

LIBERATION OF A MONSTER

Subhash Gatade

[We are not driven by a feeling of vengeance. We are just demanding that the end to the impunity that has surrounded the Barbados crime for over 30 years. It's unacceptable that bail be given to the man who does not regret anything of what he's done and who challenges the entire world by saying that if he were born again, he would again fill innocent families with mourning :—Ileana Alfonso, a relative of a bombing victim who died in the 1976 attack]

Does blowing of civilian airlines, bombing of hotels or other civilian facilities constitute an act of terrorism? Anyone with a feeble sense of justice would definitely answer in the affirmative. But for the US such a categorization is dependent upon the way state department looks at such acts. If it is meant to damage the US then definitely 'yes' but if it is meant to damage its adversaries then such actions cannot only be condoned but duly supported as well. The much debated case of the Cuban-American terrorist Posada Carriles who was instrumental in blowing up a civilian airliner killing 73 people is a case in point.

It was only last week that Louis Posada Carriles walked out of a New Mexico jail, free on bail. Posada was being held and tried for immigration charges in US but not in connection with the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed 73 people. The Bush administration has consistently refused to extradite Posada to Venezuela or Cuba to stand trial for the airline bombing. In a statement, Castro said the Bush administration is allowing: "the liberation of [a] monster." On Sunday, the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez accused the US of protecting international terrorism and said that Posada Carriles, that his case should be taken to the United Nations. Cuba has also renewed calls for Posada's extradition.

The double standards employed by the US to protect its own buddy Posada have shocked the world. By its refusal to either prosecute Posada for his crimes against humanity on its own or refusing to extradite him to Cuba or Venezuela it has clearly violated international anti-terrorism agreements. Ricardo Alarcon, the leader of the Cuban National Assembly made clear these aspects of international law : According to international law, according to antiterrorism agreements, when there is an attack on a civil plane, the country that has a suspect in its custody and is asked for him to be extradited to another place so that he can be investigated and tried, that country that has him has only two options: to extradite him or, without exception, to try him itself. Posada is not a suspect. Posada was being tried, formally accused over twenty years ago by another Venezuelan government, by other Venezuelan courts that have been demanding him ever since then.

For close watchers of US foreign policy there is nothing unusual in the US actions which has rather incorporated this duplicity in all its actions. It would be worthwhile to revisit US actions in Nicaragua more than two decades back when the tiny nation was still being ruled by a leftist regime.

Hardly anyone outside the State Department of US would be remembering Anthony Quainton today. He was the man posted in Nicaragua way back in 1984 to work as an ambassador. Those were the days of the Reagan presidency when the US was engaged in dubious ways to destabilize the leftist Sandinista regime there led by Daniel Ortega.

Interestingly when Quainton was cornered by some intrepid journalist, to differentiate between such US actions as the mining of Nicaragua's harbours and bombing of airports from the acts of terrorism that the US condemned around the world, he had no qualms in declaring : 'If they do it it's terrorism, if we do it, it's fighting for freedom'.

One does not know whether George Bush, the present incumbent to the White House, have had his initial lessons in politics under the guidance of this now forgotten Quainton. Interestingly this longstanding leitmotif of US polity, which is guided by the immediate interests of the American state, has been consistently put on the anvil since the onset of the 'war against terror'. It is for everyone to see how the US views its occupation of a sovereign country like Iraq as 'mission democracy' and the growing resistance by the Iraqi people as acts of 'Al Qaeda brand terrorism'.

The case of Posada Carriles, who helped blow up a Cuban airliner carrying civilians around and continued his terrorist acts against the Cuban regime at the behest of the US brings home the point with alacrity.

Perhaps very few people in this part of the globe have even heard about Posada Carriles, a Cuban immigrant to America. In fact he was on the payroll of the CIA for around 40 years, engaged in doing all those 'dirty jobs', which the US intelligence wanted him to do. In 1960 he joined the CIA Operations 40, made up of sharpshooters whose job was to murder the leaders of Cuba's government. In early 70s the CIA sent him to Caracas, Venezuela with substantial bomb making materials. In 1975 he opened a separate outfit (in reality a CIA cover) and masterminded the bombing of a civilian airliner by placing a bomb in the restroom of a civilian *Cubana airliner* which blew up in midair after leaving Barbados for Havana, killing all 73 civilians aboard. (6 October 1976) The recently declassified parts of CIA, FBI and State Department reports confirm Posada's key role in it. He continued with his terrorist operations thereafter and got finally caught in 2000 in Panama City with 37 pounds of C-4 explosives in his car, intending to kill Castro and hundreds of students at a speech to be given by him at a local university.

Even a cursory glance at Posada's bloody career makes it clear that the top bosses of the US establishment made every effort to save him. It is revealing to note that despite the fact that he was convicted and has confessed to his crime, the US government protected him.

It was no surprise that in his speech before UN last year Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez made it a point to present details about this case. According to him "...Thirty years will have passed from this other horrendous terrorist attack on the Cuban plane, where 73 innocents died, a Cubana de Aviacion airliner." He added "...where is the biggest terrorist of this continent who took the responsibility for blowing up the plane? He spent a few years in jail in Venezuela. Thanks to CIA and then government officials, he was allowed to escape, and he lives here in this country, protected by the government."

As of now the US magistrate Norbert Garney has recommended Posada's release, who was held on the immigration charge. It is worth emphasizing that attorney general Gonzales, who has been instrumental in presenting a 'legal' advocacy of torture, did not deem it necessary to classify Posada as a terrorist. The state department has also refused to extradite Posada to Venezuela where he is wanted to stand trial for the destruction of the airliner in 1976.

Definitely the case of Posada Carriles cannot be considered an exception. The world at large knows today how the US has been engaged in quite selective and inappropriate use of the term 'terrorism'. For Bush, even the attack on Lebanon by the Israeli army, which was condemned by the world community, was rather precipitated by 'terrorists' of Hizbollah. Over time this term has got so politicized that has rendered it effectively useless as a category of moral judgment or policy analysis.

It is for everyone to see that while Bush labels Cuba and the people of the Middle East as "terrorists" in pursuit of a war for empire that does not hesitate to use terrorist tactics against its targets. Meanwhile, the US government continues to imprison the men known as the Cuban Five for up to double-life terms for attempting to report on the planned activities of Posada and the Miami-based and CIA funded terrorist organizations whose acts have taken the lives of more than 3,000 Cubans since 1959. □□□