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LADB Staff

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Assassination of Ex-Presidential Candidate Colosio Remains Unsolved

by LADB Staff

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Despite a strong pledge to fully solve the assassination of former presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio, President Ernesto Zedillo's administration has been unable to come up with any new answers to the incident other than to throw new doubts on the original theory that a lone gunman was responsible for Colosio's death. Upon taking office on Dec. 1, 1994, Zedillo committed himself to solving the assassinations of Colosio; Roman Catholic Bishop Juan Jesus Posadas Ocampo; and Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu, secretary-general of the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). As a sign of his commitment, Zedillo appointed Antonio Gracia Lozada, a member of the opposition National Action Party (PAN), as attorney general. For his part, Gracia named a special prosecutor with no political ties to head the investigations into the three assassinations.

After four months of intense investigations, Lozano Gracia and Pablo Chapa Bezanilla have come up with only a few concrete answers in the three cases. For example, in the Posadas case, on March 16 the prosecutors concluded that the killing of the bishop was intentional. Prosecutors in former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration had ruled that Posadas had been caught in a cross fire during a battle between two factions of drug traffickers. However, other than raising the strong possibility that Posadas was assassinated, Lozano Gracia and Chapa Bezanilla were unable to provide answers regarding the perpetrators of the killing or a motive.

In the Ruiz Massieu case, prosecutors took a series of dramatic steps, including announcing the arrest of former president Salinas's brother, Raul Salinas de Gortari, for participating in the plot to kill Ruiz Massieu. Prosecutors also charged Mario Ruiz Massieu with obstructing the investigation into the assassination of his brother. Despite these arrests, the motives for the assassination remain unclear. Additionally, former legislator Manuel Munoz Rocha, who was originally named as intellectual author of the assassination, remains at large.

The strongest outcry about the lack of resolution to the assassinations, however, has focused on the Colosio case. During commemorative ceremonies on March 23 the first anniversary of Colosio's death Zedillo and Lozano Gracia renewed their pledge to bring the matter to a conclusion. "We will not rest until we fully clear up the brutal murder that took away Mexico's best man," Zedillo said at a ceremony unveiling a large bronze bust of Colosio in Mexico City. Despite Zedillo's promise, however, many Mexicans believe the true perpetrators of Colosio's assassination will never be captured. According to a public opinion poll published in Reforma newspaper on March 24, 66% of the 400 individuals polled said they had no confidence in the Attorney General's ability to resolve the Colosio case. Another 75% of the respondents expressed doubt that the intellectual authors of the assassination would be arrested. Lozano Gracia himself admitted that his office has been unable to come up with new developments in the Colosio case.

"We don't have the motive at this time," Lozano Gracia said at a news conference. In fact, the only new conclusion reached by special prosecutor Chapa Bezanilla's office is to confirm that Colosio was killed by bullets shot from two different guns and that the assassination was indeed a "plot." The conclusion, however, did not implicate any current or former political figures. In fact, the only arrests since the beginning of the year have been members of Colosio's security detail, including bodyguard Othon Cortes Vazquez, who is accused of firing the second shot. Even this arrest has provided few new answers, since Cortes has denied that the second bullet that killed Colosio was fired from his gun.

In a special section marking Colosio's assassination, the daily newspaper La Jornada said that the Attorney General's Office (PGR) is investigating the theory that Othon Cortes had originally intended his bullet for Aburto and not for Colosio. Assuming that this theory is true, the newspaper raised the question of whether Cortes shot Colosio accidentally while attempting to kill Aburto. According to La Jornada, Chapa Bezanilla's ongoing investigation has focused on members of Colosio's security detail, including Brig. Gen. Domiro Roberto Garcia Reyes, who was in charge of security for Colosio. The newspaper said the investigation is focusing on whether Garcia Reyes provided any assistance to the gunmen. The report said others under investigation include Jose Antonio Sanchez Ortega, a special investigator at the Interior Secretariat (Secretaria de Gobernacion, SG), and former federal police officer Fernando de la Sota Rodriguez.

The implication that the PRI leadership, including former president Salinas, were responsible for Colosio's assassination remains a strong theory among most Mexicans. For example, according to El Universal daily newspaper, special prosecutor Chapa Bezanilla is said to be investigating allegations that Salinas's former chief of staff, Jose Cordoba, and Sonora Governor Manlio Fabio Beltrones Rivera may have had a role in planning Colosio's assassination. The PGR has denied, however, that Cordoba and Beltrones are formally under investigation. For his part, former president Salinas, who had not returned from a trip to the US as of early April, has adamantly denied that he had any role in the assassination or in a cover-up. In fact, in early March, Salinas staged a brief hunger strike to demand that officials clear him of claims that he impeded an investigation of the Colosio case. (Sources: Notimex, 02/26/95; El Universal, 03/14/95; Agence France-Presse, 03/16/95; Deutsche Press Agentur, 03/21/95; Associated Press, 03/23/95; Reuter, 03/01/95, 03/23/95; La Jornada, 03/23/95, 03/24/95; Reforma, 03/29/95)

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