

U.S. Arrests Cuban Exile Accused In Deadly '76 Airline Bombing

The New York Times

May 18, 2005 Wednesday, Late Edition - Final

Copyright 2005 The New York Times Company

Section: Section A; Column 3; National Desk; Pg. 1

Length: 1144 words

Byline: By ABBY GOODNOUGH; Tim Weiner contributed reporting from New York for this article, and Terry Aguayo from Miami.

Dateline: MIAMI, May 17

Body

Immigration officials **arrested** Luis Posada Carriles, a **Cuban exile** suspected in a **deadly** airplane **bombing** and other attacks, on Tuesday, weeks after he slipped into the **United States** and shortly after he withdrew an application for political asylum.

The Bush administration, which had been mostly silent about Mr. Posada's presence and until Tuesday denied knowing if he was even in the country, faced growing pressure from Cuba and its ally Venezuela to extradite him. Critics had questioned why the **United States** would not root out a suspected terrorist, even one hailed by **Cuban exiles** as a freedom fighter against Fidel Castro.

As the Department of Homeland Security detained the 77-year-old Mr. Posada, hundreds of thousands of Cubans in Havana participated in a protest march against him, which Mr. Castro described as "against terrorism and in favor of our people's life and peace." Mr. Castro had furiously **accused** Mr. Bush of sheltering Mr. Posada, a former Central Intelligence Agency operative, in recent weeks.

Government officials would not discuss why, where or how they **arrested** Mr. Posada, 77, though on Tuesday night, Russ Knocke, a spokesman for **United States** Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said: "Today is the first time there was verifiable information about his presence in the country. We had received leads prior to today, which we pursued, but they ultimately did not go very far."

One of Mr. Posada's associates said he was detained at a private home in Southwest Miami-Dade County. His lawyer, Eduardo Soto, said he was taken to Homestead Air Force Base and flown by military helicopter to an undisclosed location.

Immigration officials had scheduled an interview with Mr. Posada in Miami early Tuesday regarding his asylum request. But he did not show up, Mr. Soto said. Hours later, Mr. Posada held a furtive news conference to deny involvement in the **Cuban** airliner **bombing**, which killed 73 people off the coast of Barbados in 1976, and to say he may withdraw his asylum application to avoid causing trouble for the **United States**.

"I have lived clandestinely for more than 30 years," Mr. Posada said at the news conference, which he held near Hialeah under strict terms and was later broadcast on local television news programs. "If my request for political asylum should become a problem for the **United States** government, I am willing to reconsider my request." A few hours later, through his lawyer, he withdrew his application. He was **arrested** about an hour later.

The New York Times declined to attend the news conference because of the terms, which included being driven by Mr. Posada's associates to an undisclosed place and agreeing to ask questions only on certain topics.

U.S. Arrests Cuban Exile Accused In Deadly '76 Airline Bombing

Barbara Gonzalez, a spokeswoman for United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said the agency had 48 hours to determine "what we are charging him with and what his custody status will be."

In a written statement, the Department of Homeland Security said that it "does not generally remove people to Cuba" or "to countries believed to be acting on Cuba's behalf." Mr. Castro has a close relationship with Hugo Chavez, the Venezuelan president, whose country officially asked the United States last week to extradite Mr. Posada so it could retry him for the airliner bombing.

Newly declassified F.B.I. documents from 1976 places Mr. Posada, who had been a senior Venezuelan intelligence officer, at two meetings where the bombing was planned. Some experts following the case said the document complicated Mr. Posada's request for asylum, though his lawyer did not mention it on Tuesday.

At a news conference in Coral Gables, Mr. Soto said he had asked the Department of Homeland Security not to question his client without a lawyer present and to look after Mr. Posada's health. Mr. Posada was shot in the face in an attempt on his life in Guatemala in 1990, and his speech is permanently slurred as a result.

Mr. Soto questioned why the United States did not let Mr. Posada leave quietly after he withdrew his asylum application. "It's clear that by formally withdrawing his application for asylum," Mr. Soto said, "that his intent was to abandon the United States, and they simply could have let him go."

Mr. Soto added, however, that he would renew Mr. Posada's asylum application because of the arrest. Mr. Posada was seeking asylum for having served as a cold war soldier on the payroll of the C.I.A. in the 1960's, Mr. Soto told reporters last month.

In an interview with The Miami Herald last week that was not published until Tuesday, Mr. Posada said he was hiding less these days because it seemed that the United States was not looking for him. He told The Herald that he took a bus from Houston to Miami after crossing into Texas with a smuggler, and that while here, he had read Confucius and painted Cuban landscapes.

Pepe Hernandez, president of the Cuban American National Foundation, an exile group in Miami, said that the United States had the right to question Mr. Posada if he entered the country illegally but that the timing of the arrest was bad.

"To wait for Fidel Castro to put together a rally and to go and detain him almost at the same hour is something I don't understand," Mr. Hernandez said.

Mr. Posada was released from prison in Panama last year after that country pardoned him for a conviction in a bomb plot against Mr. Castro in 2000. Venezuela wants to retry him for the airline bombing, and the Cuban government wants to prosecute him for hotel bombings that damaged tourist spots in Havana and killed an Italian visitor in 1997.

Mr. Posada said in the news conference Tuesday that he had nothing to do with the 1976 airplane bombing, adding, "I repudiate that abominable action as a case of terrorism." But in his earlier interview with The Miami Herald, he would not confirm or deny involvement in the 1997 attacks, saying, "Let's leave it to history."

In a 1998 interview with The New York Times, Mr. Posada said he organized the hotel bombings in Cuba the previous year.

The government's plans for Mr. Posada -- extraditing him, keeping him jailed for illegal entry or granting him asylum -- remained uncertain, as did his whereabouts. Nor was it clear just how much of a political risk his detention was for President Bush, who with his brother Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida counts on South Florida's Cuban exiles for financial and political support.

But Steven Schwadron, the chief of staff for Representative Bill Delahunt, a Massachusetts Democrat who has lobbied the Bush administration to expel Mr. Posada, said there was no excuse to keep him here. "You can't pick

U.S. Arrests Cuban Exile Accused In Deadly '76 Airline Bombing

and choose the ideology of a particular terrorist without undermining the fundamental integrity of the global war on terror," Mr. Schwadron said. "Mr. Posada does not belong in the **United States**."

<http://www.nytimes.com>

Graphic

Photo: Luis Posada Carriles, left, held a furtive news conference yesterday in Florida, hours before he was taken into custody. Mr. Posada, a **Cuban exile**, denied being involved in a 1976 **airline bombing** that killed 73 people. (Photo by Tim Chapman/The Miami Herald, via Associated Press)(pg. A18)

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: IMMIGRATION (91%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (90%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (90%); **ARRESTS** (90%); TERRORISM (90%); ANTI-CASTRO CUBANS (90%); POLITICAL ASYLUM (89%); BOMBINGS (89%); PRESS CONFERENCES (85%); EXTRADITION (78%); AIR FORCES (78%); SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE FORCES (78%); PROTESTS & DEMONSTRATIONS (73%); NATIONAL SECURITY (73%); INTELLIGENCE SERVICES (69%); LAWYERS (66%); ARMED FORCES (63%)

Organization: US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (57%); US IMMIGRATION & CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT (55%); CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (55%)

Industry: AIR FORCES (78%); HELICOPTERS (73%); LAWYERS (66%); ARMED FORCES (63%); **AIRLINES** (63%); MILITARY HELICOPTERS (63%); TELEVISION NEWS SHOWS (61%); TELEVISION PROGRAMMING (60%); TELEVISION INDUSTRY (60%)

Person: FIDEL CASTRO (78%); Abby Goodnough; Luis Posada Carriles; Fidel (Pres) Castro; George W (Pres) Bush

Geographic: MIAMI, FL, USA (92%); HAVANA, CUBA (79%); FLORIDA, USA (79%); **UNITED STATES** (96%); CUBA (92%); BARBADOS (79%); Cuba; Cuba; Havana (Cuba)

Load-Date: May 18, 2005