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Several Arrests In Guatemala's Rosenberg Murder Case, But Architects Of The Crime Remain Free

by LADB Staff

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The arrest of several persons appears to absolve Guatemala's President Alvaro Colom of a murder charge in the assassination of attorney Rodrigo Rosenberg. It was Rosenberg who made the charge in a video released after Rosenberg was shot dead May 10 while riding his bicycle in Guatemala City (see NotiCen, 2009-05-14, 2009-05-28, 2009-06-25). The suspects, including police and soldiers, are accused of tricking Rosenberg into making the video and then killing him. The investigation leading to the arrests was overseen by the Comision Internacional contra Impunidad en Guatemala (CICIG), led by Spanish prosecutor Carlos Castresena. CICIG came to Guatemala expressly to counter the inefficiencies and corruption in the nation's security and justice institutions. In mid-September, Castresena credited those institutions with making the case against the accused. He told the media, "Rest assured, today your police, your prosecution service, and your armed forces have arrested the murderers in one of the cases that not only shook Guatemala but the entire international community." The statement was a step toward establishing some credibility and respect for law enforcement. The case was less important internationally for the murder than for the political campaign springing from it, a campaign to remove Colom from office. That would have been a giant step backward for the country's repeated attempts at democracy. The highlight of the accusatory video was Rosenberg telling his fellow citizens, "If at this moment you are hearing or watching this message, it is because Alvaro Colom had me killed." Rosenberg also accused Colom's wife Sandra and his private secretary Gustavo Alejos. Former Policia Nacional Civil (PNC) officer William Gilberto Santos, alleged head of a crime family, PNC officer Mario Luis Paz, and Edwin Idelmo Lupez, a soldier, were accused of committing the murder. Four others, Samuel Girun, Jose Armando Ruano, Balmore Guzman, and Lucas Jose Santiago Lupez were accused as accomplices. William Santos' brother Alberto and PNC officers Carlos Aragon and Miguel de Jesus Ordenez Barrios were arrested sometime later, as were others. All were suspected members of the crime group, whose activities encompassed murder, kidnapping, drugs, and extortion. In what may have been an effort to prevent any more murders in the case, Castresana told reporters, "We have no witnesses, but we have overwhelming scientific evidence." The evidence included a video of a black car chasing Rosenberg down. The video came from closed-circuit cameras mounted on the house opposite Rosenberg's, Castresana said. There was no license plate on the car, but it was unusual enough to be identified, a Mazda 6 with a spoiler, a sticker on the gas port, and special tires. The owner was William Santos. Santos' cell-phone records led investigators to the others. Castresana explained, "We then identified which of those telephone numbers were present at the crime scene on May 10 at 8:40 in the morning, and that is how we discovered who committed the crime." It was a massive investigation, utilizing 13 international investigators from CICIG, 21 investigators from the attorney general's office, 13 from the Directorate of Criminal Investigations, 25 from special forces, 100 military police, and others, totaling 260 people. But, as is so often the case in Guatemala, only the perpetrators have been caught. Those who planned and commissioned the crime remain free and presumably unknown. The CICIG chief said he hoped the intellectual authors would be in custody by year's end. "The investigation continues and the case remains open," he said. The

people behind the killers and the system they own. Theories abound as to who these people are. One theorist is Arnaldo Villagran, formerly vice minister of the interior in the Colom administration, now working in the technical secretariat of the Consejo Nacional de Seguridad (CNS). Villagran gave Central America Report (CAR) an interview on the question. He focused on the country's economic elite, pointing to an effort to unseat Colom because he is pressing, as no president before him has done, to end the system of immunity from taxation that has made them very wealthy in a very poor country. They have lost their traditional control of the government and are voraciously seeking to get it back. Villagran told CAR, "The ultimate problem is that the oligarchy has never paid taxes and this government is seeking a more progressive tax system, but the oligarchy will never accept that." Other presidents have attempted to harness their economic power in the past but were easily defeated and rendered powerless. Villagran asserts that these were the people who concocted Rosenberg's accusatory video, utilizing the same kinds of psychological operations and many of the same psyops specialists that proved effective during the civil war that ended in 1996. He implicated Banco Industrial, as well as people opposed to the government's deal with Venezuela's Petrocaribe to bring cheaper gasoline and petrochemicals to the populace. Villagran noted that members of this elite have always been successful at mobilizing the Guatemalan middle class, for the most part against their own interests, in this case to overthrow the government. This, perhaps, is the key to understanding economic and political Guatemala. Villagran told CAR, "Of course there's a destabilization plan against the government. Who benefits from exploiting crime? Certain political parties and those who reap huge profits from the private-security business. There is a permanent destabilization plan against the government." But one of the chief failures of the plan is that the private elite has never been able to take control of the upper echelons of the military. The Constitution still permits the military to operate in internal security, but, said Villagran, "the Army is well-aware that that is not its role."

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