

Mr. Bob Woodward
Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

9/26/88

Dear Bob,

The enclosed UPI story from the Indianapolis Star says that George Bush's friend Felix Rodriguez harbored a convicted terrorist and that Bush declined to deny it when asked. Not exactly what Bush has been saying about terrorism.

When I phoned Friday and you were busy I also wanted to let you know that, in a sense, Wright's comments on the CIA's provocation of the Nandaime disturbances was unfair. Your name then appeared on a Nicaragua story. The immediate provocation was in part by Ambassador Melton. Because of the strange circumstances it appeared only in our local papers whose managing editor was then in Managua. It appears that those at the embassy were not aware that he was not one of the non-Congressional Congressional delegation. It was sent not by the Congress but by the White House and from the embassy people he quoted they were about weekly - and so far as I know, unreported. The embassy press officer said they all see the same people, opposition businessmen, the cardinal and La Prezada.

This managing editor, Mike Powell, wrote a long story after the expulsions in part because he is in the picture the Nicaraguan's used on Nightline. Sorry, not quite this way. He wrote the long story first and then, after Nightline, a long oped piece in which, among other things, he said his only purpose in making the trip was to write a story about Beverley Byron. He edits the only dailies in the county in which she lives. He also said he knew nothing^{about} and had no experience in foreign affairs.

This is the weekend delegation (left Friday, returned Sunday) that was present for and participated in the Nandaime demonstration. There were four pro-Contra Members, with some of their staffs, and two from State. The latter made it clear that it was a White House rather than a Congressional function. This delegation and I presume all the many others went by military plane. The other expenses of this delegation were met by the National Forum Foundation.

The day they got to Managua Melton told them, "we're here to overthrow their government." If you are aware of the significance of an official statement, which is of enormous significance under international law and an official admission that is the exact opposite of the administration's statements of purpose, don't get excited because the Post won't carry it. I'm writing only to inform you. As soon as I saw this astounding story I phoned your foreign desk, spoke to someone there and then was referred to Goshko, who didn't even want a copy of it when I offered it to him. After this story of the next day reported Melton's lies to the Congress I sent a copy to Sen. Bradley, who didn't like whatever I said in a letter. I've forgotten what I said. (I know the significance of an official statement of policy not only from my days in intelligence and in State during and after World War II but from countless CIA statements and some of the FBI in my FOIA litigation.)

The part of the story of that delegation that makes it unfair to dump it all on the CIA is how and why some of this delegation was at and were photographed seeming to participate in that demonstration. When their attendance was proposed everyone in any kind of official position said, in one way or another, that was impossible. Cong. Byron, who'd been there many times, was quite explicit in predicting everything that happened beginning with their presence, and before they left she was and expressed apprehension over the visible change in Nicaraguan official attitude toward them. Melton overrode her, the State people with the delegation and his own staff and said their going was just "fine."

Not only did he tell them they could go, he provided three marked and ^{readily} readily identified embassy vehicles to take them and to be seen at the demonstration, as they were. The two women "embers did not go to Nandaimo.

Powell claims that the gesturing the Nicaraguans interpret as participation in the demonstration was merely their signalling to each other.

Powell does not report that the government started the violence, which was alleged here before his story appeared four days later.

With about 50 such delegations in 1987 alone a ^{lot} hell of a ^{lot} lot of money is involved and apparently a hell of a lot of use of military aviation, with those costs coming from military appropriations. I'm surprised not to have seen any of this reported anywhere before Powell's piece. Once upon a time that alone would have been considered news.

Powell's first piece began on the front pages of both papers and continued on two inside pages. It makes for bulky copying but if you should want a copy I'll make and send it.

On another matter that may or may not interest the Post, there is an awful lot of stuff being prepared for the 25th anniversary of the JFK assassination. I've heard of some and some of those preparing specials for TV have been in touch with me. Some of it is awful crap, disinformation and exploitation. As George Lardner can tell you, I've never been a conspiracy theorist and disagree with all who are.

Two I've helped (in the belief that FOIA makes me surrogate for the people and I thus make all I got under it available to anyone) are big on the nonsense that the mafia did it. At least one additional book will allege this. One, and this is not personal knowledge, is going for the fabrications of David Lifton's book titled "Best Evidence." He alleges a massive government conspiracy to kill JFK.

So, if Shales or anyone else is interested, I'm usually home all day after early morning physical therapy.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

Iran-Contra figure hid man wanted in plane bombing

By BRIAN BARGER
UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

Washington — A key figure in the Iran-Contra scandal with close ties to Vice President George Bush has acknowledged harboring a fugitive charged in the 1976 bombing of a Cuban passenger plane in which 73 people died.

Felix Rodriguez, whose contacts with George Bush initially drew the vice president into the Iran-Contra affair, said in a series of recent interviews that he harbored the bombing suspect, Luis Posada Carriles, shortly after his August 1985 escape from a Venezuelan prison.

Offering the first details of his involvement with Posada, Rodriguez said he agreed to hide the fugitive at the request of a wealthy Miami benefactor who he said financed Posada's prison escape. He would not identify the financier.

Senate investigators are pursuing allegations that Posada's prison escape was financed in part by Jorge Mas, with possible help from then-White House aide Oliver North. Mas, who heads the Cuban-American National Foundation, an anti-Castro lobby group, denied any role in the escape.

Rodriguez, a former CIA operative, offered refuge to Posada while managing a secret White House operation based in El Salvador to ferry weapons to the Nicaraguan rebels. The weapons airlift was directed by North during a U.S. ban on rebel military aid.

Despite Bush's friendship with Rodriguez, White House officials acknowledged that Bush took no action after numerous media reports in late 1986 identified Posada as a logistics aide

for Rodriguez in the weapons airlift.

Bush was CIA director in 1976 when the bombing occurred, and took a personal interest in this and a string of related anti-Castro bombings that shook the hemisphere that year, according to law enforcement officials.

Donald Gregg, Bush's national security adviser, said, "I don't think the vice president knew that Posada was working with Felix (Rodriguez), so why would he call for an investigation?"

When Posada's role came to light in late 1986, Gregg said Bush "didn't pay much attention" to the press reports and made no inquiries after reporters questioned him about the fugitive's links to Rodriguez.

"If he (Bush) had asked about it, he would have asked me," said Gregg, who was Rodriguez's CIA supervisor during the Vietnam War. "I don't know about when the allegations on Posada came out, and I did not focus on it."

Bush declined to answer a series of written questions about the affair submitted to his press office last week.

Rodriguez's disclosures could raise a potentially embarrassing issue for Bush during his presidential campaign. As head of the president's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism, Bush has trumpeted a tough stand on pursuing and punishing international terrorists.

Rodriguez, a strong supporter of the vice president, said he was never asked about the fugitive by Bush or his aides. "If they had asked, I would have told them," Rodriguez said, "but nobody asked."

With assistance from Gregg,
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Rodriguez was placed in El Salvador as a counterinsurgency adviser to the Salvador military in 1984. Less than a year later, North recruited him to manage the secret Contra airlift that was financed in part with profits diverted from secret arms sales to Iran.

But Rodriguez said he never told Bush or his aides about hiring the terrorist suspect in the sensitive covert operation, and did not advise Bush aides of his work for North until shortly before the Iran-Contra scandal broke.

Posada's link to the operation first came to light after a cargo plane carrying American Eugene Hasenfus was downed Oct. 5, 1986, in Nicaragua. Hasenfus

identified a photograph of Posada as Rodriguez's aide, who used the pseudonym Ramon Medina.

As the scandal unfolded, attention turned to Bush's office, where an aide fielded the first call from Rodriguez to advise that one of North's planes was shot down.

Bush aides acknowledge that Rodriguez was in regular contact with the vice president's office, and met with Bush on three occasions while managing North's airlift operation. But Bush and his aides maintain they were kept in the dark about North's Contra resupply efforts during the 1984-1986 congressional ban on U.S. aid.

Posada, a former CIA demolitions expert, was imprisoned for nine years during a lengthy and complicated trial process stemming from charges of planning the Oct. 6, 1976, bombing of a Cuban passenger plane in which 73 people, including the Cuban

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national fencing team, were killed.

On August 18, 1985, Posada escaped from Venezuela's San Juan de Los Morros prison, and fled to El Salvador. Rodriguez denied any direct involvement in Posada's prison escape, but said he helped arrange Posada's arrival at El Salvador's Ilopango air force base, where he gave him a job.

"I got a call from an old friend in Miami who has helped me financially, who wanted me to hide him," Rodriguez said. "I felt I had no choice. The man who called was a very old and dear friend, and he has helped pay my expenses since I have been in Central America. I felt I could not turn him down."

Rodriguez refused to identify the caller, but when pressed he acknowledged it was the same person who financed Posada's prison escape.

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Bush ally harbored plane-bomb suspect

WASHINGTON — (UPI) — A key figure in the Iran-contra scandal with close ties to Vice President George Bush has acknowledged harboring a fugitive charged in the 1976 bombing of a Cuban passenger plane in which 73 people died.

Felix Rodriguez, whose contacts with Bush initially drew the vice president into the Iran-contra affair, said in a series of recent interviews that he harbored the accused bomber, Luis Posada Carriles, shortly after his August 1985 escape from a Venezuelan prison.

Offering the first details of his involvement with Posada, Rodriguez said he agreed to "hide" the fugitive at the request of a wealthy Miami

benefactor who he said financed Posada's prison escape. He would not identify the financier.

Senate investigators are pursuing allegations that Posada's prison escape was financed in part by Jorge Mas Canosa, with possible help from White House aide Oliver North. Mas, who heads the Cuban American National Foundation, an anti-Castro lobby group, denied any role in the escape.

Rodriguez, a former CIA operative, offered refuge to Posada while managing a secret White House operation based in El Salvador to ferry weapons to the Nicaraguan rebels.

Turn to IRAN-CONTRA / 15A

Bush ally harbored terrorist

IRAN-CONTRA / from 1A

The weapons airlift was directed by North during a U.S. ban on military aid to the contras.

Despite Bush's friendship with Rodriguez, White House officials acknowledged that Bush took no action after numerous media reports in late 1986 identified Posada as a logistics aide for Rodriguez in the weapons airlift.

Bush was CIA director in 1976 when the bombing occurred. He took a personal interest in it and a string of related anti-Castro bombings that year, according to law-enforcement officials.

Donald Gregg, Bush's national security adviser, said, "I don't think the vice president knew that Posada was working with Felix [Rodriguez],

so why would he call for an investigation?"

Bush declined to answer a series of written questions about the affair submitted to his press office last week.



calling itself Coordination of United Revolutionary Organizations.

CORU has been implicated in a string of bombings and assassinations in the United States and Latin America, including the Sept. 21, 1976, car bombing that killed Chilean exile leader Orlando Letelier in Washington.

On Aug. 18, 1985, Posada escaped from Venezuela's San Juan de

Los Morros prison and fled to El Salvador. Rodriguez denied any direct involvement in Posada's prison escape, but said he helped arrange Posada's arrival at El Salvador's Ilopango air force base, where he gave him a job.

"I got a call from an old friend in Miami who has helped me financially, who wanted me to hide him," Rodriguez said. "I felt I had no choice. The man who called was a very old and dear friend, and he has helped pay my expenses since I have been in Central America. I felt I could not turn him down."

Rodriguez refused to identify the caller, but when pressed, acknowledged it was the same person who financed Posada's prison escape.

Rodriguez also refused to answer questions about his benefactor posed by Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., last month during a Senate Foreign Relations terrorism subcommittee hearing.



Rodriguez - Vice -
presidential
spokesman Steven Hart said Bush
responded to the questions by saying
he "didn't recall the name and
was totally unfamiliar with any such
relationship" between Rodriguez
and Posada.

Rodriguez, a strong supporter of
the vice president, said he was never
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Federal officials in Miami said the
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in interviews with United Press
International, three Cuban exile
leaders in Miami and two former
members of Posada's group alleged
that Mas helped finance Posada's
escape. A federal law-enforcement
official said he received reports al-
leging Mas' involvement, but de-
clined to elaborate further.

In testimony before Kerry's sub-
committee, Rodriguez refused to
explain several of North's notebook
entries that reflected conversations
about transferring \$50,000 to Ro-
driguez through Mas.

One entry, dated Jan. 28, 1985 —
nine months before Rodriguez said
he began working with North —
said: "Felix Rodriguez — expedite
50K for I.R.," with the name "Jorge
Mas" below. Another note said:
"Mtg. w/ Felix Rodriguez — Call
Jorge Mas." Then on Feb. 4, North
wrote, "Felix Rodriguez, still have
not gotten dollars from Jorge Mas."

Mas, at his Miami office, denied
any role in Posada's prison escape,
but said he has helped fund Rodri-
guez's activities in Central America.

Asked about accounts from Cuban
exile leaders and a law-enforcement
official that he provided bribe mon-
ey for Posada's escape, Mas said, "I
have nothing to do with Luis Posada.
He is a friend, but I have not had
anything to do with him in many
years."

Mas said he fought alongside Po-
sada and Rodriguez during the 1961
Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba.

Miami Herald 4/5/88

Todd Hotchkiss
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September 15, 1988

Opinion Page Editor
Indianapolis Star
P.O. Box 145
Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-0145

Dear Sir or Madam:

On Monday, September 5 the Star carried a front page article reporting that an aide to Vice President Bush has admitted to harboring a prison escapee implicated in planning the bombing of a jetliner in October 1976 in which 73 people died. The article, from United Press International and carried in only one other major U.S. daily newspaper, stated that Felix Rodriguez, "at the request of a wealthy Miami benefactor," agreed to hide and harbor Luis Posada Carriles, a suspect in the 1976 bombing who escaped from prison in Venezuela. Mr. Rodriguez said that this "Miami benefactor . . . financed Posada's prison escape." At the time Mr. Rodriguez assisted the fugitive Mr. Posada, Mr. Rodriguez was managing the secret White House operation from El Salvador run by Col. Oliver North to rearm the Contras in violation of the Congressional ban on U.S. military aid to the Contras. Mr. Rodriguez admitted he "helped arrange" Mr. Posada's arrival at the top-security Ilopango Air Force Base in El Salvador. Mr. Rodriguez then hired Mr. Posada to help run the illegal Contra resupply operation.

Thus, U.S. taxpayers have paid the salary of an aide to the Vice President to illegally harbor a suspected international terrorist. Mr. Posada himself may have been paid by U.S. taxpayers.

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Four principals were implicated in the October 6, 1976 airliner bombing. Two of the four confessed and named Orlando Bosch and Mr. Posada as conspirators. (The confessors later alleged they were unduly coerced to confess.) Mr. Posada, trained by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.), had been chief of operations for Venezuela's DISIP, its version of the C.I.A. Vice President Bush was director of the C.I.A. at the time of the October 1976 airliner bombing.

Mr. Rodriguez was in "regular contact" with Vice President Bush's office while managing Col. North's illegal Contra resupply operation. In fact, Mr. Rodriguez met with the Vice President three times while managing the illegal operation with Mr. Posada working with him. The Vice President claims not to have known about Col. North's illegal activity or about the fact of Mr. Posada's presence and contribution.

When Eugene Hasenfus' plane illegally ferrying arms to the Contras was shot down by Nicaragua in October 1986 it became known that Mr. Posada was in fact an aide to Mr. Rodriguez. The Vice President's national security adviser has stated that Mr. Bush did not know Mr. Posada was working with Mr. Rodriguez, did not believe the press reports and made no further inquiries. The Vice President, furthermore, refused to answer a series of written questions about this matter submitted to his press office within the last three weeks.

The Vice President, while head of the President's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism, thus knowingly and willingly ignored reputable

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reports that an important aide had harbored and employed a suspected international terrorist named by two confessors as a conspirator to the killing of 73 people. This presidential candidate, who cloaks himself as the law and order candidate, knowingly and willingly ignored the fact that one of his aides had harbored a suspected international terrorist.

Given these facts, I request the Star consider calling for:

- 1) the F.B.I. and Department of Justice, recognizing the validity of Mr. Rodriguez's printed admission, to immediately arrest Mr. Rodriguez for at least harboring a known fugitive and obstruction of justice, and that authorities hold Mr. Rodriguez without bail pending either criminal prosecution in the U.S. or extradition to Venezuela for prosecution;
- 2) Mr. Posada's immediate arrest either in the U.S. or El Salvador and the utilization of all requisite legal means to extradite Mr. Posada to Venezuela for prosecution;
- 3) the F.B.I. and Department of Justice to investigate Mr. Rodriguez's links to the "Miami benefactor" who financed Mr. Posada's escape from Venezuelan confinement and prosecute or extradite for prosecution any and all persons involved in related illegal acts; and
- 4) Congress, the F.B.I. and Department of Justice to investigate Vice President Bush and his aides regarding their participation in and dealings with this matter and its principals to determine if anyone else has harbored Mr. Posada, obstructed justice or committed misprison of a felony.

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Thank you for serving the public by printing the September 5,
1988 article.

Sincerely,

Todd Hotchkiss
Indianapolis