

"Is Posada Still Working for the White House?"

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An Exclusive CounterPunch Interview with Ricardo Alarcon About One of the World's Most Wanted Terrorists

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"While Mr Posada was reappearing in the US, the US Government did thousands of arrests of persons that had entered the country illegally. But they did not arrest Mr Posada!" said Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada, President of Cuba's Parliament.

And he then added: "He was really lucky or is he still working for the White House? Or is he again being protected by the second generation of Bushes?"

In an hour and a half long exclusive interview for COUNTERPUNCH, given in the meeting room of the National Assembly administrative building, on 42th Street, in Havana's Playa neighbourhood, Alarcon resumed the grievances of the Cuban authorities in relation with the presence of Cuban terrorist Luis Posada Carriles in US territory.

Liberated on August 26 from a Panama jail where he was detained for an assassination attempt on President Fidel Castro, Posada entered illegally the US, one month ago, arriving from Islas Mujeres, Mexico, on a boat owned by Miami businessman Santiago Alvarez, also denounced by Cuba as a terrorist.

Alarcon is one of the Cuban leaders closest to President Fidel Castro. A well-known student leader when the Cuban revolution happens in 1959, he is now a member of the Political Bureau of Cuba's Communist Party, and has been president of the National Assembly since 1993.

Cuban ambassador to the United Nations in 1976 and then in 1992, he lived in New York for fourteen years. He was later on Cuba's Minister of Foreign Affairs. He is recognized in the US diplomatic community for his vast knowledge of Cuba-US relations.

Cuban President Fidel Castro gave several consecutive speeches, at Havana's Convention Center, since a little more than one week now, on the presence in the US of Cuban-American terrorist Luis Posada Carriles. You participated in these meetings, giving an exposé of Luis Posada and Orlando Bosch implication in the 1976 explosion of a Cuban airliner in Barbados. The American mainstream media were somewhat reticent, apparently, to publish the full details of Cuba's accusations, would you tell us about this.

This is a very, very long story that goes along the entire history of the Cuban Revolution and the confrontation between the US and Cuba.

Let me begin by part of what has been documented by the US authorities regarding the anti-Cuba terrorism based in Miami.

First of all, the most important thing is what happens when Orlando Bosch enter the US in February 1988, as soon as he was so-called acquitted by a Venezuela court in the case of the destruction of a Cubana airliner in mid-air in 1976. When that happens there was an investigation in the Caribbean made, first of all, by Trinidad and Tobago, which was the country that detained two Venezuelans who had traveled from Port-of-Spain to Bridgetown, had left the plane in Bridgetown and intended to return to Caracas via Port-of-Spain.

Because of the fact they were the only persons who were on the plane and left it before the sabotage - they were without luggage, they immediately tried to book on a flight back to the place where they had come - they became very suspicious to the Barbadian authorities. They informed the Trinidadians and the Trinadians arrested them practically upon arrival to Port-of-Spain.

And the investigation begun. As a matter of fact, two parallel investigation. One by the Barbadian authorities who, according to the international law, had the duty to determine what has happened with a civilian airplane that had exploded almost over their territory. And another investigation by the Trinidadians, around these two individuals that they had captured on their soil.

It is very important because some key elements appear, on both investigations, in an independent and separated manner.

The Barbadians found that while they were in Bridgetown, in the very short time that they spent at a hotel, they only made phone calls to Caracas. In those days, there were no cell phones, you had to ask an operator who helped you. Then the Barbadian hotel had the receipts, the records of who called whom, at what time, the day and so on. There were phone calls to Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch, with two different numbers in Caracas.

That was one thing.

The other thing is that two Barbadians taxis drivers testified - one worked at the airport and had taken these two individuals from the airport, the same day the Cubana airline was sabotaged. He brought these two people to town.

The explosion took place probably more rapidly than they had expected because they eared and saw the explosion when they were in the taxi going from the airport to town. That perhaps has provoked their extremely instable attitude. They were very, very nervous. That is what the driver reported.

And at some moment they asked the driver not to go to the hotel but to go to the American Embassy and, at a particular moment, something struck the mind of the driver. He listened when one of the individuals signalled a building, when approaching downtown Bridgetown, and referred to the American Embassy. In Bridgetown, at this moment, there were very few embassies. The US and very few countries had a representation there. We didn't at the time. This was noted by the driver because it is rather strange that somebody who is entering the country should know this, unless he had been there before.

Then they went to the Embassy, according to this driver.

Another taxi driver, from the hotel - after the Embassy, they went to the Holiday Inn - reported that, on two occasions, on the afternoon of that day, they asked him to bring them to the American Embassy.

And he gave a very detailed report: the time, when they left the car, and so on and so forth.

That was going on in Barbados as part of an investigation that the Barbadians had to do concerning the nature of what happened. In the civil aviation, anything of that kind is considered an accident in principle. And you have to determine the causes of that accident.

They determined that it was not an accident. It was sabotage.

THE US INSISTS ON PARTICIPATING

From the technical standpoint, the Commission was established by the civil aviation authorities of Barbados and they invited representatives of other countries, experts that could help. For example, people from the Cuban civil aviation were there, people from Canada because the plane has been built in Canada. Then experts from the company who attended so they could understand the technical details.

Interestingly, the US asked to participate in that investigation: no Americans was killed or suffered damage. The plane was not American. The company that handled the plane was not American, it was not traveling through American territory but they expressed a great interest in participating right at the very beginning. It begun almost immediately after the sabotage.

It is important to stress that because after that, the US would act as if they had no relation whatsoever with this incident and that they didn't have any obligation to cooperate with this investigation. But at the very beginning they were very interested.

My suspicion is that they were very interested in knowing what others would know. Or perhaps to try to influence in the determination, because it had not been an accident due to human errors or technical malfunction or whatever - that would be the best cover-up for the terrorist. But through the words of that commission, it became crystal clear that it was impossible to hide the terrorist nature of what had happened.

And that fact was very important: they had to build a different strategy. Having been demonstrated that it was a terror act, you would try to completely "disconnect" with that. They probably didn't expect that in the process to determine that, they would also be present at the moment that these taxi drivers were invited to participate in the commission.

SOMETHING VERY CONFIDENTIAL

But what happened? In the meantime, the Barbadians inform the Commission that Trinidad had shared with them some information that they were learning through the two detainees.

And one of them - Hernan Ricardo - had asked, in Trinidad and Tobago, the head of the police service of the country very confidentially, privately. And at that moment, he told him that he, Ricardo, was a member of the CIA and that his "boss" in the CIA was the same person that was his "boss" in a so-called private investigation company that Posada had in Caracas.

And that they had visited the US Embassy in Barbados three times during the few hours that they spent there.

In other words, this strange story about visiting the American Embassy in that context would come separately from, on the one hand, the taxi drivers in Barbados, and from the individuals themselves talking to somebody else in Port-of-Spain.

Who knows, it was a rather stupid thing for them to do but they were very affected by what happened. Because one thing is to put a bomb that explodes and to read in the papers what has happened. And another thing to watch with your own eyes when those people among whom you had been a few minutes before, are physically destroyed.

Apparently that shocked them and that they couldn't imagine that this would be the situation. Some people have interviewed them, have written books about that story and they always stressed that they didn't expect to watch, to see the result of their action and that may explain why they became so nervous.

So nervous that they acted in a very suspicious manner. Including going to the Embassy, to get protection. They were afraid of having been committed in a very serious crime.

Imagine that the plane had exploded a couple of hours later. It could have been near Jamaica, for example. Or in Jamaica, on the ground. It would have been more difficult to suspect that some individuals had left the plane in Barbados. But that having happened in front of everybody in that small island, with only two persons descending from the plane, two persons that immediately attempted to depart, going back. And the fact has been very clearly documented that the only thing that they did in Barbados was to get in contact with Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch. Nothing else. They didn't go shopping; they didn't go to the beach; they didn't do anything in that tourist island. And allegedly they also went to the US Embassy. And there are two sources of information for that. I stress that point because years later the US Government would say that they had nothing to do with all that.

As a matter of fact, after that, there was an international conference called by the Trinidad and Tobago government, attended by the Caribbean nations affected, Guyana, Barbados, Trinidad, Cuba and Venezuela. And a decision was taken to bring these people to a trial in Venezuela, in a Venezuelan court, because the action was planned in Caracas and everybody was Venezuelan or Venezuela resident.

EVERYBODY COOPERATES, EXCEPT THE US

Everybody cooperated, sent information. The US was specifically asked to cooperate, to bring information in the clearest terms by no other than Carlos Andres Perez, a very well-known friend of the US who at that time was the president of Venezuela. Carlos Andres went to New York to deliver a speech at the UN General Assembly, a speech in which he condemned in very strong terms the terror attack on the Cubana airplane and asked for cooperation from the international community.

He asked for help to permit Venezuela to make justice. After the speech, he had a press conference, in New York in the UN building, in which he refers to the various elements of suspicion that would suggest that the US Government was involved. He said he didn't want to blame the US but he asked the US, in the friendliest manner, to help dispel those doubts that were in the media in those days.

Imagine: in this tiny island of Barbados this story of the two drivers was known by everybody. Imagine the shock for those nations who had been independent for no more than ten years at that moment. Islands who had been associated with the nature, with the beaches looking at an airplane exploding over your head, and people dying they were no bodies recovered, only parts of bodies

IN 1992, AT THE SECURITY COUNCIL

You have to remember that in 1992, the US has promoted some action at the Security Council to have this Council dealing with issues of terrorism. Specifically around two famous incidents. One was the explosion of a Pan Am flight and another was a UTA, a French airline traveling to Africa. And the Security Council met on several occasions between January and March 1992 to consider those cases and, in general, to condemn international terrorism. They even had a Security Council summit meeting attended by heads of states representing the fifteen members of this Council.

But what happened is that a couple of years before, President Bush -the same head of state that attended this solemn meeting- had pardoned Orlando Bosch when he went to Miami after being "acquitted" by a Venezuelan court.

And a lot has been published, in the American media, in those months, about the so-called Iran-Contra scandal, including the fact that Luis Posada Carriles who had "escaped" from the Venezuelan court before receiving a verdict from a court of appeal, had gone practically straight from Caracas to Ilopango in El Salvador. All that would explode in the media when the Iran-Contra scandal appeared.

It was discussed in the Senate, it was the object of a report by the government, the Towers report. In those hearings, it appeared that Mr Posada went out of the Venezuelan jail with the cooperation of the White House. It was Oliver North who conducted that operation and Posada went directly to work for Oliver North. Remember that North was in this operation of clandestinely sending weapons to the Contras in Nicaragua, something that was prohibited by an Act of congress. Posada was the person at the military airbase in Ilopango, San Salvador, in charge of sending the weapons to the Contras.

THE SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS REVELATIONS

Later another scandal came up in the States when the San Jose Mercury News, in California, showed the other dimension that not only they distributed weapons among the Contras, but the Contras would give them drugs.

It was a two way operation. The Americans would give weapons to the Contras, these people who organize the network of clandestine distribution of weapons, would also clandestinely introduce drugs in the US.

That is quite understandable. If you have a clandestine operation - airplanes and whatever, not moving through customs, it is very easy to make some additional profits by sending drugs through those same channels and it was demonstrated that, in those days, drugs would come from that place in Central America to L.A.

I remember the denunciations by Maxine Waters in particular. There were meetings in L.A. The CIA had to go there to apologize.

It was proven, documented, that Mr Posada exit from a Venezuelan prison was a secret US operation. That Mr Posada would join a secret US operation, that means, working for the US Government at the highest level in a delicate mission. The same guy that according to the one of the material instruments of the sabotage was his "boss" in the CIA. This guy, his employee who, immediately after the explosion, went to the US Embassy in Bridgetown and also called him to report about that. This guy was so important for the US services that he was taken out of prison. Not Mr Bosch, who was nearby in another cell. No, they took Mr Posada out. And Mr Posada went straight to continue working for them.

"THEY CONTINUED WORKING WITH HIM!"

Posada gave an interview to a Venezuelan magazine, a couple of weeks after his departure from prison, and he said that he was again in the fight against the communists somewhere in Central America. Later he would give an interview to the magazine of the Miami Herald. He would then publish an autobiography. So that was a very public fact that that man recognized.

What was an allegation of two taxi drivers or a confession of a criminal now appears to be confirmed by the fact that he was an employee of the white House. Can you imagine a government hiring a person that was accused of being the mastermind of a terrorist attack in which he was involved or it was alleged that it was involved? He should be cautious and should not be willing to have that connection. But they did! They save that man and they continued working with him or him working for them.

Do you need a better demonstration that he was a CIA man at the moment of the sabotage and after that, at least all the way to the nineties

"A VERY BIG MISTAKE"

Then in 1992, because the Security Council had done that, we asked it to discuss also our plane. It was smaller than the Pan Am jet or UTA's but everybody was killed and it was the first case in the western hemisphere. And the authors one of them had just been pardoned and the other one was again hiding after being discovered while he was working in a secret operation for the White House. The Government

that convened that summit of the Security Council on the issue of terrorism should also cooperate in cases that allegedly involved it.

I sent a letter on April 27 1992 and I got no answer. The members of the Council had what they called private consultations where they would see how to answer requests for meetings and nobody wanted to have that meeting. I had to send maybe a dozen of letters requesting, insisting and we keep insisting.

This was a terrible situation because they would not meet but I would let everybody know that they were not answering my request. We simply sent letters to the Council and distribute it to the media. They were public letters always. And finally, on May 21st we had a meeting.

On that day, the State Department issued a statement that was read at the Security Council meeting by the US Ambassador. In that statement, they simply lied openly to the world and that is on the records of the Security Council meeting. What they said is absolutely a big lie.

They said that they didn't send any information to Venezuela because they didn't had anything. And that they were not even asked by Venezuela.

This was a big mistake of the State Department: they forgot that Carlos Andres Perez, personally, in front of everybody, and was in the news on November 1976 I was there! I remember perfectly well when Carlos Andres Perez made that appeal. In a very friendly manner to the US: please help us dispel that allegation involving you!

The statement of the State Department says: At the State Department, there is no document about having received from Venezuela any request of evidence or testimony in relation with this case. Apparently the Venezuelan authorities considered that it was unlikely that the US would have useful information that was not already in the hands of the Venezuelans.

"A VERY CYNICAL ANSWER"

As you can see, it is a very cynical answer because they were building up on the issue of terrorism in the nineties, because of the Pan Am and UTA planes, establishing a responsibility of the governments around the world to cooperate against terrorism. But clearly terrorism when affected them, not terrorism at such. At that meeting of the Security Council, I had the opportunity to present these documents that were made public a little before: the decision of the Attorney General on Mr Bosch application for admission into the US.

As soon as he was acquitted in Caracas, he went to the US, apparently with the help of Otto Reich, who was then the US Ambassador to Venezuela, another coincidence.

In this document - a rather comprehensive report of Bosch activities including specific references of the terrorist action against the Cubana airplane-, they say that they had information "reflecting that the October 6, 1976, Cuban airline bombing was a CORU operation under the direction of Bosch."

That information is not reflected in the long report of the Venezuelan court that doesn't mention the US at all giving anything to this court. And they have something that was not shared by the court obviously because the US didn't want to cooperate. Rather, they wanted to protect the defendants by not telling others what they had.

Listen to this, it is rather revealing. It is in a list of confidential material that the Attorney General say that they had, related to Mr Bosch, and it can be extended to Mr Posada:

"Information relating to the organization and command structure of CORU and reflecting that between June 1976 and March 1977 -at that moment Bosch and Posada were in jail in Venezuela- persons associated with CORU engaged in some 16 episodes involving bombings, attempted kidnappings, assassinations and attempted assassination. These episodes occurred in the United States, Spain, the Caribbean and Central and South America".

I think there is no doubt whatsoever and it was demonstrated in 1992 that the US had been protecting these guys for many years."

"A CLEAR OBLIGATION FOR EVERY MEMBER STATE"

Now you have the reappearance of Mr Posada. Now it is said that Mr Posada is in Miami and would be or has requested asylum, a repetition of what happened with Bosch.

There is a problem for the US. The problem is 9/11.

After 9/11, the US had the Security Council again adopted a resolution that was drafted by the US, on September 28, 2001. This resolution is very clear. It says that "all States shall refrain from providing any form of support, active or passive, to entities involved in terrorist acts, including by suppressing recruitment of terrorist groups and eliminating the supply of weapons to terrorist"

It says also "to take the necessary steps to prevent the commission of terrorist acts including by provision of early warnings to other states by exchange of information"

Almost 30 years after the Barbados attack, the US still have documents that they haven't share with anybody.

"Prevent the movement of terrorist or terrorist groups by effective border controls and controls of identity papers or travel documents "

Mr Posada has said, as it was recorded in the Washington Post, that he had four, five passports including one American, that he had visited the US freely anytime he wanted to. And now it has been said that has been there for more than a month!

And the official position of the Ste Department is still is that they do not have evidence that he is there. That is not a minor league terrorist. It is one of the most famous, known for decades, and he can enter the US! He can be there for more than

a month and you can't find him. Can you imagine? Telling that to the US people at a time you are supposed to be involved in a struggle against terrorism.

This resolution is a clear obligation for every member state. And certainly for the author of the resolution, the US!

"THAT WAS THEIR ONLY CRIME"

September 2001: in those very days, the US Government was trying to get the most severe sentences against the five Cubans who had been arrested, prosecuted and tried in Miami for fighting against terrorists!

Mr Bosch acting openly in Miami after having been pardoned by the president of the US. The US refusing to cooperate with the Venezuelan tribunal that was dealing with that case, is a way to condone terrorists and to back their action. And Cuba sending five young people to try to learn about those groups who were planning against us - that was their only crime.

By September 2001, the US was presenting to the Miami court what is called a memorandum of sentences. And they refer to one very important issue in the US: what they call "incapacitation", which is a rather peculiar concept. What means incapacitation? It means to assure a person cannot do something, to deprive you from your capability to do something. Incapacitation to learn about what the terrorists were planning in order to send this to Cuba to help us to protect ourselves.

They wrote that for them it was very important not only imposing the Cuban 5 the maximum sentence but also to insure that they could not do the same in the future.

The 5 were not spying, they were not killing, they were learning about the terrorists groups. Three of the 5 -Gerardo, Fernando and Ramon- are born in Cuba and had to assume new personalities. Two are born in the US and were there with their real names -Antonio Guerrero and Rene Gonzalez.

There are three who have been condemned to life -Gerardo, Ramon and Antonio. And two who have been sentenced to 19 years, Fernando, and 15 years, Rene.

In the case of the life sentences, theoretically the issue of incapacitation would not appear. In case, for any reason, that they would leave jail, they would be immediately be expelled to Cuba.

In the case of Fernando, it is included in the sentence that, after serving his time he would be immediately expelled to Cuba. By the way, is main job was investigating Mr Bosch.

Then come the cases of Rene and Antonio.

Rene was condemned to fifteen years plus a special limitation for his life after serving his sentence.

In the own words of the sentence, as requested by the government, this was included in his sentence:

"As a further special condition of supervised release the defendant is prohibited from associating with or visiting specific places where individuals or groups such as terrorists, members of organizations advocating violence, and organized crime figures are known to be or frequent".

September 2001, it was the Security Council adopting this very strong resolution and, at the same time, the US protecting individuals such as terrorists, members of organizations advocating violence, and organized crime figures.

It is no double standard, doble moral like it is said in Spanish I prefer to say it is no moral at all.

"THOSE WHO HARBOUR A TERRORIST"

I would quote President Bush, Bush junior. He has repeated solemnly, in several occasions, that those who harbour a terrorist are as guilty as the terrorist himself.

If you protect in any manner a terrorist, you are as guilty as the terrorist himself. This was the justification for the attack on Afghanistan, a country was attacked because in the territory of this country, there was Al Qaeda, Ben Laden and so on, you know the story. In the case of Iraq, as it was demonstrated, it was a big lie: it had nothing to do with 9/11.

But now you have the same government, the same president that knows that they have terrorists in your own territory. And you are not doing anything to arrest them, to try them and so on furthermore you are protecting them. That's why the Five are in prison. You have been protecting them all along these years as it is proven in the Attorney general decision on Bosch. They had information going back to the sixties all the way to the moment he arrived in Miami. And he was pardoned by Mr Bush father.

Now the son have an opportunity of redressing this situation; he has a legal obligation according to the Security Council resolution that was adopted in September 2001, a resolution that was drafted by the US.

The US has launched wars, threatened the world with an all out war to fight terrorism and has a very clear opportunity at home to show if they really opposed terrorism.

They must arrest Mr Posada, find him -the sooner, the better. It is a very grave situation: a very well-known terrorist, a face very easy to recognize, is there and it is of public knowledge who brought him there, who have been protecting him. Financing him, paying his expenses. Who is paying the lawyer? This guy is there, he signed the application for asylum, he has allegedly issued a statement from Miami, it is not Mr Ben Laden sending strange videos from nobody knows where. No, this guy has been telling you where he is. The county, the city. His friends are known - friends, by the way, all of them with terrorist background, known also by the US.

It is very interesting, as reflected by the article published by Anne-Louise Bardach in the Washington Post, this same September 2001, after 9/11 and before adopting this

staunchest position against terrorism, the same Attorney general took the time to free a number of well-known convicted felons of terrorism, the killers of Orlando Letelier and other actions that took place on US soil.

And they didn't expel them as it is established in the US law. They didn't do what is clearly stated in the Security Council resolution.

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"If Americans would know what is going on, I'm very sure they would feel outraged, insulted by this, concluded Alarcon. We will insist, we will keep talking about that and explain We know we do not control the big monopolies of information but it will be very difficult for them to keep the truth from everybody all the time. We will do our best to insure that".

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