

Cuban Terrorists At Large in Miami: Bush Welcomes Them Home

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Eat the State!

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As the US government releases a few of the innocent people it has held in Cuba's Guantanamo Bay internment camp for years, four convicted Cuban terrorists were recently pardoned by Panama's outgoing President Mireyas Moscoso. Upon being released from prison on August 26, three of the terrorists were flown on a private jet to Miami where they were met by their families. The four men, along with two others, were convicted on charges relating to a plot to assassinate Fidel Castro by blowing up a crowded auditorium in 2000.

Despite these men's longstanding ties to the CIA, stretching back to the 1970s anti-leftist terror war in South America, "Operation Condor," the US State Department denied having lobbied for their release, and said that it would leave all comments on these particular terrorists for the Panamanian government. As the local US embassy spokesman, William Ostick, said, the US never officially "requested the Panamanians to pardon these individuals."

Nonetheless, China's Xinhua news agency reported that President Moscoso left a telephone message for a former US ambassador to Panama saying "Ambassador, good morning, this is the president to inform you that the four Cubans were pardoned last night and have already left the country. Three are headed for Miami and the other to an unknown destination. Good bye, and all the best." According to the report, Moscoso has acknowledged the recorded voice was hers.

The men, three of them naturalized US citizens and Miami residents, were charged with planning to blow up a University of Panama auditorium with 33 pounds of plastic explosives, as Castro was speaking during an Ibero-American summit in 2000. Found with explosives, false documents, maps, and other evidence, they were convicted in April of 2004, for "endangering public safety" and "falsifying documents" after the courts ruled there wasn't enough evidence to convict them for attempted murder or possession of explosives.

The prosecution has appealed the conviction, arguing that the six- to eight-year sentences don't comply with the serious charges proven during trial. The pardon was condemned by Cuba and international human rights groups, and sparked outraged protests in Panama, Argentina, Cuba, Venezuela and Central America.

The pardons were also repudiated by the government of incoming President, Martin Torrijos, who promised to try to repair Panama's shattered relations with Cuba and Venezuela.

Dr. Julio Yao, professor of international law at the University of Panama, said on Cuban radio that because appeals are continuing, the pardons were "completely illegal" and that Panama's constitution does not even allow pardons in terrorism cases. He added that in light of extradition requests and anti-terrorism conventions, the pardons were illegal under international law as well.

Venezuela also protested the decision and recalled its ambassador to Panama, complaining that it had requested the extradition of the plot's ringleader, Cuban citizen Luis Posada Carriles, who escaped from a Venezuelan prison in 1985 where he was awaiting trial for a bombing of Cubana Airlines flight 455 in 1976 that killed 73 people. After

disappearing from Venezuela, he reportedly divided his time between Miami and San Salvador, El Salvador, where he has long resided. Posada has also admitted in interviews in masterminding a series of bombings of tourist hotels in Cuba in the 1990s.

President Moscoso said she pardoned the men on humanitarian grounds, saying that if they were extradited to Cuba or Venezuela she was "sure" they would be killed. The Venezuelan government retorted that Venezuela doesn't have the death penalty. And Cuba has publicly stated it would not seek the death penalty in their case. Earlier, Moscoso said she had never intended to pardon the four convicted terrorists, but changed her mind after getting angry at Cuba's undiplomatic threat to break off diplomatic relations in response to mere rumors that she planned to pardon the men.

The four terrorists all have a lifetime of ties to the CIA and various Latin American intelligence agencies and violent anti-Castro extremist groups.

Apart from Posada, a Cuban citizen, Guillermo Novo Sampoll was convicted of the assassination in Washington DC in 1976 of Chilean politician Orlando Letelier, whose car was blown up by agents of US-backed dictator Augusto Pinochet. That conviction was overturned on appeal.

Another of the pardoned men, also a naturalized US citizen, Gaspar Jiminez Escobedo was imprisoned in Mexico for a plot to kidnap and assassinate Cuban diplomats and is linked with an Operation Condor-related program to assassinate Pinochet opponents living in exile in Mexico. He has also been implicated in a plot to kidnap and assassinate Cuban consular officials in Miami in 1976, and with a bombing that same year that wounded a Miami reporter.

The whereabouts of Posada Carriles, who has long enjoyed the protection of the US government, are still unknown. He may have gone first to Honduras and according to Radio Havana may now be "somewhere in the Bahamas."

Cuban television reported on September 2 that Honduran President Ricardo Maduro had admitted that the "terrorist" Posada had entered his country and that he "has the support of powerful people with international influence."

Pedro Ramon Rodriguez was convicted of the attempted assassination of a Cuban diplomat in New York on September 11, 1980. Also a naturalized US citizen, he spent 9/11/04 presumably with his family in Miami, where he may have enjoyed listening to Bush's strong words against international terrorists.

Coincidentally, Bush was campaigning in Florida, shoring up support among anti-Castro Cuban Americans, segments of which are said to consider Posada and his cohorts heroes, on August 27, just as the three Miami-based terrorists were arriving home.

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