

MIAMI HERALD: LUIS POSADA CARRILES Papers connect exile to bomb plot

Documents say that Luis Posada Carriles, a Cuban militant seeking U.S. asylum, attended two meetings at which the 1976 bombing of a Cuban jetliner was planned.

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Luis Posada Carriles attended at least two planning meetings for the bombing of a Cuban jetliner in 1976 that killed 73 people, according to once-secret documents provided to The Herald Monday by the private National Security Archive in Washington.

The records, made up of FBI and CIA files that were part of an investigation into the airliner bombing and other anti-Castro terrorism in the 1970s, may further complicate Posada's bid for U.S. asylum.

Posada, who denies involvement in the airliner tragedy, is believed to be in hiding in South Florida and has requested asylum.

U.S. officials claim they don't know whether Posada is in the United States. They have said they are not looking for him but would pursue leads on his whereabouts.

The case presents a dilemma for the Bush administration, which faces the prospect of considering asylum for a man implicated in international terrorism at a time when it is demanding that other countries deny refuge to terrorists.

One of the records obtained by The Herald is based on information provided to former Miami-Dade Detective Raul Diaz by an informant, Ricardo "Monkey" Morales, in October and November 1976, days after the jetliner bombing.

"Some plans regarding the bombing of a Cubana Airlines airplane were discussed at the bar in the Anauco Hilton Hotel in Caracas, Venezuela, at which meeting Frank Castro, Gustavo Castillo, Luis Posada Carriles and (Morales) were present," Diaz told the FBI, according to the document, dated November 1976.

Diaz told the FBI that Posada attended another planning meeting at Morales' apartment in the Anauco Hilton with Morales and Castro and that disagreements arose among the men over who would "claim credit" for the bombing.

"Some people in the Venezuelan government are involved in this airplane bombing," the document says. 'If Posada Carriles talks, then Morales Navarrete and others in the Venezuelan government will `go down the tube.' "

Posada, linked to several anti-Castro attacks around the Americas over the past four decades, sneaked into the United States in March.

A telephone call seeking comment from the FBI regarding any search for Posada wasn't immediately returned late Monday.

Morales' reliability as a witness and informant was publicly questioned by a judge in a South Florida drug trafficking case. He is known to have said at one time that Posada didn't participate in the jetliner bombing.

Morales died after a 1982 South Florida bar shooting.

POSTING TODAY

The National Security Archive, a private research institute and library at George Washington University, plans to post the rest of the Posada documents online today at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/> . The archive catalogs and releases declassified U.S. documents often obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.

"There is no way the Bush administration can ignore the historical record as it evaluates his petition for safe harbor," said Peter Kornbluh, a senior analyst and Cuba specialist at the archive.

According to another FBI document sent by teletype to Washington the day after the airliner bombing, a source ``all but admitted that Posada and Bosch had engineered the bombing of the airline."

In that document, dated Oct. 7, 1976, the "confidential source" was not identified.

Orlando Bosch Avila, a Cuban exile then in Venezuela, was acquitted in the bombing. He is living in Miami and denies either he or Posada was involved.

Posada's lawyer in Miami, Eduardo Soto, said that "as a whole I don't think Mr. Morales was a very credible individual." But Soto said he believed Morales was telling the truth in an interview he gave to an exile journalist in 1982 in which he says Posada was not involved in the airliner bombing.

"My client was not involved in the 1976 bombing," Soto said.

Posada's friend and benefactor, Santiago Alvarez, said Morales could not be believed because he was unreliable.

Posada was twice acquitted by Venezuelan courts in the bombing and escaped from a Venezuelan prison while awaiting a prosecutor's appeal.

"He never told the truth to anyone that was with the CIA or the police or anything like that," Alvarez said.

Former Miami-Dade Detective Diaz, who retired several years ago, could not immediately be reached for comment Monday night.

Castillo, who is living in Hialeah, told The Herald last week that he played no role in the airliner bombing. According to the documents, Frank Castro was the head of CORU, an anti-Castro organization that had claimed responsibility for several attacks on Cuban-related targets. He reportedly is living in the Dominican Republic and could not be reached for comment.

EXPLOSIVES KNOW-HOW

Another exile mentioned in the documents, Orlando Garcia Vasquez, had intimate knowledge of the explosives used on the plane, according to the documents. At the time, Garcia Vasquez was the head of DISIP, a Venezuelan state security agency.

'Garcia Vasquez mentioned that the bomb on the Cubana airliner was activated by a `lapicero' [time pencil]," a type of detonator, the document said.

His wife told The Herald Monday that her husband was too ill to speak and could not answer questions.

Other documents that will be published today confirm that Posada worked for the CIA through the late 1960s and was an informant for the agency until the mid-1970s, Kornbluh said.

Herald staff writer Alfonso Chardy contributed to this report.