

Mr. George Lardner
Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

2/14/89

Dear George,

According to a radio news story last night, one of the nine categories of information DJ wants to block from the North trial is where in Central America the CIA has stations. This is supposed to be a matter of national security. I've had this come up in FOIA cases and from them believe I know the boilerplated b.s. claim. It is that there is a distinction between what is general knowledge and official admissions. In the absence of official admissions, it is alleged, there is no protest from the countries involved and with official admission there would be dire consequences. The ~~other~~ major reason for the multitudinous denials of information I've experienced is embarrassment. Next is harassment.

However, the CIA itself has disclosed the existence of its stations and it has authorized others to disclose them. Others include the FBI and authors, like E. Howard Hunt. It did approve such books as his and he did disclose where the CIA had stations.

I think you'll find other books that required CIA clearance, which is approval, also include the locations of such stations.

To make it safe the practise has been to have someone who does not have personal knowledge, like Thornburg, make the sworn statement. He thus is immune to a perjury allegation or charge.

I do not know of a single instance in which disclosure of the existence of stations even under the most embarrassing circumstance has caused even a serious ripple in any international relations, one of the stock spook claims. Remember the scandal when it was officially disclosed that we operated the CIA in England? It was slightly embarrassing because of the nature of what was disclosed, the CIA's operation, but nothing happened.

This boilerplated claim is so ridiculous assignment of the CIA's station chief in Moscow requires the KGB's approval and vice versa.

Until someone cooked up this mess to withhold, and they've gotten away with it consistently in the courts, the CIA did disclose existence of its stations voluntarily. My first recollection of this is its first JFK assassination records disclosures of late 1974 or early 1975 and included the Mexico City station. I recall that it authorized the FBI to disclose existence of its operations to me and I'm clear on Italy and believe other countries were identified.

Then the FBI took this up and got away with it again to hide what is embarrassing. The illustrations are more numerous with the FBI and as I think I mentioned to you, the courts let them get away with this even when I proved under oath that they had disclosed to me what they claimed had to be withheld and attached samples to my affidavits.

Both have always filed and gotten away with false affidavits on these claims and when I attested in direct contradiction and it was material I was never charged with perjury.

However, I was never before Gesell on any of those cases, and there were several. I doubt he is aware of this, or that Walsh is.

The CIA has claimed the need to withhold the identification of a newspaper from which it had a news story on the ground disclosure would identify the fact of a station in that country. As I now recall this extended to bars and hotels. Harassment, I think. And the government is engaging in harassment in this case as well as seeking to hide what can be embarrassing....I've been wondering if Gesell would appoint a master to review the claims to national security.

Best,

2/12/89

Mr. George Lardner
Washington Post, Newsroom
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

Dear George,

Here is the story I told you about a few minutes ago. I am expecting someone who may be able to get this in tonight's outgoing mail. That goes through Baltimore, such is our new efficiency, but it may reach you faster.

I've had enough experience with claims to national security in FOIA cases, all sworn to, to believe that the claim is being made in the North case in the secure belief that nobody really knowing what what is secret and what need be will ever see what is withheld. Moreover, very often those making the claim have no personal knowledge. Indeed, I am sure that those without personal knowledge are used to frustrate the remote possibility of a perjury allegation.

I'm reasonably confident that when he was earlier at DJ Thornburg was responsible for some entirely unjustifiable national security claims in FOIA cases.

If reporters have had enough of such things and of having had what ought not be denied withheld from them, I have a notion that pursuing some of the awfuller claims would be interesting and perhaps productive.

I've had them swear they had to withhold what they had already disclosed - and get away with it. Such are our judges.

It is because I wondered if the Thornburg/DJ belated position ~~has~~ has anything to do with Bush's security that this enclosure came to mind.

Best wishes,

Hards

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.

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

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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.

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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.

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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.