

Justice thwarted – The Posada affair

As a student of Cuban/American relations since my unexpected voyage to Cuba in 1996, I have watched in sad wonderment as the poor Cuban people continue to suffer as pawns in an apparent chess game of madmen. Truth is - as a people - the Cubanos are internationally recognized as some of the kindest and most friendly folk on the planet, and that was certainly my experience on the island during my six-week stay.

In 1976 Cuba experienced one of the first acts of air terrorism in modern times. A plane full of teenagers, a young Cuban fencing team returning home to accolades and nine future medical students from Guyana, was blown out of the sky off the coast of Bermuda by two bombs placed on board. The culprits were quickly caught and proved to be employees of Luis Posada Carrilles, a Cuban-American extremist and former CIA agent working out of Caracas. He had been trained by the U.S. in explosives. Posada, directly implicated by one of the bomber's testimony and much evidence, eventually escaped prison in Venezuela by bribing his guards. He was then involved in the illegal Iran/Contra affair, associated with a cocaine supply line, and later convicted of planning an auditorium bombing in Panama using thirty pounds of C4 explosive, where Fidel Castro was to speak. He was eventually pardoned, to public outrage, by the outgoing president of Panama who now lives in south Florida.

Upon his return to the U.S. this year, Posada was picked up by U.S. Homeland Security after a much publicized press conference in south Florida. Although he had entered the country illegally and with much local fanfare, a government spokesman initially stated they had no knowledge he was in the country. Venezuela immediately filed extradition papers on Posada, requesting his return to stand trial for the bombing in 1976. Then Homeland

Security balked. What would have otherwise been a routine extradition became a political hot potato. Posada held many secrets of past CIA activities and Venezuela's President Chavez was known to be sympathetic to Fidel Castro.

Dating back to the Kennedy years, Posada and his group of "Cuban Warriors" had been deeply involved in the secret war against Cuba and populist progressive movements in Central America. This war included acts of sabotage, assassination (including a diplomat in Washington D.C.), torture, hotel bombings, intrigue and possibly even biological warfare on the island of Cuba. Posada has even been identified with the Cuban-exile/CIA/Mafia collaboration known as operation "Mongoose" that may have backfired and played a role in John Kennedy's assassination.

Rather than extradite Posada to Venezuela, as per our treaty agreement, the U.S. began to play a cat and mouse game of legal technicalities. Unlike other routine extraditions of accused or escaped criminals, he received every consideration under U.S. law. As time wore on much of the world lost interest. Then U.S. prosecutors dramatically changed their tune: Initially enthusiastic in their case to extradite Posada to Venezuela, Homeland Security prosecutors completely reversed course, in effect folding their cards before the game played out. Gratified by the change in attitude, Posada's lawyer expressed relief that his client would not be forced to reveal past covert operations and facts "embarrassing" to the United States. Based on the testimony of one lone witness, a lawyer friend of Posada's from Venezuela, who's testimony went completely unchallenged by federal prosecutors, Posada will now not be returned to Venezuela on the grounds that he may face torture. Many in Latin America see this as a prime example of U.S. hypocrisy in its struggle against terrorism, and the triumph of perverted "political" justice in a kangaroo court.

It is a bitter irony indeed that during this time of terrorist obsession, one of the world's first known - Luis Posada Carrilles, will apparently escape his just deserts by holding the U.S. hostage to its own dark past. As with the Kennedy assassination, the world may never know the full scope of our often brutal covert tactics and policies in Latin America and Cuba. From the accounts of eyewitnesses and victims it is indeed a tragic tale. The sadistic and horrifying terror campaign waged by Nicaragua's Contras, for example, are legendary in Central America.

This hurt is further compounded by the travesty of duplicity and failed duty now apparent in the actions of federal prosecutors working for Homeland Security. They did not present one witness in the hearings and failed utterly in their responsibilities.

I can't help but think of the parents of those triumphant youngsters on Cubana flight 455 that crashed off the coast of Bermuda. The fate of their children in the last moments of their short lives must be a continuing nightmare.

But the mastermind behind their murder, the coldly ruthless one whose clever cunning doomed their fate, will probably go free. You see, it seems we simply have too much to hide for justice to be served.

John Bomar
Arkadelphia, AR 71923
501-525-0519
johnrbomar@hotsprings.net

Dr. John Bomar is an ocean sailor who unexpectedly found himself in Cuba after signing on to a Danish schooner in 1996.