

US Denies Providing Haven For Alleged Cuban Airline Bomber

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WASHINGTON (AP)--A top State Department official denied Tuesday Cuban allegations that the U.S. is providing a haven for a man Cuba accuses of perpetrating a terrorist bombing against a Cuban airliner in 1976.

"I don't even know that he is in the United States," said Roger Noriega, the top State Department official for Western Hemisphere affairs.

At issue is the whereabouts of Luis Posada Carriles, who has spent much of his life trying to overthrow Cuban President Fidel Castro. Posada's Miami lawyer, Eduardo Soto, says Posada sneaked into the U.S. in March via Mexico and plans to ask for asylum.

Noriega said Cuban claims about Posada "may be a completely manufactured issue."

The U.S., he said, "has no interest in giving quarter to someone who has committed criminal acts."

Unlike Cuba, Noriega added, "we are a country that respects the rule of law."

Cuba accuses of Posada of masterminding the bombing that killed 73 people who were aboard a Cuban passenger plane that was flying over Barbados 29 years ago.

Castro has launched a marathon of speeches on the case, demanding that the U.S. extradite Posada to Venezuela, where he holds citizenship and is wanted in the bombing.

Alternatively, Cuba would like to see him handed over to an international tribunal in a neutral country.

Posada has denied involvement in the airline explosion, and was acquitted in two trials in Venezuela.

But he escaped from prison in 1985 while awaiting a prosecutor's appeal. He once acknowledged - and later denied - overseeing the bombings of Cuban hotels in 1997.

Cuban officials say that consent by U.S. authorities is the only possible explanation for what it claims is the presence of a renowned terrorist on U.S. soil.

Castro has said that Posada is "the most famous and cruel terrorist of the Western Hemisphere."