



Terrorism Then and Now: The U.S., Cuba and the Strange Case of Luis Posada Carriles[±]

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Terrorism in the Caribbean

On October 6, 1976, Cubana de Aviación flight 455 took off from Barbados and shortly after, exploded and sank into the Caribbean Sea. All 73 people aboard the civilian airliner were killed by two bombs placed on board, including the entire Cuban Olympic fencing team and eleven Guyanese students on their way to medical school in Cuba. The passengers were mainly young athletes from Cuba, North Korea and the East Bloc, on route to Cuba after participating in the Pan American games. Their bodies, beyond recovery, still lie in a watery grave, tragic testimony to the worst terrorist bombing in the Western Hemisphere up to then. There is no record of any public statements at that time from the White House, the State Department, the Pentagon or the CIA (headed by George Herbert Walker Bush, father the current president) regarding a terrorist challenge in the hemisphere. A quarter of a century later on September 11, 2005 three planes, hijacked by Middle Eastern terrorists, slammed into the Pentagon in Washington and the hemisphere's two tallest office buildings at the World Trade Center in New York City. This time three thousand people would die in what was now the worst direct attack on U.S. soil since the Japanese airforce bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941. Fidel Castro offered his condolences to the American people as he and the rest of the world awaited George Bush's response.

It was not long in coming. The president declared nine days later before a shaken Congress that the U.S. would retaliate with "... every necessary weapon of war in pursuit of what he called "infinite justice" in a war that would be infinite as well. In near-apocalyptic terms he warned that this was "civilization's fight." The people of the U.S. "should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen.... Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." Two days later, on September 22, Cuba denounced this speech as the blueprint for the idea of a

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global military dictatorship imposed through brute force, without international laws or institutions of any kind. (1) Perhaps the Cubans reflected on the disparity of the U.S. responses to the two attacks but they also may have thought that in this new post 9-11 world, it might finally be possible to capture and bring to justice the perpetrators of the savage act of terrorism twenty-five years ago. If they did, the events of 2005 proved that regarding Washington's attitude toward Cuba, plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

In a matter of days after the October 1976 bombing it was revealed that anti-Castro agents, two Cubans residing in Venezuela and two Venezuelans, were involved. Moreover, the Cubans had links to Venezuelan intelligence and its security police, the DISIP, as well as to the CIA. One of the Cubans was Orlando Bosch, a pediatrician, but far from average. His real work was as a leader of the violent and Cuban exile opposition to Fidel Castro. Currently head of the terrorist umbrella group, Coordinadora de Organizaciones Revolucionarias Unidas (CORU), Bosch was wanted for questioning in the U.S. in connection with the assassination in Washington a month earlier of Orlando Letelier, the former Chilean foreign minister in the socialist government of Salvador Allende. The other Cuban was Luis Posada Carriles, a former security agent under Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship. Both had been trained by the CIA and Posada had practiced for, but did not participate in, the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961. He also had been commissioned by President Kennedy a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. Posada was now formally running a private detective agency in Caracas, but it was well known that he had never moved far from his contacts in the DISIP or his role as an intelligence operations chief. (2) Posada, in fact, had been in contact with the CIA for more than a decade prior to the 1976 airline bombing and had spent more than five years in the service of both the FBI and CIA. Posada also participated at the CORU meeting in Bonao, the Dominican Republic in July when the decision was taken to coordinate terrorist attacks among various Cuban groups. Posada, representing the DISIP, returned to Caracas with a complete plan for CORU's future bombings including the downing of the Cubana jet. (3)

The four were arrested but the Cubans presented a conundrum for Venezuela's president, Carlos Andrés Pérez. The atrocity threw a monkey wrench into the Cuban diplomacy of Pérez which was based on a quid pro quo that Caracas would not allow its territory to be used as a springboard for anti-Castro activity. In return Havana pledged not to support the Venezuelan left-- with its history of pro-Cuba guerrilla movements in the 1960s, and whose nemesis was Pérez, then interior minister under the Acción Democrática governments. This meant that despite important support from the security police and some sectors of the military, Posada and his cohorts would be jailed but never brought to trial. The case was moved to a military court where the proceedings could take place in secret. (4) According to Bosch in an interview in the 1980s, the Posada-DISIP connection continued while he was in jail and he remained on its payroll. Posada and Bosch were held four years without trial before the War Council of the Venezuelan Armed Forces declared that there was not sufficient evidence to warrant a trial and ordered their release (along with the two material authors of the bombing who had confessed to placing the bomb and implicated Posada). Cuba protested by withdrawing all its diplomats from Venezuela, causing the Army High Command to declare that they would have to remain in jail while the decision of the Council of war was reviewed. (5)

In the Shadow of Washington

According to recently released documents, the CIA had solid advance intelligence, as early as June 1976, that Cuban exile terrorist groups were planning to bomb a Cubana airliner. A week before the bombing a CIA agent reported that Posada Carriles was overheard stating: "We are going to hit a Cuban airliner." Although the FBI's attaché in Caracas had many contacts with one of the Venezuelans who placed the bomb on the plane, and listened to him suggest terrorism against the Cuban embassy, the agent neither tapped his phone nor had him investigated. Five days before the bombing, despite suspicions that the Venezuelan was involved in terrorist activities at the behest of Posada, the FBI provided him with a visa to the U.S. (6) There are suggestions that still classified records will show the informant to be Posada himself who at that time was in periodic contact with both CIA and FBI agents in Venezuela and generally was considered to be the CIA's man in Caracas. Finally, there is no evidence that the CIA passed on its information regarding the terrorist threat to Cuban civilian aircraft to authorities in Havana. Based on the CORU-CIA link and the appearance of the name and phone number of the FBI legal attaché in Caracas, Joseph Leo, in the papers found on one of the perpetrators, Havana accused the CIA of "directly" participating in the mass murder. (7)

Even a cursory examination of the historical record, leaves the inescapable conclusion that during the cold war the U.S. at the least countenanced and tolerated the practice of terrorism by its perceived allies and on multiple occasions, mainly in the early 1960s and again in the 1980s in Central America, fomented and sponsored it. The U.S. in fact has had a long and dark history of abetting violence and terrorist operations against its enemies in the developing world, particularly in Latin America. To focus briefly on only this region, Nicaragua was an especially egregious example of this in the 1980s when U.S.-sponsored contra forces fighting the Sandinista government regularly engaged in terrorizing the civilian population. In 1985, it was revealed that the CIA even created a How-To manual for conducting terrorism against enemy targets inside Nicaragua. This included-- to use the term created during the Vietnam war for killing village officials suspected of Viet Cong collaboration-- "terminating with extreme prejudice" local Nicaraguan leaders allied with the Sandinistas. (8) The US is the only country to have been condemned by the World Court for international terrorism, calling the actions by the U.S. inside the country and the effort to mine Nicaragua's harbors as an "unlawful use of force" in its war against Nicaragua. Two Security Council resolutions, vetoed by the U.S., supported the judgment of the Court. (9) The record includes ignoring the terror and torture of civilians under the Pinochet regime; even recently, the U.S. has been less than cooperative in dealing with suspected terrorist killers from Venezuela as evidenced in the case of the murdered prosecutor Danilo Anderson. In August of this year right wing TV evangelist and former candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, Pat Robertson, seemed to be echoing this past on his national television program when he called for the assassination of Venezuela's president, Hugo Chávez: "We have the ability to take him [Chávez] out and it is time that we exercise that capability." (10)

By far, Cuba has been the most prominent victim of U.S.-linked terrorism. The Church Committee of the US Senate held hearings in 1976 that exposed an effort beginning in 1959, and growing over several years in the early sixties, to end Castro's rule through a dirty war. This included nearly daily terrorist attacks in high speed boats leaving from the US mainland and hundreds of acts of sabotage and plots to kill Cuban leaders. Most famously were more

than a dozen attempts by the CIA to assassinate Castro as part of a terrorist destabilization program dubbed Operation Mongoose and spearheaded by Bobby Kennedy after the failure of the Bay of Pigs. The program was ended by the mid-1960s but over the years Washington has turned a blind eye to actions by extremist Cuba exiles in the U.S. that resulted in the deaths of dozens of Cuban officials and innocent civilians. Cuban ports, merchant and fishing ships were subject to constant attacks and diplomatic personnel abroad became targets of attacks with explosives and fire arms. Posada Carriles was only one of an array of hard-line anti-Castroites who worked for the CIA, or who were too often left alone to carry out their obsessive schemes for the violent overthrow of the Cuban regime.

Anti-Castro violence peaked in the '70s and Washington at least officially renounced it during the Carter administration. Presidential Directive NSC-6 of March 15, 1977 recognized past U.S. involvement and declared "The Attorney General should take all necessary steps permitted by law to prevent terrorist or any illegal actions launched from within the United States against Cuba and against U.S. citizens and to apprehend and prosecute perpetrators of such actions. " US-based terrorism against Cuba reappeared in the late 1990' with the targeting of tourist hotels in which Posada's role was acknowledged by the Cuban terrorist himself. While the U.S. has periodically accused the Cuban government of involvement with terrorism-- most recently of bioterrorism-- a charge that turned out to have as much validity as Saddam's famous purchase of yellowcake uranium in Niger-- the U.S. has also had a notable double standard regarding the hijacking of Cuban planes to the U.S. In violation of its own directives on terrorism, it has complicated and dragged its feet on the return of both planes and people to Cuba.

Posada 1985-2005

In August 1985, at the height of Ronald Reagan's war against the Sandinista government of Nicaragua Posada walked out of the front door of the San Juan de los Morros, in the guise of a guard after bribing a prison official, most likely with money sent by right-wing Cubans in Miami, and probably with the acquiescence of the U.S. and Venezuelan governments. He stopped off in the Dutch Antilles before landing in El Salvador. Not surprisingly, he soon turned up working for Oliver North in his secret operation to fund the contras against the wishes of Congress. One would have to be particularly credulous to believe that there was no link between his "escape" in Venezuela and his first employment in Central America. There, his partner was Félix Rodríguez, another old Cuban CIA hand (whose past included involvement with the CIA in the capture and execution of Che Guevara in Bolivia in 1967) in running the contra resupply effort from a safe house in El Salvador. When the Sandinistas shot down a C-123 supply plane on October 5, almost nine years to the day after the Cubana bombing, the names of two Cuban-Americans surfaced: Max Gómez and Ramón Medina. In a matter of weeks it was ascertained that these were aliases for Félix Rodríguez and Luís Posada Carriles. The incident exposed the illegal operation and became the first act in the Iran-contra scandal. Vice-president George H.W. Bush, head of the White House Task force on Terrorism and Narcotrafficking , was asked about Posada. The former head of the CIA in 1976 denied having ever heard of him. (11)

Orlando Bosch in the meantime remained in jail until 1987. Joe D. Whitley, then an associate United States attorney general with the Justice Department called Mr. Bosch "a terrorist, unfettered by laws or human decency, threatening and inflicting violence without regard to the identity of his victims," in the words of Joe D. Whitley, then an associate United States attorney. (12) Although he had been declared ineligible to enter the U.S. after being charged for his role in the bombing of a Polish freighter in Miami, Bosch nevertheless returned in 1988. Scheduled for deportation, George H.W. Bush, now president, overruled the Justice Department and pardoned Bosch in July 1990. Bosch now lives in Miami, honored by a boulevard carrying his name in Little Havana. Having streets named after admitted terrorists is another of the exquisite ironies for the country leading the global war on terrorism.

Posada managed to disappear from public view after his exposure in El Salvador, although he was often sighted in south Florida. Then in the late 1990s, a spate of bombings took place in Havana and in other places in Cuba for which Posada publicly took credit. In 1998 he appeared on a U.S. Spanish language TV channel, CBS Telenoticias, and reiterated that he was behind the bombings. When asked straight: "Have you anything to do with those bombings in Havana?" he said, "I am totally responsible for all of those acts and others that will come." The CIA, he continued, "taught us everything-- everything. They taught us to kill, bomb, trained us in acts of sabotage... [we] were called patriots." The CIA the called it "actos de sabotaje... Now they call it terrorism." Posada maintains that US law enforcement authorities consistently exhibited an attitude of "benign neglect" toward him during his career. Posada backed up these frank admissions of terrorism, including its financing by the rabidly anti-Castro and politically influential Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), in his self-published 1994 autobiography, Roads of the Warrior. (13) The CANF is still a powerful political force in Republican politics, mainly in South Florida where the Cuban-American community rallied behind Bush in the disputed 2000 election. But CANF has also been courted by the Democrats, including Clinton in the 1992 and 1996 elections.

Once again, Posada disappeared and only to reemerge in Panama in 2000. In November of that year when Fidel Castro was attending a Latin American Summit, Posada and several other cohorts were arrested for involvement in an abortive attempt to assassinate the Cuban leader. He was convicted of entering illegally in Panama and introducing weapons and explosives, including C4 plastique, and sentenced to 8 years in prison. Suddenly, in August 2004, Panamanian president Mireya Moscoso pardoned the jailed conspirators. One does not need to be an expert in international relations to know that a U.S. satellite like Panama would never have dared do this without the approval of Washington. In fact there is evidence that Colin Powell in an earlier visit to Panama had asked Panama's president to free the prisoners. (14)

Posada reentered the U.S. in early 2005 and in March gave a press conference in Miami. He requested political asylum on April 12, was arrested five days later and taken to jail in Texas. The history of Washington's relationship with anti-Castro Cubans from 1959 helps explain the superficially astonishing fact that an admitted terrorist and international fugitive from justice would openly announce his entry into a country which had declared a war against terrorism and whose president declared that "those who harbor a terrorist are as guilty as the terrorist himself. " Far from worrying about the consequences, he appears to have felt safer here than elsewhere.

Since U.S. authorities had never questioned Posada before, even in custody in Panama, he had every reason to believe that the Bush administration would not treat him any differently than in the past. Indeed, several weeks after announcing his arrival in the U.S., the State Department claimed they had no knowledge that Posada was in the U.S. As with Orlando Bosch, who has also never hidden his involvement with anti-Castro terrorism-- indeed he wears it like a badge of honor-- the FBI and CIA, with their detailed knowledge of his terrorist past, did absolutely nothing until he was detained May 17 in Miami by U.S. Homeland Security. Then the country which has regularly suspended the rights of citizens and combatants alike, and defended the use of torturing suspects--in the name of the war on terror-- did not see fit to handcuff the hemisphere's number one terrorist as they took him to be charged with violating U.S. immigration laws. (15)

The Current Case

At this writing Posada Carriles is still in detention in El Paso, Texas accused of illegal entry into the U.S. Venezuela filed an extradition request on May 27 in connection with the 1976 bombing, but on September 26 immigration judge William L. Abbott accepted contention by Posada' lawyers that he might be tortured in Venezuela, where he is a naturalized citizen. Abbott ruled this possibility contravened the Convention Against Torture (CAT) and effectively ruled out returning him to either Venezuela or Cuba. Abbott did not rule out deportation to a third country. The judge declared that "the worst terrorist or mass murderer can qualify for a postponement of extradition of he or she can establish the probability of torture in the future. It is worth mentioning that at the same time the U.S. government is dithering in dealing with a declared terrorist it has jailed five Cubans for spying in the U.S. Their crime: infiltration of illegal anti-Castro terrorist groups from the right-wing Cuban community in South Florida to try and head off future terrorism. This was necessary precisely because Washington refused to share intelligence with Havana. As with bringing Posada Carriles to trial, the overriding concern is that intelligence sharing would expose and implicate groups with ties leading back to the White House.

One pauses before the thundering irony of the country which has tried to legitimate torture and has engaged in "extraordinary rendition"-- the practice of sending suspects in the terror war to countries where they may be more easily tortured for information-- suddenly becoming squeamish about the physical well-being of an admitted terrorist. Moreover, as Venezuelan ambassador, Bernardo Alvarez, countered that there "isn't a shred of evidence" that Posada would be mistreated in Venezuela. " The U.S. State Department's own Human Rights report states that no one has been tortured in recent years in Venezuela. (16)

These transparently political and face-saving arguments politically-motivated arguments are unconvincing to most of the outside world. In the XV Iberoamerican Summit in October foreign ministers of Spain and Latin America called for the extradition of Posada Carriles to Cuba or Venezuela to be tried for terrorism. Country leaders, however added a phrase that implied that Posada could be brought to justice in the US. (17) In fairness, many U.S. officials, including some from the State Department, were appalled by the hypocrisy of protecting a terrorist in our midst as we charge about the world leading a global war on terror. Wayne

Smith, diplomat, academic and former head of the U.S. Interests Section (which substitute for an embassy) in Havana, summed it up: "This is a total farce." (18)

The Problematic

Like a ghost from cold wars past, Luis Posada Carriles has returned to haunt Washington's global war on terrorism. The Bush administration now has four choices regarding his case: granting him asylum; jailing him for illegal entry; granting Venezuela's request for extradition; or deporting him to a country other than Venezuela or Cuba. Granting asylum to Posada would deal a serious blow to U.S. credibility, already suffering from the way it has handled the case, in the war on terror. Imprisoning a well-known terrorist for the minor infraction of violating U.S. immigration laws would certainly compromise the Bush administration's vow that a nation which harbors terrorists is equally guilty of terrorism, and would be no better for the U.S. image abroad. Either alternative would offer a political bonanza for Fidel Castro, who has railed against Posada in recent speeches, calling him the worst terrorist in the Western Hemisphere.

On the other hand, the Bush administration confronts two serious negatives in extraditing him to Venezuela. First, such a move would provoke the wrath of the CANF and the conservative Cuban-American community of South Florida, deep sources of political support and campaign money for the President, the Republican Party-- especially in Florida, an important electoral state-- and Jeb Bush, the state's governor. Second, a trial on charges of terrorism either here or abroad would undoubtedly publicize the sorry history of U.S. involvement with hemispheric terrorism. The damage to U.S. credibility would affect its self-proclaimed leadership in the war on terror but in particular its emphasis on democratization to combat terrorism. Democracies lead best, and are most successful in encouraging others to follow by example. Its Cuban dilemma undermines one of Washington's principle foreign policy assumptions; i.e., that democracy is a timeless and easily exportable feature of U.S. society and that the projection of the U.S. model is essential in its democratization effort to reduce the attraction of terrorism in the Islamic world.

In addition, the administration sees Posada's extradition as delivering an unacceptable victory to President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, Mr. Castro's closest ally in Latin America. The most desirable outcome from the U.S. point of view would be deportation to a third country but so far, administration feelers to other governments have not borne fruit. As Marcelino Miyares, a veteran of the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion and president of the Miami-based Christian Democratic Party of Cuba, admitted, "But it's a no-win situation for the United States government." (19)

The Posada affair casts into bold relief some glaring contradictions and double standards surrounding the Bush administration's war on terrorism. First, the governments of George Bush and Tony Blair tend to discredit any interpretation of Islamist terrorism that takes into account political motivation, even interpreting "political" broadly. Accordingly, we hear that terrorists are inspired only by an irrational hate and a primitive ideology of vengeance. Terrorism is pathological and looking for deeper causes would only legitimate them. We still hear the summary assertion that they are just "evil people." After the horrific London bombings, Tony Blair discounted any serious motivation, characterizing those responsible as simply "people

with evil in their hearts." (20) In July 2005, US Secretary of State (Foreign Minister) Condoleezza Rice echoed administration language from September 2001. Speaking of Muslim terrorists in Europe, the former international relations scholar declared that "this is not about grievances but an effort to destroy; they want to create chaos and undermine our way of life.... these are simply evil people who want to kill." (21) To argue as Blair and Rice have is to suggest that terrorist violence is a perverted end in itself.

Thus, the Washington-London take on terrorism, departing from view expressed more often in Europe, rejects any responsibility for understanding the sense of embattlement and frustration Muslims feel because of western foreign policies, the war in Iraq, the Israel-Palestine question, social alienation within European immigrant communities, and the general sense that Islam is besieged by the West. Despite the evidence that U.S. politics-- in particular its foreign policy-- plays a crucial role in motivating this terrorism, Washington steadfastly relegates any call for understanding the political (or socio-economic or religious for that matter) motivation of "bad" terrorists to a rhetorical limbo, characterizing such analyses as nothing more than a contemptible coddling of criminals, if not nearly treasonous rhetoric.

But Posada Carriles could not possibly be understood without a political analysis of his motives or those of the U.S. Posada is a decisive rejection of the Rice-Blair definition of terrorism and the notion often heard that terrorists must be considered common criminals. To remove the political motivation from Posada or the political and geopolitical contexts of the U.S. role in the cold war is to reduce the case to that of a mere psychopath deserving of incarceration in an asylum for the criminally insane. Instead, the episode reveals the work of a pitiless political terrorist who committed savage acts to promote an agenda backed by the U.S. and who must be brought to justice. Political policies in Washington allowed the U.S. to justify terrorism in the twentieth century, to create in effect a category of "good" terrorists. And now in the twenty first century, as political judgments frame the Bush administration's response to encountering a terrorist in its midst, it seems dishonest cavalierly to dismiss political motivations behind Islamist terrorism.

Second, this violent history revolves around a half-century old U.S. assumption: that what today is called terrorism was justified in the case of Cuba because the goal was regime change. But in fact regime change is exactly the argument Al Qaeda uses to explain its bloody strategy. Osama Bin Laden and his followers aim to replace what they perceive as corrupt, apostate regimes in the Middle East with societies ruled by their version of radical Islamic fundamentalism. An important secondary aim is to discredit and undermine the credibility of their allies like the U.S. and some western European countries by demonstrating their constant vulnerability to terrorist attacks. This is the case even when obscured by apocalyptic calls for a defensive jihad to avenge a besieged and humiliated Islam. (22)

Third, the Bush administration tends to argue that all terrorisms are fundamentally identical, joined by the bloody methods they choose, and must be combated globally. It serves the U.S.' hegemonic agenda to promote the idea that terrorism is a world-wide phenomenon requiring a proportional international response led by the U.S. military. The U.S. terrorist list consists of over fifty terrorist groups including the FARC from Colombia, ETA in Spain and the IRA along side of Al Qaeda. But the Posada case illustrates that the U.S. has not and does not believe that all terrorisms are equal-- in fact, some terrorism may at times be quite acceptable.

On the surface the strange case of Luís Posada Carriles appears as a congeries of ironies and hypocrisies. But beneath these surface contradictions lies a rather remarkable consistency. When we place the Posada affair in the context of the Bush administration's pattern of subordinating the war on terror to its political and geopolitical aims, the hypocrisy remains but the contradictions begin to fade. (23)

The case is simply the latest evidence of the administration, presenting itself as the necessary gendarme to protect US national security, while deferring to political or hegemonic imperatives (the war in Iraq being the best example of the latter) when prioritizing objectives in the war on terrorism. This political cynicism, needlessly costing dozens of lives daily, is morally shameful and has brought about a dangerous perversion of responsible national security policy.

Moreover, the current U.S. practice and legitimation of torture may be seen not as aberrant, but rather the reincarnation of its past and present tolerance of terrorism as an unsavory but necessary means to a worthy end. Finally, however inconsistent with the rhetoric and actions of Washington in the war on terrorism, the posture on Posada is very consistent with the U.S.' historical protection of anti-Cuban terrorists.

Joe Whitley, now general counsel for the Department of Homeland Security, refuses to comment on the Posada case. But perhaps he best summed it up fifteen years at the time of the scandalous pardon of Orlando Bosch: "The United States cannot tolerate the inherent inhumanity of terrorism as a way of settling disputes. Appeasement of those who would use force will only breed more terrorists. We must look on terrorism as a universal evil, even if it is directed toward those with whom we have no political sympathy."

Conclusion

Any resolution of the Posada problem for Washington comes at a time when the U.S. is leading a military campaign in the name of the global war on terrorism. At the same time it presents itself to the Islamic world as a model democratic antidote to terrorism. Bringing Posada Carriles to justice in the U.S. or abroad on terrorism will expose the U.S.' dark alliance with terrorism-- in the past and, by its handling of the Posada case, into today. But absolving Posada in some fashion makes a mockery of the administration's own antiterrorist principles announced after 9-11 and presents the same challenge to U.S. credibility. There is no good solution for its dilemma. In a sense the U.S. now is hung by its own petard: any course of action would expose U.S. hypocrisy and double standards in the war on terrorism and risk tarnishing its international prestige to one degree or other-- as well as its ability to lead by example in the embryonic democracy movement in the Moslem world. This in turn may undermine its efforts to lead that war and thus protect the security of the nation against terrorism. The situation resolves itself finally in a troublesome paradox: the root cause of the problem is the U.S.' own past embrace of terrorist violence in that name of long-standing national security goals which may now be undermined in turn by that past.

The scenario is being played out with the Bush administration at its lowest ebb in five years, beset with questions of political and administrative incompetence, a foolhardy and increasingly unpopular military adventure in Iraq, financial corruption scandals involving high-ranking Congressional Republicans and a major criminal scandal involving the highest echelons of the White House. It has lost much domestic credibility with respect to its two strongest political cards: an image of toughness, competence and resolution on terrorism and national security; and its self-proclaimed moral clarity and rectitude-- especially in contrast to the previous administration.

A weakened presidency will most likely accept the international opprobrium it must weather for continuing to apply a double standard in the matter of Posada Carriles. The prized trade-off is the preservation of its political alliance with the Cuban community in the U.S. The administration can reason that each alternative involves some loss of international credibility anyway. Moreover, the Bush team has never had any problem before in couching the issue of terrorism and counterterrorism in political terms. There is also the argument that a society willing to accept the double standard applied to Iraq in the arguments for war, as the U.S. did, will not balk at its use in an esoteric hold-over from the cold war. The likelihood therefore is that Posada will not be brought to trial anywhere.

The CIA employs a term for situations that contain the potential to boomerang and create a future disasters: "blowback." Fighting the USSR in Afghanistan in triumphalist disregard of the boost it was giving to radical Islamic fundamentalism, gave rise to the Taliban, that regime's protection of Al Qaeda, the attacks of September 11, and the current war on terrorism. The Posada affair is simply the latest example of the phenomenon of "blowback" and another of the terrible cold war ironies which we still are witnessing.

ENDNOTES

1. Speech to Congress by George Bush, September 20, 2001. See the New York Times, September 21, 2001.
2. The Cuban exile community in Caracas numbered 50,000 at the time and Venezuela's security police hired many Cuban exiles during the period of Venezuela's leftist guerrilla insurgency in the 1960's. Forgotten today, it was the first serious long-term armed threat to a Latin government. Six thousand people eventually died between 1960-1969 when an amnesty was declared. The deputy director of the DISIP was a Cuban exile, Orlando García and he became President Carlos Andrés Pérez' personal security adviser. See Robert Matthews, "Oil on Troubled Waters: Venezuelan Policy in the Caribbean," NACLA Report on the Americas, July-August, 1984, p. 29; Taylor Branch and Eugene Propper, Labyrinth. New York: Penguin Books, 1982, 99-100.
3. Branch and Propper, pp. 20, 101, 329.
4. Matthews, p. 29; Branch and Propper, pp. 99-100.
5. Alicia Herrera, Pusimos la bomba...y que? Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1981, pp. 115-116 and p. 204-207. Branch and Propper, p. 604; see also the autobiography of another Cuban CIA operative, Félix Rodríguez, who wrote with John Weisman, Shadow Warrior, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989, pp. 230-241.
6. Peter Kornbluh, "The Posada File," The Nation, June 6, 2005.
7. Kornbluh, "The Posada File," and Peter Kornbluh, "CIA and FBI Documents Detail Career in International Terrorism; Connection to U.S." in Luis Posada Carriles: The Declassified Record of The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C., NSA Electronic Briefing Book No. 153; see also ABC Nightline's program on Luis Posada Carriles. May 17, 2005.
8. For a reproduction of the CIA Manual see Reed Brody, Contra Terror In Nicaragua. Cambridge: South End Press, 1985.
9. Interview with Noam Chomsky, by Bernie Dwyer, Radio Havana, August 28, 2003. From: moderator@portside.org, April 17, 2005.
10. Laurie Goodstein, "Robertson Suggests U.S. Kill Venezuela's Leader," The New York Times, August 24, 2005, A-10; Yolanda Monge, "'Diplomacia' de Predicador," El País, August 25, 2005.
11. Interestingly, during October and November of 1986 the author consulted the main Caracas newspapers, El Nacional, El Universal and El Diario de Caracas on a daily basis, but they carried not a word about Posada Carriles.
12. Tim Weiner, "Case of Cuban Exile Could Test the U.S. Definition of Terrorist" The New York Times, May 9, 2005, , p. A-1.

13. Interview with Ricardo Alarcon, president of the Cuban National Assembly by Amy Goodman, "Top Cuban Official Ricardo Alarcon Demands U.S. Hand Over Terrorist Posada," Democracy Now program, Pacifica Radio, May 9th, 2005. Ann Louise Bardach and Larry Rohter, "Life in the Shadows, Trying to Bring Down Castro," The New York Times, July 13, 1998 .
14. Alberto Salazar "Cuba repudia indulta a terroristas presos en Panama" Prensa Latina, August 24, 2004.
15. Ann Louise Bardach and Larry Rohter, "Key Cuban Foe Claims Exiles' Backing,"The New York Times, July 12, 1998; Saul Landau, "Posada Arrest Points to Bush's Anti-terror Hoax," Progreso Weekly, 9 June 2005.
16. "Venezuela is prepared to offer him a house made of gold and feed him caviar every day if he is extradited to stand trial," Ambassador Alvarez said in a statement, calling Posada "the Osama bin Laden of Latin America." Venezuelan vice president Jose Vicente Rangel said he thought that "when [the Americans] refer to the existence of torture in Cuba they must be referring to their base in Guantanamo." Bill Weinberg, World War 4 Report. Deconstructing War on Terrorism, October 13, 2005, <http://www.ww4report.com/node/1171> and the Associated Press, Sept. 28; South Florida Sun-Sentinel, Sept. 28; Venanalysis.com, Sept. 28; The Chicago Tribune, Sept 29) ; Jim Lobe, "Posada Carriles aniquila credibilidad de EEUU," Interpres Service News Agency, September 29, 2005.
17. The U.S. was not pleased with the resolution. "Iberoamérica condena el bloqueo de Cuba pese a EEUU", El País, 16 de octubre de 2005. p. 1
18. Jim Lobe, "Posada Carriles aniquila....."
19. Tim Weiner, "Case of Cuban Exile ..."
20. Alan Cowell, "Blair Says 'Evil Ideology' Must Be Faced Directly," The New York Times, July 17, 2005,p. A8. Robert Fisk, "Sometimes I Wonder If There Will Be A Moment When Reality And Myth, Truth And Lies, Will Collide," The Independent August 20, 2005.
21. The Jim Lehrer Newshour, Public Broadcasting System, July 28, 2005.
22. Robert Matthews, The U.S. War on Terror Four Years After September 11: An Accounting," Informe of the Centro de Investigacion para la Paz, September 2005 (Spanish version: "Estados Unidos y su guerra contra el terrorismo cuatro años despues: Un repaso"). pp. 6-7
23. For a discussison of the various ways the Bush administration has politically exploited the issue of terrorism and often subordinated its antiterrorism program to political and geopolitical aims see Matthews, The U.S. War on Terror...., "The Geopolitics of Counterterrorism", and "The Politics of Counterterrorism," pp, 18-24.