome and lavish media coverage in France.

The day after the return of the two pilots, government spokesman Stéphane Le Foll stated that the government would not carry out the Dominican Republic’s

international arrest warrant of the pair despite the fact that France has an extradition treaty with the country: “We do not extradite French citizens when they are on our soil. ... We are a great country, we respect the law and must be respected.”

Ultimately, however, they were arrested on Monday by French police, some nine days after their return, and placed in provisional custody for questioning.

The cast of characters in this incident and their activities hark back to the days when far-right army torturers from French counterinsurgency operations in Indochina and Algeria trained US and South American death squads in the 1960s and 1970s.

The pilots were working for Marc Dreyfus, the boss of the SN-THS private air transport company that had chartered the Faucon 50 aircraft they were flying, when they were arrested in a joint raid by US and Dominican anti-drug agencies on March 19, 2013 at La Punta airport. They were about to take off with 680 kilos of cocaine in 26 suitcases and two other French citizens.

It is unclear who owned the cocaine. However, given a street value of €50,000 to €60,000 for a kilogram of cocaine in France, a massive sum of money—some €30 million to 40 million—is involved.

Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who is likely to again be the conservative candidate in the 2017 presidential elections, is also linked to this affair. His phone was tapped in a judicial investigation of possible irregularities in the payments of three flights he chartered with the same air transport company, SN-THS, between December 2012 and February 2013. The flights had been provided by the Lov Group company run by Stéphane Coubit at the cost of €330,000.

Although investigating judge Christine Saunier-Ruellan has not stated that a connection with drug-running is involved, she has stated that these three

flights could involve the misuse of company assets and receiving stolen goods. Courbit was indicted in the case of the illicit funding of Sarkozy's presidential election campaign by L'Oréal multibillionaire Liliane Bettencourt

Marc Dreyfus and his associate Fabrice Alcaud were tried and jailed for involvement in drug-running in June 2013 after a visit by judge Saunier-Ruellan to the Dominican Republic. They were released on bail a year later. Fauret and Odos were cited as *témoins assistés*, or involved witnesses.

At the time, Saunier-Ruellan was investigating drug running involving the Spanish and Marseille drug mafia and their collaborators in French police and customs.

Fauret, Odos and their passengers, due to take off on the Faucon 50 on March 19, 2013, all denied that they had known of the existence of the cocaine. The pilots said that it was not their job to check the contents of passengers' luggage.

However, a book by crime reporters Jérôme Pierrat and Marc Leplongeon, *L'Affaire Air Cocaïne Mafia et jets privés (The Air Cocaine Affair, the Mafia and Private Jets)*, quotes text messages sent by Fauret to Pierre-Marc Dreyfus, discussing the cargo they are transporting. One says "Nature of the load confirmed."

The book also reports that Fauret "appears to have participated in the loading of the plane on March 20, 2013: with a sigh, Pascal Fauret concluded: 'I helped them.'"

The Dominican authorities had released Fauret and Odos from jail with a ban on leaving the country pending their appeal against the 20-year jail sentence. On arriving in France, they were free for nine days, until their arrest by French police on Monday, to give multiple interviews together with their supporters giving their version of events to sympathetic interviewers.

This was despite the fact that they had been under surveillance in an investigation into drug-running by Saunier-Ruellan since 2012.

The escape plot, flouting the Dominican courts, has not been condemned by France's Socialist Party (PS) government. The Elysée presidential palace, the Quai d'Orsay, and the Ministry of Defence, have claimed that they were in no way involved. An unnamed diplomat is quoted as asserting, "The French state has nothing to do, from near or afar, with this escape. And

the Dominican authorities fully understand this."

A statement from the Elysée asserted: "We are not concerned. It's a matter for the judicial system."

In fact, it is patently obvious that the French state is implicated in this affair. French military and intelligence agencies and territorial authorities sprung or helped spring the two pilots from the Dominican Republic, with or without an official go-ahead from the Elysée.

It is unclear whether President François Hollande was notified of this operation. It is difficult to conceive of a situation where top state authorities were not involved in a matter involving relations with another sovereign state. However, if the Elysée was in fact not informed of this operation—and dismisses the matter as one of no concern—this would only show that the PS is giving a pass to intelligence and military services to violate international law as they please.



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