

Posada Carriles Bust Blows Bush's Anti-Terror Cover

By Saul Landau | June 3, 2005

President George W. Bush has made it clear that the punishment for even being suspected of planning, abetting, or carrying out a terrorist act is, at a minimum, getting tossed into a dark hole. Bush has thrown out even the Magna Carta when it comes to Muslims suspected of pernicious thoughts toward the United States.

But if suspected terrorists turn their ire toward Fidel Castro, these rules don't apply.

Indeed, those who try to bomb and assassinate Cuban targets, or those related to Cuba, receive special treatment. This double-standard casts a shadow over the president's commitment to fight terrorism.

In mid-May, Homeland Security cops arrested Luis Posada Carriles. As TV footage showed, these officers didn't even handcuff him. Justice Department spokespeople said they plan to charge the foremost terrorist in the western hemisphere with "illegal entry into the United States."

The FBI has reams of files on Posada, affectionately called "Bambi" by his terrorist friends. Former FBI Special Agent Carter Cornick told *New York Times* reporter Tim Weiner that Posada was "up to his eyeballs" in the October 1976 destruction of a Cuban commercial airliner over Barbados. All 73 passengers and crew members died. Recently published documents from the FBI and CIA confirm Cornick's statement. Published cables also reveal that U.S. agencies had knowledge of the plot and did not inform Cuban authorities or try to stop the bombing.

Posada denied involvement at the time, but police nabbed two of the plotters who had disembarked in Barbados. They fingered Posada as the man who hired them to place the bomb on the plane. His name became ubiquitous in the files of U.S. agencies that monitored terrorists. Nevertheless, several weeks after Posada announced his presence on U.S. soil, Roger Noriega, assistant secretary of state for Inter-American Affairs, still claimed he had no information that Posada had even entered the country.

Posada's International Profile

Posada himself promoted his international profile. To make sure that the world knew of his exploits, he boasted to *New York Times* reporters Anne Bardach and Larry Rohter in 1998 that he had organized a sabotage campaign of Cuban tourist spots. In 1997, a bomb placed by a Posada agent at a Cuban hotel killed an Italian tourist. Did this bother his conscience? Posada replied that "it was a freak accident, but I sleep like a baby."

In 1999, Panamanian police discovered that the 71-year-old Posada, between visits to his proctologist and gerontologist, conspired with three other anti-Castro geezers to assassinate Cuba's leader in Panama. Castro was to give a public speech there.

This quartet of seniors, Guillermo Novo, Pedro Remon, Gaspar Jimenez, and Posada, planned to blow up the platform from which Castro would speak. After Panamanian police arrested them, they denied any involvement. They sneered at the Panamanian prosecutors, claiming that no proof existed—just a set of their fingerprints on the explosives found in their rented car.

This March, Posada entered the U.S. surreptitiously. He left Panama less than a year after out-going Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso pardoned him and his accomplices.

Moscoso also apparently contravened Panamanian law by issuing the pardons before the appeals process had ended. The Panamanian press openly "suspected" that more than a coincidence existed between the almost simultaneous issuing of pardons and the mysterious \$4 million deposited in her Swiss bank account.



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After she had pardoned the four, Moscoso phoned U.S. Ambassador Simon Ferro, saying she had complied with Washington's request to release the men.

On May 20, 2004, the four caught a waiting airplane that took them to Honduras. There, Posada, the *padrino* of Latin American terrorism, disembarked while the other three continued to Miami so their arrival could coincide with President Bush's campaign stop.

On November 26, 2001, Bush had declared that "if anybody harbors a terrorist, they're a terrorist." He apparently forgot to mention that he had made exceptions for "zealous patriots" who wanted to assassinate Castro and anyone else who happened to be near him when the bomb went off.

Long History of Terrorist Actions

Indeed, all four pardoned Castro-haters had long histories of involvement in assassination plots and sabotage conspiracies against Cuban officials and properties in New York, Mexico, and the Caribbean.

A Washington, DC jury had convicted Guillermo Novo of perjury in 1982 for lying about his knowledge of the assassination plot against former Chilean Chancellor Orlando Letelier. In September 1976, five Cubans working with Chilean secret police agents had car-bombed Letelier on Washington's Embassy Row.

Ronni Moffitt, Letelier's young colleague at the Institute for Policy Studies, also died in the bombing. The FBI also knew that Posada had knowledge of the plot to kill Letelier.

Born Luis Clemente Faustino Posada Carriles in Cienfuegos, Cuba in 1928, the infamous Cuban expatriate served on dictator Fulgencio Batista's repressive forces until the January 1959 revolutionary takeover. Posada then swore vengeance.

The CIA recruited him to invade Cuba in the 1961 Bay of Pigs plot. The agency placed Posada in a Cuban version of the Waffen SS, a squad designed to "mop up" after the invaders had prevailed. Following the April fiasco, the CIA sent Posada for "training" at Fort Benning, Georgia to learn about spying, using

explosives, and other lethal devices. In 1971, he partnered with Antonio Veciana, founder of Alpha 66, another anti-Castro terrorist group, to plan an elaborate plot to assassinate Castro.

In a 1996 interview, Veciana told me how he and Posada had recruited a couple of Venezuelan hit men, disguised them as a TV news crew and sent them to Santiago, Chile before Castro arrived on a visit. Meanwhile, the assassins "blended in" with the press corps. CIA technicians had outfitted a news camera with a gun. Fortunately for Fidel, the assassins chickened out. Posada became enraged over their cowardice. He and Veciana recruited other assassins to use the same camera on Castro when he stopped in Caracas for a press conference on his return to Cuba. Those whackers also had second thoughts and the plot failed again.

Perhaps Posada's frustration over the failed 1971 hits abated after the "success" of his 1976 Barbados air sabotage. Venezuelan authorities charged him with responsibility for the airline bombing and threw him in prison until August 1985. Leaders of the Cuban American Nation Foundation in Miami apparently—according to Lt. Col. Oliver North's notebooks, published by the Iran-Contra congressional subcommittees—bribed prison authorities to help Posada "escape."

North then engaged him in the late 1980s to resupply the CIA-backed Contras from El Salvador. From there Posada went into the business of bombing hotels in Cuba, as he told Times reporters Bardach and Rohter, with money that came from wealthy Cubans in Miami.

What the U.S. Must Do

Given Posada's record, both from his own boasting and from the published documents, the Justice Department must either try him for terrorist acts or deport him to Venezuela, which has requested his extradition since he plotted the bombing from there and escaped from prison—and apparently committed other serious crimes as well. Despite the overwhelming published evidence, however, the Justice Department rejected Venezuela's extradition request

to try Posada for this crime on the grounds that the request lacked sufficient detail.

Did Posada announce his illegal presence in the United States with the idea that his knowledge of U.S. complicity in aiding and abetting past acts of terrorism would protect him? After all, documents show that U.S. authorities didn't inform Cuba or try to stop the 1976 air-bombing plot. In 1971, as Veciana stated, the CIA made the gun that Posada's agents put inside the camera to assassinate Castro. And what does Ollie North know about Posada's activities for U.S. intelligence?

Given the history of U.S. terrorism aimed at Cuba and other targets around the world, Bush should rethink his own dogmatic statements. Terrorism is indeed a scourge on all of us. From the aftermath of the foul 9/11 deeds on, Bush should have left the struggle against the terrorists to police and judicial agencies. But he insisted on his wars. As we have seen, by employing the military for such tasks, and in the process justifying the erosion of human rights as necessary to fighting terrorism, the world has come to think of our government as hypocritical—at best.

As the Posada case illustrates, one old U.S. terrorist chicken has come home to roost in Bush's nest. And that has exposed the president's anti-terrorist policies as a hoax.

*Saul Landau is a Foreign Policy In Focus scholar (online at www.fpif.org). He also teaches at Cal Poly Pomona University and is a fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies. He wrote *Assassination on Embassy Row* (McGraw-Hill, 1980), an account of the 1976 Letelier-Moffitt murders, with John Dinges).*

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