

# Politics Seen Intruding on Plane Crash Probe in Caracas

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Washington Post Foreign Service

CARACAS, Venezuela, Oct. 30—Attention in the case of the Cuban air crash has turned to the issue of whether the two prime suspects can get a fair trial in Venezuela's civil court system, known for its political orientation.

Reports circulated that the case is about to be transferred to a military court, a decision that could lend weight to government promises of impartial pursuit of all leads in the Oct. 6 crash off Barbados.

Leftists here have echoed Cuba's charge of a CIA plot behind the crash, which killed 73 persons, and have worried that police and government security considerations would undermine pursuit of any clues in that direction.

Rightists within the Democratic Action Party, on the other hand, have charged the center-leftist leadership with planning to condemn suspects Hernan Ricardo and Freddy Lugo with little real proof to appease Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro.

Reports from Barbados yesterday said that the British recovery team

had brought up parts of the plane's fuselage from 1,500 feet of water off the coast along with fragments of explosives tentatively identified as the C-4 type used by the U.S. Army. Such evidence could provide the needed basis for military jurisdiction and specific charges for the trial.

[Barbados announced that the United States has accepted an invitation to join the crash investigation in Bridgetown, Associated Press reported. The plane was American-made.]

One of the problems with leveling charges in the case has been the lack of information on exactly what happened to the plane. A growing crop of rumors here includes the notion that Cuban or other explosives experts were aboard the aircraft and that the blast took place in their own luggage.

Ricardo and Lugo, both Venezuelans, maintained in a published interview that they were innocent and had merely gone to Barbados to check prices on camera equipment. There has been much grumbling in newspaper circles over this interview.

It was conducted by an editor of the Caracas newspaper El Mundo aboard the commercial flight that brought the handcuffed prisoners here from Trinidad. Although the national security agent on the plane allowed the interview and pictures, the security police then rushed the two through waiting reporters in Caracas with jackets over their heads, permitting no questions or photographs by El Mundo's rivals.

Government spokesmen say that the two were technically not under arrest until their arrival in Caracas, so the interview could not have been prevented legally.

Ricardo was widely reported earlier to have confessed to placing a bomb on the plane. According to Venezuelans who talked with authorities in Trinidad, Ricardo and Lugo told police that the firebomb was supposed to go off while the plane was on the ground in Barbados, harming no one. Instead, the plane left 20 minutes early and the bomb blew when Barbados' three-mile limit had barely been passed.

There is little faith here in the independence of the civil courts in such a

highly political case. Appointed by the ruling party, judges may investigate in secret and do not have to reveal the reasons for their decisions. Procedures in the military courts are even more secret, but they are generally thought to be less political.

The press is free but subject to the influences of lucrative government advertising and friendship and family ties with high party officials.

Yet, some newspapers, including El Mundo, have attacked the government on some details, notably the conflicting accounts of the expulsion of three American journalists last weekend. Taylor Branch of Esquire magazine, freelancer John Rothschild and Miami News reporter Hilda Incan claimed that they were forced to leave after recognizing in the Caracas airport a former CIA operative in Miami, Ricardo Morales Navarrette. The Caracas government denied that Morales Navarrette works for the Venezuelan political security police, and the newspaper openly ridiculed the denial.

Interior Minister Octavio LePage acknowledged in an interview that

one of the murkiest areas of the probe involves the relationship of the Venezuelan security police to various figures in the case as well as to the CIA.

Government officials readily discuss the close collaboration in the early 1960s between the CIA and FBI and Venezuelan authorities combatting Cuban-inspired terrorists here. But they say the ties faded as the guerrilla threat diminished and as U.S. policy toward Cuba was softened.

"We are determined to pursue the probe to its ultimate consequences, no matter where it leads," LePage said. "Venezuela will never tolerate use of its soil for political terror of either the right or the left."

Some of the questions center around Cuban exile leader Orlando Bosch and former security police operations chief Luis Posada Carriles, both under arrest in Caracas in connection with the plane crash. Posada's telephone receptionist at his private detective agency confirmed that she received a phone message which Hernan Ricardo, the plane crash suspect, allegedly called in from Trinidad the day of the crash. According to news-

paper accounts, Ricardo's girl friend here took the call and relayed the following message to Posada's secretary: "Tell Posada the truck has left with a full load."

Posada's private detective agency was raided by police, who allegedly found high-powered radio equipment that is newer and more sophisticated than their own. The probe will consider the nature if any, of Posada's current involvement with the security police, known as DISIP. The checks might also cover whether Posada has maintained the contacts with the FBI he is acknowledged to have had when he was with DISIP and the contacts he is alleged to have had with the CIA when he lived in Florida in the 1960s.

Bosch, 49, the acknowledged head of a Miami-based militant anti-Castro group, confirmed outside a court Thursday that he has asked Venezuela to grant him political asylum. He is wanted in the United States for a 1974 parole violation as well as for questioning in the assassination of former Chilean Foreign Minister Orlando Letelier, according to Washington sources.