

**Shadowy Networks Of Repression And Violence:
Aguan Valley, Honduras & the tangled web of mercenaries, bombers,
the CIA, drug traffickers & NGOs across the Americas**

By Annie Bird, March 8, 2011

From the Aguan region, in northern Honduras, to Santa Cruz in Bolivia, mercenaries and paramilitaries violently undermine democracy.

On January 10, 2011, a land rights activist, part of the Honduran Resistance movement, spent his first day in hiding, after being detained and tortured in Honduras. The same day, lawyers from the Union Civica Democratica (UCD) of Honduras traveled to Washington to meet with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of American States to discuss the case of Alejandro Pena Esculsa, an opponent of the Venezuelan government accused of possessing bomb making materials in Caracas.

And, in Texas, the trial began of former CIA agent, Luis Posada Carriles, a CIA trained bomber, charged with immigration fraud.

Why were Honduran coup-supporting lawyers advocating for a Venezuelan accused of making bombs in Venezuela, and what does this have to do with a kidnapping and torture in Honduras or an immigration fraud trial of a former CIA agent?

Though unrelated in most senses, these events illustrate the international interests at play in the Honduran coup, and bring to light some of the actors, though much remains in the shadows.

MULTI LANGUAGE TORTURE IN HONDURAS

On January 8, 2011, Juan Chinchilla, a Honduran land rights activist, was kidnapped and tortured. Able to escape the evening of January 9 while being moved from his illegal detention center, Chinchilla

reported that participants in his torture spoke English and another language he was not able to identify.

Chinchilla was not the only Honduran post-coup torture survivor to report an English speakers' presence in their torturer, it was also reported in the January 2009 torture of two Globo TV journalists.

In the region in which Chinchilla was kidnapped, the Aguan, small farmers have suffered from constant attacks by private security forces employed by palm oil producers and banana companies for many years, but since the June 2009 military coup the level of violence and militarization of the region by a mix of private security, paramilitary and military forces, sometimes reportedly acting in direct collaboration with drug traffickers from the region, has grown markedly; though yet to be substantiated, campesinos report the presence of Colombians in those forces.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Use of Mercenaries in October 2009 reported that Honduran African palm tree producers recruited former Colombian AUC paramilitary forces to work in Honduras as security guards.

As Honduran human rights organizations denounce that 1980s style death squads are again operating in Honduras with indications that the squads are now multinational teams, investigations in South America connect an international web of political and economic interests that apparently supported mercenary group that operated in Bolivia's Santa Cruz province, that planned bombings during the 2010 Venezuelan elections, and that includes a former CIA agent now being tried for migration fraud in Texas, but also wanted in connection to bombing a Cuban commercial airplane in 1979 and for connections to coordinating mercenary or terrorist cells in Central America.

HONDURAN COUP SUPPORTING COALITION VISITS WASHINGTON

The same day Chinchilla was tortured, representatives of the Civic Democratic Union, UCD, packed their bags to travel to Washington.

The UCD is a coalition of over forty Honduran organizations, many of which have long enjoyed US government funding from sources such as USAID, the National Endowment for Democracy and the Millenium Challenge Corporation.

The UCD and its members played a key role in supporting the June 28, 2009 military coup in Honduras, and in their January 2011 trip to Washington advocated on behalf of Pena Esclusa in the Inter American Commission on Human Rights.

The main purpose of the UCD's Washington trip was to seek further funding, meeting with members of Congress such as Connie Mack and Illiana Ros Lehtinen. For anyone who remembers the 1980s, and the hundreds of thousands of murders, torture and disappearances by Latin American militaries, with the support of the US government, it is a frightening moment in the US Congress as Mack and Ros Lehtinen take control of the House Foreign Relations Commission.

THE CORPORATE LOBBY FOR WAR AND TERROR

Mack, Ros Lehtinen and others have been weaving a new "cold war" narrative in Congress in which the enemy is a new "axis" of Venezuela and Cuba and various aligned nations in South America. In this narrative, Honduras holds a key position as a frontline in the battle against this new threat.

The reality is that the governments they are confronting are divergent expression of national processes of democratic consolidation that have slowly taken root in Latin America since the military governments began losing control of nations in the 1980s.

Unlike the coup government in Honduras, all have been legitimately elected, though they do have weaknesses and faces challenges as shadow powers, like organized crime networks and coup plotters, debilitate the states.

Mack's and Ros Lehtinen's activism in defense of a military coup is easily likened to the rabid defense of the genocidal Central American

military governments from a block of 1980s Congress members such as now deceased Jesse Helms. And the reality is that the only threat the new governments of Latin America pose is to the corporations that have pillaged Latin American resources, taking advantage of, and backing the forces of repression and impunity set in place by the military governments that are only now beginning to be challenged; the same corporations that fund the campaigns of their congressional allies and fill the bank accounts of lobbyists tied to those congress people.

These conservative republicans have deep ties to the Cuban exile community in South Florida. Miami, and South Florida in general, is a nexus of power in Latin America. It is where the oligarchs of Latin America, especially the Caribbean, meet, shop and socialize, and the US southern command is based in Miami.

While Ros-Lehtinen campaigned for her seat in Congress in 1989 she strongly supported Orlando Bosch's release from immigration detention. Bosch, a Cuban with Venezuelan citizenship, had been implicated in the 1976 bombing of Cubana airplane, killing 73, and dozens of other bombing and assassination attempts. Immigration officials felt he represented a danger to the American public.

Again, in September 2010, Ros-Lehtinen appeared in press conference supporting the political asylum request of Venezuelan Raul Díaz Peña. Díaz Peña had been convicted to 9 year prison sentence for placing bombs in the Spanish and Colombian embassies in Caracas. In September 2009, while taking part in a program that allowed him to leave prison during the day to work or study, he escaped, it is unclear how he entered the United States.

BOMBING WEB GROWS - UCD ADVOCATES IN THE IACHR FOR VENEZUELAN CHARGED WITH POSSESSING BOMB MAKING MATERIALS
The UCD took advantage of their trip to Washington to visit the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, IACHR, and express their concern for Alejandro Pena Esculsa, director of UnoAmerica.

UnoAmerica is a coalition of organizations that aim to unite Latin Americans in opposition to the progressive governments that have won political control of much of Latin America.

Honduras' coup authors cited Pena Esclusa as a key source of inspiration, and bestowed the "Orden José Cecilio del Valle" upon him in a December 2009 ceremony.

On July 1, 2010, El Salvadoran national Francisco Chavez Abarca was arrested entering Venezuela with a false passport. Subject to an Interpol arrest warrant, in relation to the 1997 series of hotel bombings in Cuba, Venezuelan authorities reported that until his arrest Chavez Abarca formed part of a "destabilization" cell that operated in El Salvador and Guatemala.

According to Chavez Abarca, his cell was set up and commanded by the former CIA agent Luis Posada Carriles, also subject to an arrest warrant and currently on trial in El Paso, Texas for immigration fraud.

Chavez Abarca admitted that the purpose of his trip was to coordinate actions to destabilize the September 2010 elections in Venezuela, and his contact in Caracas was Alejandro Pena Esclusa. In a subsequent search of Pena Esclusa's home, authorities reported finding bomb making materials. Pena Esclusa and his supporters claim that he was framed.

UNOAMERICA DEFENDED THE COUP IN HONDURAS AND FASCIST MASSACRE IN BOLIVIA IN THE IACHR

His own case would not be the first that Pena Esclusa took to in the IAHR. According the UnoAmerica web site, Pena Esclusa presented several petitions to the IACHR, though apparently they have not been accepted.

One complained that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez had violated the rights of Hondurans by encouraging them to resist the military coup and having lent an airplane to deposed Honduran

President Manuel Zelaya during his July 5, 2009 attempt to return to Honduras.

Another petition made the bizarre assertion that the government of Bolivia provoked the September 11, 2008 massacre of its supporters, the Pando massacre, in order to discredit the Nazi inspired separatist movement. A dozen people were massacred, including ten supporters of the government of Evo Morales who were on route to a meeting to rally support for the national government, under attack by separatists, in the province of Santa Cruz. The massacre was carried out by employees of a construction company owned by the provinces' separatist governor, now in prison, who were using road making equipment to make the road impassible.

The day before the Pando massacre, President Morales had expelled US Ambassador Phillip Goldberg, now Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence. The expulsion followed the explosion of violence in Santa Cruz, as fascist inspired separatist youth attacked government offices and carried out racist street violence directed against indigenous people.

This violence, that culminated in the Pando massacre, began just days after the US ambassador visited Santa Cruz and held a secret meeting with Santa Cruz prefect and separatist Ruben Costas on August 27.

UNOAMERICA MEMBER INVESTIGATED FOR SUPPORTING PARAMILITARY GROUP

According to Bolivian and Argentine press reports, Bolivian authorities are investigating an Argentinean member of Unoamerica, Jorge Mones Ruiz's association with an international mercenary group dismantled by Bolivian authorities in Santa Cruz in April of 2009, just days after authorities assert Mones Ruiz visited the group's leader, and around the time bombs exploded in a Bolivian government office and in the home of a catholic Cardenal. Both acts Bolivian investigators tied to the mercenary cell, which consisted of Croatian, Irish, Hungarian, and Romanian citizens and was allegedly led by a Croatian army Balkan war veteran.

Montes Ruiz is reported to be a former Argentine military officer and member of the Carapintadas, a group of Argentinean soldiers that undertook a series of failed insurrections between 1987 and 1990 in an effort to stop prosecution of human rights abuses committed by Argentinean military during the "dirty war."

Bolivian investigators have brought charges against dozens of Bolivians they allege supported or participated in the armed group the mercenaries were a part of. In May 2009 a warrant was issued for the arrest Hugo Antonio Acha Melgar, the director of the Human Rights Foundation of Bolivia, associated with the Human Rights Foundation based in New York, initially chaired by Armando Valledares, a Cuban American opponent of the Cuban government who received the "Orden José Cecilio del Valle" together with Pena Esclusa in the December 2009 ceremony.

Acha Melgar is reported to be in the United States. The brother of the prefect of Santa Cruz (who had met with Ambassador Goldberg), Pablo Costas, has been arrested and Santa Cruz businessman, cooking oil magnate Branco Marinkovic, is wanted, both for financing the paramilitary cell.

Authorities also found that that the mercenary group's leader, Rozsa Flores maintained communication with a CIA agent of Hungarian origin, István Belovai, who died in Denver in November 2009.

MERCENARIES OPERATING IN CENTRAL AMERICA?

While the government of Honduran president Manuel Zelaya has already been violently toppled (June 2009), repression in the region that seeks to destroy the strong pro-democracy resistance to the regime installed by the coup suggests that similar international networks of interests may be supporting mercenaries and paramilitaries in Honduras.

The possibility that foreign mercenaries are operating in Honduras is real, especially given the 2009 reports by the United Nations Working

Group on the Use of Mercenaries. That, in conjunction with the testimonies of torture survivors, paints a worrying picture.

There is no evidence where or in what way those Colombian mercenaries may have been employed though many believe it is highly likely they may be working in some of Honduras' multitude of "legally" registered private security agencies, many of which have ties to international agencies.

For those interested in understanding Honduras, it is important to keep an eye on events in Latin America in general, especially the ongoing investigation into the Bolivian mercenaries. While some may dismiss investigations by Venezuelan, Bolivian or Cuban authorities given the political context, a look at the history of United States government agencies and businesses in destabilizing and destroying inconvenient governments in Latin America is something that cannot be ignored.

POSADA CARRILES ON TRIAL...

Even as Luis Posada Carriles is implicated by his alleged accomplice in the 1997 Cuba hotel bombings and of continuing to coordinate destabilization (ie, terrorism) cells in El Salvador and Guatemala, US officials refuse to extradite him to Venezuela to face trial for the 1976 Cubana airline bombing. He is now on trial for migration fraud, accused of lying during his 2005 US citizenship application.

On February 22, a judge in El Paso ruled against a motion for a mistrial introduced by Posada Carriles' defense, in objection to the testimony of the Cuban official in charge of the 1997 hotel bombing investigation, one of the incidents that US prosecutors are convinced Posada lied about.

For the first time, elements of the exhaustive investigations of the networks that operate out of Florida - undertaking violent attacks against Cuba which have been carried out by Cuban authorities - may be given credence in a US court.

If the US is committed to ending terrorism, we must start with the terrorists harbored at home; our history in Afghanistan and its consequences should show us that abetting terrorism does not make the United States safer, it puts us at greater risk.

(By Annie Bird, annie@rightsaction.org, co-director of Rights Action, that funds and supports community based organizations in Guatemala and Honduras, as well as El Salvador and Chiapas, working for community development, the environment, human rights and justice.)

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