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Clues link Managua, try on Pastora's life

By Roger Fontaine
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Twelve days after the attempted assassination of anti-Sandinista leader Eden Pastora, administration officials believe a growing web of circumstantial evidence indicates the attempt was planned by the Nicaraguan government using an international terrorist, probably a Basque, as its agent.

Some American officials are so confident of their intelligence that they privately are stating their belief in Managua's involvement.

From the beginning, administration officials were suspicious of such a link, but had nothing solid until it was learned that a man attending the Pastora briefing as a Danish journalist disappeared shortly after the bombing.

The passport he used had been missing for four years, and belonged to a Danish architectural student who had never been to Central America. Furthermore, the man spoke poor Danish and knew little about Denmark, according to a Swedish journalist who met him in Costa Rica. "Europe Seven," the Paris-based photo agency the mystery man claimed to work for, also proved a phoney.

Last week, the bogus reporter was identified by Costa Rican police as a Spanish Basque, Jose Miguel Lujua Goriostiola, and a member of the Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna, a Basque terrorist organization.

Photos of Mr. Lujua and the "journalist" carried last Thursday in the Costa Rican press showed the same man, according to U.S. embassy sources in San Jose.

By the weekend, however, the Costa Rican assistant interior minister, Manuel Carballo, began raising doubts about the fake journalist's identity and French police were reported to be holding Mr. Lujua under house arrest since January.

U.S. officials in Washington and San Jose remain confident, however, that Mr. Lujua or someone like him with similar terrorist connections was involved in the incident.

Costa Rica officially has requested help from the United States and other countries in the investigation, and according to sources, the United States has agreed.

If there is a Basque connection, administration officials emphasize that ETA is more than a separatist organization. Professedly Marxist-Leninist since 1970, the ETA, the officials point out, has forged a working relationship with the Soviet Union and especially Moscow's client states, as well as other terrorist organizations like the Irish Republican Army and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Reagan administration officials also point to the fact that Basque ETA operations already have

jumped the Atlantic. Last September, Costa Rican police arrested an admitted Basque terrorist, Gregorio Jimenez Morales. Caught in the act of drawing plans of Mr. Pastora's residence, he was charged with plotting to kill him and other leaders of the Revolutionary Democratic Alliance, ARDE.

U.S. officials say that last June, two Nicaraguans posing as Sandinista defectors attempted to assassinate ARDE leaders in San Jose, Costa Rica, but failed when their briefcase filled with plastic explosives went off prematurely while they drove to the meeting, killing one of the Nicaraguans.

The surviving assassin, later jailed by the Costa Rican government, admitted they had been sent by Managua to liquidate the ARDE leadership.

Administration officials also cite a U.S. embassy report from Managua describing the handling of the Pastora assassination attempt in the Nicaraguan media.

According to the cable, the official Radio Voz de Nicaragua early on the morning following the explosion blamed it on the CIA because, according to Voz, the agency alone had access to plastique, a powerful explosive that had been used in the attempt.

Plastic explosives, in fact, are widely available, and more important, its use in the Pastora assassination attempt had not yet been disclosed by investigating authorities, according to U.S. officials.

Officials also refer to a similar method used earlier by Basque terrorists operating elsewhere in Central America.

Two months before the Pastora bombing, a Salvadoran guerrilla defector told U.S. intelligence officials that ETA agents working with the Cuban and Nicaraguan governments made two assassination attempts in October 1981 and February 1982 at the request of one group within the insurgent coalition, the People's Revolutionary Army, ERP.

Alejandro Montenegro, a former ERP commander, said the Basque target was Jose Guillermo Garcia, then El Salvador's minister of defense. The ETA terrorists had posed as journalists from a European magazine seeking an interview with Gen. Garcia.

Their plastic explosives were hidden in video cassettes and stored in metal trunks supposedly filled with camera equipment. The first attempt failed when the bomb exploded in the terrorists' hotel room, and the second resulted in explosives being placed under Gen. Garcia's desk with a timer device, but the bomb did not go off.

On a trip to Cuba, Mr. Montenegro also disclosed that he saw ETA members in Havana "waiting for their documents to be put in order so they could enter El Salvador." Such a process normally involves forgery and other sophisticated deception methods carried out by the highly professional Cuban intelligence services.

The Spanish press has reported recently up to 100 Basque terrorists living in Managua.

While U.S. officials say they cannot confirm that figure, they point out that Nicaragua long has been a haven for a wide variety of terrorist and guerrilla organizations from such countries as Argentina, Chile,

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