

Extrait du El Correo

<http://www.elcorreo.eu.org/La-tentative-d-assassinat-du-Senateur-des-Etats-Unis-Edward-Koch>

# **La tentative d'assassinat du Sénateur des Etats Unis Edward Koch.**

- Notre Amérique - Terrorisme d'Etat - Plan Condor - Plan Condor chilien -

Date de mise en ligne : mercredi 13 octobre 2004

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Washington, D.C. -

Military officials of Uruguay, who were members of a secret Southern Cone intelligence alliance called **Operation Condor**, threatened to assassinate U.S. Congressman Edward Koch in mid-1976, according to a just published book, *The Condor Years : How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (The New Press 2004). Written by investigative journalist John Dinges, the book reveals that the CIA intercepted the threat but failed to take any actions in response to it or to warn Congressman Koch for more than two months.

In an interview for the book, Koch said that the then Director of Central Intelligence, George Herbert Walker Bush, informed him in October 1976 that his sponsorship of legislation to cut off U.S. military assistance to Uruguay on human rights grounds had provoked secret police officials to "put a contract out for you."

According to documents obtained by Dinges and interviews he conducted for *The Condor Years*, the CIA station chief in Montevideo received information in late July 1976 that two high-level Uruguayan intelligence officers had discussed their ability to have Chile's secret police, DINA, send agents to the United States to kill Koch. The station chief, identified in the book as Frederick Latrash, reported the conversation to CIA headquarters but recommended that the Agency take no action because the officers had been drinking at a cocktail party when the threat was made.

Only after Chilean operatives carried out the September 21, 1976, assassination of former ambassador Orlando Letelier did the CIA warn Koch and share the intelligence with the FBI and the State Department, according to the new book. A car bomb planted by those agents killed Letelier and an American woman, Ronni Moffitt on Massachusetts Avenue in Washington D.C. Considered at the time to be the most egregious act of international terrorism ever committed in the U.S. capital, the Letelier-Moffitt assassination was quickly linked by the FBI to a shadowy six-country alliance, Operation Condor, created by Chile to enable the military governments to track down and kill their opponents inside and outside of Latin America.

The basic Condor method of operation, according to FBI and CIA documents, was for member countries to assist each other in carrying out assassinations against each other's enemies. Col. Jose Fons, one of the two officers identified as discussing the plan to kill Koch, was Uruguay's representative to a November 1975 secret meeting in Santiago, Chile, at which Operation Condor was created, according to secret Chilean documents obtained by Dinges. The other officer, Major Jose Nino Gavazzo, who is described in a secret State Department memorandum as "apparently a dangerous type," was also a Condor operative. He headed a team of intelligence officers working in Argentina in 1976 in operations that resulted in the kidnapping and deaths of more than 100 Uruguayans.

In addition to the CIA intelligence about targeting Koch, Dinges has compiled more than 30 CIA, State Department and Pentagon documents discussing Operation Condor and coordination of assassinations among Chile, Argentina and Uruguay—all dated in the months leading up to the Letelier assassination. The US intelligence community, he concludes, had detailed and timely information on planned Condor terrorism, which officials obtained from their contacts inside the Latin American security forces. But they were loath to act on the information because of the friendly nature of their relationship with those agencies and because the U.S. government and the Latin American regimes shared the overall goal of defeating communism.

During a July 30, 1976, meeting between CIA and State Department officials, a CIA representative, for the first time, shared intelligence on Operation Condor, which he described as "organization [that] was emerging as one with a far more activist role, including specifically that of identifying, locating, and 'hitting' guerrilla leaders." The CIA official described these as "disturbing developments in [Condor's] operational attitudes."

In The Condor Years, Dinges concludes that had US officials acted on this intelligence, the Letelier assassination might well have been prevented. "When terrorist plots by our enemies are discovered the threat is greatly exaggerated and given major publicity," he said, drawing a parallel with the current debate over intelligence failures in Iraq. "But when terrorist plans by our allies are discovered, they are minimized and kept secret. That is what happened with the Condor information that could have prevented the Letelier assassination ; and that is what the CIA did with the information on the plot against Koch."

In mid October 1976, Koch wrote to the Justice Department asking for FBI protection and requesting "any additional information relating to this matter in your files...which I should be made aware of." None was provided to him. In his 1991 autobiography, Koch wrote that Bush had called him and told him to "be careful." But, until Dinges told the former mayor of New York City about Operation Condor in an interview in 2001, Koch was not aware of the connection between the threat on his life and the assassination operations of Condor, on which the CIA had concrete intelligence in the summer of 1976.

As a result of his meeting with Dinges, Koch petitioned the CIA and other agencies for more information on why he had not been expeditiously warned of a terrorist threat on his life. The CIA declined to declassify the relevant reports, but sent Koch a letter with this explanation for the delay : "The Agency's initial analysis of these comments [the military officers' discussion of killing Koch] was that they represented nothing more than alcohol-induced bravado. In the aftermath of the assassination of Orlando Letelier in Washington, DC, U.S. officials questioned their assumption that other countries would not conduct assassinations in the U.S." (see Document 4)

Details of the threat have also been deleted from State and Justice Department documents released to Koch. But the documents reveal that the State Department took action after the fact to prevent the two officers from entering the United States. In late 1976, Colonel Fons and Major Gavazzo were assigned to prominent diplomatic posts in Washington D.C., but the State Department forced the Uruguayan government to withdraw their appointments with the public explanation that "Fons and Gavazzo could be the objects of unpleasant publicity...." The real reason, according to the documents, was the threat against Koch (see Document 3).

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### Read the Documents

**Note :** The following documents are in PDF format.

You will need to download and install the free Adobe Acrobat Reader to view.



#### Koch-01

##### **Document 1 : Koch letter to U.S. Attorney General Edward Levi : October 19, 1976**

After receiving a phone call from an FBI agent who briefs him on the "possible danger" to his life, Koch writes to the Attorney General. He asks : "should my staff and I not have F.B.I. protection ?" He also requests that the Justice Department provide him with any additional information in their files, or the CIA files. Finally, he suggests that it would "be sensible to advise the Uruguayan government that it would be held responsible in the event of an assault upon me or my staff."



#### Koch-02

##### **Document 2 : Edward Levi letter to Henry Kissinger, November 5, 1976**

Two weeks after the Koch letter to Levi is sent, the Attorney General writes to Secretary of State Kissinger to suggest that the demarche Koch proposed to the Uruguayan military regime "appears to be a matter within your jurisdiction, and I therefore refer it to you for your attention...."



### Koch-03

#### **Document 3 : State Department SECRET Action Memorandum, "Uruguayan Threat Against Congressman Koch," December 13, 1976**

This heavily censored memorandum to Philip Habib from Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, Harry Shlaudeman reviews the death threat against Koch and poses "one additional problem" : that the Uruguayan officers who made the assassination threat are due to be appointed to high-level diplomatic posts in Washington D.C. U.S. Ambassador to Montevideo, Ernest Siracusa, has urged the State Department to inform the Uruguayan government that "these two gentlemen would not be welcome in the United States." Shlaudeman recommends, and Habib approves, vetoing the appointment of Col. Jose Fons and Major Jose Gavazzo on the excuse that they would become objects of "unpleasant publicity" because of their involvement in human rights atrocities in Uruguay.



### Koch-04

#### **Document 4 : CIA Letter to Edward Koch, September 26, 2001**

The CIA responds to a request from Koch (made after his interview with author John Dinges) for additional information in Agency files on the assassination threat against him. The Agency letter suggests that the CIA did not take the threat seriously at first because the officer making it was "reportedly in the state of intoxication." But, after the September 21, 1976, Washington D.C. car-bombing that killed Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt "U.S. officials questioned their assumption that other countries would not conduct assassinations in the U.S." The letter reveals that weeks after the threat was made, and one week after the carbombing, the CIA directorate of operations disseminated this intelligence to the FBI and State Department. The letter concludes with the CIA's refusal to declassify any actual documents on the Koch threat "because to do so would disclose the intelligence sources and methods by which the CIA obtained the above information."