

Baltimore Sun: Consistency please

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EDITORIAL

'I AM NOT renouncing violence.' It's a safe bet that those words, uttered on Tuesday by Luis Posada Carriles, a Cuban exile with strong links to deadly airplane, car and hotel bombings stretching from Cuba to Washington, D.C., are probably not what U.S. Department of Homeland Security officials normally expect to hear from someone seeking political asylum here.

Usually, those seeking refuge are fleeing violence directed at them because of their political beliefs, not fleeing prison because of violence waged by them in pursuit of their political views.

Then again, Mr. Posada, who was taken into custody in Miami by homeland security authorities Tuesday, is no ordinary asylum-seeker. He's a former CIA operative, an avowed enemy of Cuban President Fidel Castro and an unapologetic terrorist who would stop at nothing - including taking 73 innocent lives - to kill Mr. Castro. He should not be granted political asylum here under any circumstance and permitted to erode America's credibility in its war on terrorism.

"If you harbor a terrorist, you're a terrorist. If you feed a terrorist, you're a terrorist." Remember that statement? It was made by President Bush in November 2001, and it should still apply today, no matter Mr. Posada's ethically challenged past relationship with the United States. The problem is that the United States has a policy of not deporting people - even criminals - to countries with which it

has no diplomatic relations. In this case, that means Communist Cuba - which wants to prosecute Mr. Posada for the hotel bombings - and left-leaning Venezuela, whose relationship with this administration has badly eroded. Mr. Posada was jailed for several years in Venezuela before escaping, and officials there want him back. American officials fear Venezuela will turn him over to Cuba.

Political considerations are a major driver in all this. Many Cuban-Americans, reliable Republican voters for Mr. Bush and his brother, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, support Mr. Posada and think he should be allowed to stay.

The United States is home to hundreds of former foreign despots, human rights abusers and even a collection of minor dictators, many of them in Florida. The homeland security agency even has a special unit charged with ferreting them out and deporting them. If ever there was a case crying out for consistency in American anti-terrorism policy, Mr. Posada's case is it. If the United States can't deport him, it should at least try him in court and jail him.