

Facts Behind Terror by Jeffrey Steinberg

The case of Orlando Bosch

Is the Venezuelan president making his country into a terrorist haven—with U.S. help?

Orlando Bosch and three co-defendants will be freed this month following the surprising Sept. 17 decision by Venezuela's Military Tribunal to absolve them of any involvement in the 1976 bombing of a Cubana Airlines jet. Bosch heads the Cuban exile terrorist organization Omega 7, which six days before the tribunal's verdict claimed responsibility for the New York assassination of Cuban United Nations diplomat Felix García Rodríguez.

When the 1976 terrorist case came under Venezuelan jurisdiction, because Bosch had been arrested there right after the bombing, the government then headed by Carlos Andrés Pérez promised to prosecute to the fullest. Last month, the new Venezuelan government, with Christian Democratic Herrera Campins as president, reversed position. The government prosecutor, Antonio José Moros González, asked the military tribunal for an acquittal, claiming "lack of evidence."

The prosecutor himself had arranged this deficiency, however, by throwing out documentary material from Barbados and Trinidad police forces on the basis that it was not translated into Spanish by "designated experts," and refused to enter Cuban police evidence because it was presented "in defective form."

He then introduced a Scotland Yard report that the bomb had ex-

ploded in a different section of the plane from the one originally identified, and therefore, he said, could have been put in place at a different time by someone other than Omega.

Word leaked out last week that coaching on the case came from U.S. ambassador William Luers, who, according to the Venezuelan press, had attended a sensitive high-level government meeting on how to handle Cuba's angered response to the freeing of the terrorists. The meeting was said to have confirmed the hard-line anti-Castro response initially adopted by the Herrera government.

When Christian Democratic foreign affairs secretary Leopoldo Castillo confirmed Luers's presence at the meeting, the question was raised in Caracas political circles: was Luers in on meetings prior to the government's decision to pull the case? Did Luers promise U.S. protection for contaminated Venezuelan networks when Omega 7 hit quads step up their continental activity after Bosch is released?

Speculation has now surfaced that the Luers hard-line approach may have been adopted specifically to provoke counterterror on the part of networks connected to the Havana government, thus heightening the already unprecedented "left"- "right" warfare across Latin America.

The Italian weekly *Panorama* reported last week that the Herrera

government is now embroiled in a second international scandal. This one involves protection of a leading Italian terrorist, Marco Donat Cattin, who is a member of one of the most violent "left" Italian-based terrorist groups, Prima Linea. According to Italian police sources, the youthful Donat Cattin is currently in Venezuela, but Venezuelan police are not cooperating in the effort to find him.

Panorama reported that suspicion is growing that the lack of cooperation was ordered from the top: President Herrera is close to the wing of the Italian Christian Democracy which Donat Cattin's father, vice-secretary of the party, has helped to lead since the days when Herrera lived in Italy.

Further details on the next wave of terrorism planned by Omega 7 came early this month from Alicia Herrera, a Venezuelan journalist who called a press conference in Mexico City to charge that she had personally overheard Bosch bragging about his plans to eliminate former president Carlos Andrés Pérez and former Mexican president Luis Echeverría as soon as Bosch is freed. She said she knew Venezuelan guards had heard the boasts as well.

Mrs. Herrera, who had gained the confidence of Bosch through his ties to Venezuela's large Cuban exile community, served as the group's "courier" from prison, and further told the press that Bosch openly and repeatedly claimed responsibility for ordering or executing various terrorist exploits, including eight of the best-known incidents in 1975-76. Bosch used his relaxed visiting privileges, she also said, to maintain close contact with Omega networks while in prison.