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ROCKEFELLER COMMISSION  
ORGANIZED CRIME  
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KENNEDY, ROBERT  
EXECUTIVE ACTION CAPABILITY  
CUBAN EXILES  
COLBY, WILLIAM  
ASSASSINATIONS, FOREIGN LEADERS  
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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

ACTION

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May 27, 1975

178-10004-10136

MEMORANDUM FOR: GENERAL SCOWCROFT  
FROM: R. C. McFARLANE *RM*  
SUBJECT: Assassination Plots

On Friday, May 23, Director Colby continued his testimony on covert actions before the Church Committee. Prior to his appearance, the Director had been enjoined by Mr. Buchen and Mr. Hills to refrain from answering questions on assassination plots on the grounds that research to date on this matter was incomplete and that in the interest of precluding the risk of damage to persons that could arise from ambiguous references in the material, additional time would be necessary. During his appearance, the Director was questioned on the existence in the past of plots to assassinate Fidel Castro. Notwithstanding the above guidance, Director Colby elaborated in great detail the involvement of the CIA with underworld figures in plots to assassinate Fidel Castro during the period from 1960 until 1965. Following his testimony, the Director provided copies of two documents: one of these summarized a meeting of the Special Group (Augmented) in Secretary Rusk's office in August 1962 at which the subject of assassination was raised by Secretary McNamara. The other document, which flowed from the same meeting, was a tasking directive written by Major General Edward Lansdale, which called for planning in several areas to include the possible "liquidation of Cuban leaders." Since the hearing on Friday, the Committee has also requested copies of three 1967 reports by the Inspector General of the CIA dealing with plots to assassinate Castro, Trujillo and Diem. This memorandum addresses the contents of those reports as a basis for reaching decisions on the Administration's response to the Committee's request.

Plots Against Castro

The Inspector General's report treats exhaustively all written and oral evidence available in 1967 concerning various plots to assassinate Fidel Castro. From the report, the following facts based upon incontrovertible evidence, are clear:

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- CIA twice (first in early 1961 and again in early 1962) supplied lethal pills to U.S. gambling syndicate members working in behalf of CIA in a plot to assassinate Fidel Castro. The 1961 plot aborted and the pills were recovered. Those furnished in 1962 were passed by the gambling syndicate representative to a Cuban exile leader in Florida, who in turn had them sent to Cuba in May 1962. In June 1962 the exile leader reported that a team of three men had been dispatched to Cuba to recruit for the operation. If the opportunity presented itself, the team was to make an attempt on Castro's life.-- perhaps using the pills.
- As mentioned above, there was a meeting of the Special Group (Augmented) in Secretary Rusk's conference room on 10 August 1962 at which Secretary McNamara broached the subject of liquidation of Cuban leaders. The discussion resulted in a memorandum under a program designated Project Mongoose prepared by General Edward Lansdale which also mentioned the liquidation of Cuban leaders. No details as to further action taken pursuant to this directive are as yet available.
- A CIA officer passed an assassination weapon to an Agency Cuban asset at a meeting in Paris on 22 November 1963. The weapon was a ball-point pen rigged as a hypodermic syringe. The CIA officer suggested that the Cuban asset load the syringe with Black Leaf 40 for use against Castro.

From the above, it is clear that the CIA did in fact develop plans to assassinate Castro. The first seriously pursued plan was conceived in August 1960. It involved the use of members of the criminal underworld with contacts inside Cuba. The operation had two phases: the first ran from August 1960 until late April or early May 1961 when it was terminated following the Bay of Pigs; the second ran from April 1962 until February 1963 and was a revival of the first phase which had been inactive since May 1961.

The report provides only a sketchy basis for determining to what extent authorities outside the Agency may have directed or influenced the CIA to develop and carry out assassination plots. The authors of the report do state, however:

"We cannot overemphasize the extent to which responsible Agency officers felt themselves subject to the Kennedy Administration's severe pressures to do something about Castro and his regime."

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Separately, in describing actions taken by Richard Bissell early in the Kennedy Administration to establish an executive action capability ("a general standby capability to carry out assassinations when required"), the report quotes Bissell as saying: "The White House has twice urged me to create such a capability." The only other suggestive reference in the IG's report is to a CIA statement in one of its contingency plans that the elimination of the dominant figure in a government would not necessarily cause the downfall of the government. This contingency plan was developed in response to a request from General Taylor for a plan apparently designed to accomplish the overthrow of the Castro regime. It is understood that "The Taylor Report" which deals with this episode is now held by the CIA. A copy has been requested for review at the White House.

The underworld-connected plot mentioned above began with a request from Richard Bissell to the Director of Security that he investigate the possibility of establishing contacts with underworld figures who might have gambling connections in Cuba for the purpose of effecting the assassination of Fidel Castro. This request led to Agency contacts with Robert A. Maheu, a private investigator who had done sensitive work for the Agency and who had been a special agent for the FBI. Maheu in turn developed contacts with underworld figures (Johnny Roselli and Sam Giancana). The latter two, affiliated with gambling operations in Cuba, established the link with in-country persons who were ultimately to perform the assassination.

The details of the above episode are treated at length in the report to include the identities of the technicians, scientists, station chiefs, and divisions heads within the Agency that were involved in any respect. Apart from this operation, several other aborted schemes are summarized such as: a plan in August 1960 to pass a box of cigars contaminated with lethal botulinum toxin to Castro; a concept plan for contaminating a radio station where Castro was expected to speak with LSD in the expectation that he would then make a fool of himself on Cuban television; a plan to seed a depilatory into Castro's clothing during foreign travel which would cause his beard to fall out; a plot to have William Donovan present Castro with a skin diving suit which was contaminated with poison; and a scheme to place an explosive sea shell on the floor of the ocean where Castro was known to go skin diving.

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With regard to the only serious plan, that involving underworld figures, the following persons were identified as being witting: Alan Dulles, General Cabel, DDCI; Richard Bissell, Deputy Director for Plans; Richard Helms, successor Deputy Director for Plans; Sheffield Edwards, Director of Security; James O'Connell, Office of Security; J. D. Esterline, Chief, Western Hemisphere Division; Cornelius Roosevelt, Chief, Technical Services Division (TSD);\*Ray Treichler, Chemical Division, TSD; Edward Gunn, Chief, Operations Division, Medical Services Branch; William Harvey, Chief, Foreign Intelligence (Domestic) Division; Sydney Gottlieb, Special Assistant to Bissell; Robert Bannerman, Deputy Director of Security; J. C. King, Chief, Western Hemisphere Division; Robert Maheu, a private investigator, John Roselli; Sam Giancana; Santos Trafficante and Antonio Varona (both inside men in Cuba). In addition, the Agency's General Counsel, Lawrence Houston and Attorney General, Robert Kennedy learned the full details of the operation in May 1962, following its termination. It is further speculated that the following persons have learned of the operation in the intervening years: Edward P. Morgan, Maheu's attorney; columnist Drew Pearson and his partner, Jack Anderson; Chief Justice Earl Warren; James Rowley, Chief of the Secret Service, Pat Coyne, Executive Secretary of the PFIAB, Attorney General, Ramsey Clark; and various members of the FBI. Virtually all of the information above, except for the names of the persons involved, was disclosed during Director Colby's testimony on Friday.

#### Trujillo Plots

U.S. involvement with local Dominican groups plotting the assassination of Trujillo began in November 1959 and carried through the actual assassination on May 30, 1961. The IG report details the nature of this involvement which included: approval of the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Roy R. Rubottom), and the CIA Division Chief for the Western Hemisphere for cooperation with dissident Dominican groups whose objectives were known to both men to include assassination of Trujillo; approval by these same parties and Deputy Director for Plans Bissell of the provision of automatic carbine rifles to the dissident groups; active encouragement by the U.S. Consul. to the dissident groups; and involvement of a private U.S. citizen in the Dominican Republic as a go-between for the Consulate with the dissident groups in providing the arms.

With regard to the awareness by higher authorities of this U.S. involvement, a meeting was held on June 9, 1961 at the Department of State attended by

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Vice President Johnson, Secretary McNamara, General Lemnitzer, Under Secretary Bowles, Deputy Under Secretary Alex Johnson, Director of USIA Edward R. Murrow, Mr. Arthur Schlesinger, Mr. Richard Goodwin, Mr. Ted Achilles, Mr. Wim Coerr, Mr. Morales Carrion, and Mr. Jamison (Agency unknown). At this meeting Vice President Johnson referred to a message from Consul General Deerborn concerning the possibility of implicating the United States in the delivery of arms to the dissidents. The Vice President then asked for details as to the timing and authority for the delivery of the arms. There is no record to indicate that anyone at the meeting expressed awareness or lack of awareness of U.S. involvement in the operation. Another memorandum for the record exists concerning a meeting at the White House on June 7, 1961 chaired by the President at which the Vice President was also in attendance. Similarly, at this meeting there was no indication of Presidential or other high level awareness of U.S. involvement in the operation.

#### The Diem Coup

The third Inspector General's report (May 31, 1967) details U.S. policy toward and dialogue with Generals of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces who successfully conducted the coup against President Diem and his brother Nhu on November 1, 1963. The period in question was from August through October during which time U.S. support shifted away from Diem and to opposition forces. The record of exchanges makes clear that the decision to provide U.S. encouragement to opposition forces was taken by the President upon the advice of virtually all members of the bureaucracy with the notable exception of the DCI and the Station Chief. At the same time, there was never any consideration or discussion of providing overt or covert U.S. support for an assassination. There was, however, general recognition of the fact that the coup, were <sup>it</sup> to take place, could be a violent one. On the one occasion in which assassination was reported from the field as a possibility, Director McCone issued a strong warning that no U.S. support for such an assassination attempt should be considered.

Apart from making clear U.S. support for opposition forces, the IG report also notes that cross border operations were taking place at this time.

#### Summary

It is difficult to establish perspective over the Administration's position to be taken at this point in the Church Committee's investigation. Prior to the

disclosure by the Director on Friday, May 23, of detailed U.S. Government involvement in plots to assassinate Castro, the Administration's position had been to seek to have this kind of extremely sensitive information handled on a close-hold basis with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee. The Director's testimony and the subsequent disclosure of U.S. involvement in coup and assassination planning foreshadows severe damage to the foreign relations of the United States in the months ahead. An important collateral impact upon the United States intelligence system will undoubtedly result from the legislative restrictions that may be anticipated on future activities of the CIA and other intelligence gathering bodies. In addition, a significant threat is posed that public disclosure of the details of these several operations will compromise and endanger sensitive sources and methods. Thus, at least three serious areas of damage maybe anticipated: to the image of the United States abroad and its foreign relations with specific countries; to the integrity of the U.S. intelligence gathering system; and to sources and methods. It is doubtful that the Committee would be responsive to an Administration request to limit the scope of their activities in order to limit the damage that is anticipated in these three areas. Unfortunately, it is probable that the only deterring element that will be effective concerns the sensitivity of the Committee to the disclosure of witting involvement in the planning and execution of these operations by Cabinet and higher-level officials of the Government.

It is understood that the preliminary report of the Rockefeller Commission establishes no basis for alleging significant involvement in these operations of persons outside the CIA. Nor does the documentation thus far available conclusively demonstrate such involvement. At the same time, it is clear that we simply do not know exactly how the many decisions were reached and to what extent non-intelligence persons were involved. In order to facilitate presenting comprehensive responses to the Committee in this regard, it is recommended that the agencies involved (DOD, CIA, State, and the NSC) be tasked immediately to forward all documents which bear in any way on any phase of the operations in question.

Yes —  
No —

With regard to the immediate problem -- following up on Director Colby's commitment to provide the Inspector General's reports to the Committee -- it is considered unrealistic to expect that this may be avoided. Accordingly, it is recommended that the three reports (on Castro, Trujillo and Diem) be delivered to the Chairman. Apart from doing so, however (and in accordance with procedures accepted by the Chairman), it is recommended that the names of sources and unwitting participants be excised from the

Yes —  
No —

Yes —  
No —

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Yes — reports. Further, it is recommended that mention of operations having  
no relationship to the events being considered (e.g. references in the  
Castro report to Mossadeq and Lumumba) be excised on the basis that  
No — the public disclosure of these references could seriously damage the  
foreign relations of the United States.

Yes — As a final measure, it is recommended that the Agency representatives  
responsible for coordinating Administration responses to the Committee's  
request, be convened in a meeting at which procedures agreed upon at the  
No — outset of the investigation be reaffirmed. That is, that all requests for  
information be reported to the Office of White House Counsel and that no  
response be provided verbally or in writing to the Committee unless  
cleared by the Office of White House Counsel.

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