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The U.S. Terrorized Cuba, Not the Other Way Around

By Robert Scheer

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When is it all right to blow up restaurants and kill tourists? Anytime, according to Luis Posada Carriles, who masterminded last year's attacks on Cuba's booming tourist industry, terrorizing disco dancers and diners alike.

In a startling revelation this week, the 70-year-old Posada revealed that key Cuban American lobbyists in this country financed his activities, in apparent violation of U.S. law, while the FBI and CIA looked the other way.

Once again, history won't keep its mouth shut. Little by little, the truth comes out, and our policy in Cuba gets exposed for the sham it is. For almost 40 years, we have isolated Cuba on the assumption that the tiny island is a center of terrorism in the hemisphere, and year after year we gain new evidence that it is the U.S. that has terrorized Cuba and not the other way around.

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It's obvious from the Posada interview that terrorism is morally acceptable not only to Posada, who confessed to many of the bloody details of his 35 years of sabotage of civilian targets inside Cuba in a New York Times interview, but also to high U.S. government officials who trained this international killer and employed him in many nefarious operations.

The FBI and CIA also suppressed evidence of Posada's connection to the late Jorge Mas Canosa, the powerful Miami-based anti-Castro lobbyist whose campaign contributions and political clout with U.S. presidents has shaped U.S.-Cuba policy for decades.

Mas Canosa died last year, but his organization, the tax-exempt Cuban American National Foundation, begun in 1981 at the suggestion of the Reagan administration, continues to be one of the nation's most powerful lobbying organizations. His replacement as chairman of the foundation is also named by Posada in the Times interview as having financially supported his activities.

Posada first met Mas Canosa when the two men spent seven months being trained by the CIA in guerrilla warfare and explosives back in the 1960s. While Mas Canosa later concentrated on business activities and political organizing in Miami, Posada became a full-time terrorist. He has admitted to many acts of sabotage in Cuba and was arrested by the Venezuelan government in connection with the 1976 bombing of a Cubana Airlines civilian flight in which 73 people, including teenage members of the Cuban fencing team, were killed.

He protested that he did not order the attack and blamed it on a Cuban colleague but was held for nine years until a spectacular escape in 1985 in which prison officials admitted being bribed. Posada told the Times that Mas Canosa and other leaders of the Cuban American National Foundation paid to get him out of Venezuela.

In any case, soon after the jailbreak, Posada was hired to work on the illegal Nicaraguan Contra supply operation run out of the White House by Oliver North. The plot, in violation of a congressional ban on such activities, was exposed when one of the planes carrying arms was shot down over Nicaragua and the pilot ended up identifying Posada as a key link with the Reagan White House.

It was revealed previously that Posada has long been a dangerous terrorist backed by both official and unofficial sources in the U.S. Last month, the Miami Herald ran a detailed expose of Posada's operations and connections with the anti-Castro element in this country. The Herald revealed that a Cuban American businessman, Antonio Jorge Alvarez, who knew Posada in Guatemala, contacted the FBI office in Miami last year concerning Posada's role in the hotel and restaurant bombings, but the FBI does not seem to have followed up.

Posada alleged in the interview that the FBI agent contacted by Alvarez was "a very good friend." He added that the FBI never investigated his operation and added, "As you can see, the FBI and the CIA don't bother me, and I am neutral with them. Whenever I can help them I do."

When Posada was asked why he is talking so freely for the first time, the terrorist reflected on his advanced age and his desire, after the death of Mas Canosa, to revitalize what he views as a flagging movement. Whatever his motives, his story, a key piece in this most unsavory chapter of U.S. history, is too well documented by supporting evidence—released under the Freedom of Information Act from the files of the FBI and the CIA—to be ignored.

Ironically, the point of Posada's attacks on tourist targets was to prevent Western businesses from opening Cuba to foreign investment. Despite the visit of the pope last year and increasing presence of joint venture capitalism, we continue to treat Cuba as a pariah state because embittered exiles in Miami have a death hold on U.S. foreign policy toward the island.