

Miami Court Delays Guatemalan Return To District Police

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MIAMI—Stanley R. Wilson, a District of Columbia homicide detective, took the unusual step here yesterday of offering to take personal custody of Jorge A. Zimeri-Safie, the Guatemalan businessman and gun inventor who some describe as a dangerous international terrorist.

Zimeri has been caught in a tug-of-war between the Guatemalan government—which wants him extradited to stand trial on a murder charge there—the State Department and the District police department. The locale of that interagency battle switched to Miami last week, with no end clearly in sight.

Just as Magistrate Peter R. Palermo appeared ready to release Zimeri to Wilson's custody to live at an unspecified D.C. location under an assumed name, the judge gave a government prosecutor up to another week to check part of Wilson's testimony.

Wilson, a short, studious-looking man with graying hair, told Palermo that he was not only testifying under a subpoena from Zimeri's lawyers, but also as a representative of the State Department.

The policeman said that a State Department official he could not name for "security reasons" had asked him to "represent them (the State Department) as to the facts" of the Zimeri case.

State Department Position

But Assistant U.S. Attorney Jerome Sanford said that actually the State Department, on behalf of the Guatemalan government, was requesting Zimeri's return to the Central American country to stand trial on the charge that he killed a Guatemalan naval officer in 1976.

Government officials and Zimeri's attorneys have been fighting over his fate for the last week now. On the one hand, federal prosecutors have tried unsuccessfully to get Zimeri to testify to a grand jury here about "organized crime assassinations." Meanwhile, Zimeri's attorneys have tried to get him freed on bail pending outcome of the extradition proceeding.

Zimeri, a 34-year-old textile manufacturer, has said the 1976 Guatemalan murder charge is trumped up and designed only to secure his return to his homeland so that government agents can execute him for his political opposition to the current military regime.

After Wilson refused to name publicly the State Department official who authorized his testimony, the already bizarre case took an even stranger twist. Prosecutor Sanford asked Wilson to write the name of the State Department official on a piece of paper and give it to Palermo so that it would remain secret from the public.

Wilson did so and Sanford said he would check the supposed authorization of the person.

Official's Name Blurted Out

But minutes later, one of Zimeri's attorneys, Ed-

ward R. Shohat, inadvertently blurted out the name of the official, Isabel Johnstone, a former CIA agent who now investigates terrorism in Latin America and South America for the State Department.

Reached by telephone in Washington, Johnstone said she "had no idea (Wilson) was going to say that" she had given him authority to represent the State Department in his court testimony.

"I think he got carried away," Johnstone said of Wilson's testimony.

Despite the apparent conflict in Wilson's testimony, Shohat said after the court hearing that he still hopes that Zimeri will be released soon to Wilson's custody.

The police detective told Palermo that he had interviewed Zimeri for 150 hours since last December and that the Guatemalan had provided him and other U.S. officials with important information about various political assassinations in Latin America, including the 1968 slaying of John Gordon Mein, then the U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala.

Wilson said he first interviewed Zimeri in Miami about the bombing death in Washington of Orlando Letelier, a former Chilean ambassador to the U.S.

All Information Proved True

The detective said Zimeri's information about the slaying of Mein and other killings had, with independent checking, proved to be true. "In no way can I say he is a danger to society," Wilson said.

Wilson, whose air fare from Washington to Miami was paid by the defense, told a reporter before the hearing that he was testifying for Zimeri because "if a source helps me out, I'll help him out."

The policeman testified that he believes the evidence in the Guatemalan murder case "appears to be tainted." He said that two witnesses who at first implicated Zimeri in the slaying have since retracted their statements. "The case in question was set up by the (Guatemalan) government to frame the Zimeri family."

Wilson has said that he thinks it would be an injustice to send Zimeri back to Guatemala. He called The Washington Post, among others, to alert them to the case.

Sanford said he opposed releasing Zimeri on bond because he had no ties to the Miami community and no appreciable assets in the U.S. But Palermo said that he felt "under the circumstances the man should be released on bond."

But then the judge said he would give Sanford some time to check Wilson's testimony.