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JFK ASSASSINATION SYSTEM

IDENTIFICATION FORM

AGENCY INFORMATION

AGENCY : SSCIA
RECORD NUMBER : 157-10002-10083

RECORDS SERIES :
MEMORANDUM

AGENCY FILE NUMBER :

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

ORIGINATOR : SSCIA
FROM : TREVERTON, GREGORY
TO : THE RECORD

TITLE :
INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES IN LATIN AMERICA

DATE : 05/27/75
PAGES : 6

SUBJECTS :
GOODWIN, RICHARD
KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION
ASSASSINATIONS
BAY OF PIGS
CUBA
CASTRO
MCNAMARA, ROBERT
NITZE, PAUL

DOCUMENT TYPE : PAPER, TEXTUAL DOCUMENT
CLASSIFICATION : S
RESTRICTIONS : REFERRED
CURRENT STATUS : P
DATE OF LAST REVIEW : 09/30/93

Open in Part

OPENING CRITERIA :

COMMENTS :
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[R] - ITEM IS RESTRICTED

INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD GOODWIN

SENSITIVE

Date: May 27, 1975

Time: 10:00 a.m.

FILE:

Place: Goodwin's residence, 1536 32nd St. NW

Participants: Sel. Com. - David Aaron, Rick Inderfurth, Greg Treverton

Subject: Intelligence Activities in Latin America

Submitted by: Gregory F. Treverton

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ON 5/18/77

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During the 1960 Presidential campaign, Goodwin did foreign policy work for John Kennedy, specializing in Latin America. After the election he moved into the White House to handle Latin America. During that period he spoke with the President about a Latin American matter on the average once a day. Goodwin left the White House in the fall of 1962, becoming Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs under, first, Robert Woodward and then Edwin Martin. After working for the Peace Corps, Goodwin was brought back to the White House by President Johnson, in the spring of 1964, after the Panama crisis. At that time, however, he did not specialize on Latin America, instead writing speeches for Johnson. He left the Administration late in 1965.

1. Assassinations:

In general, Goodwin had not heard much specific talk of assassination, although it would not have surprised him if it had gone on. He mentioned one specific instance in which he had heard talk of assassinating Castro. After the Bay of Pigs, a Cuba Task Force was established, first chaired by Paul Nitze and then by Goodwin in his capacity as White House Staff Officer. At a meeting of the Task Force, held at the State Department, McNamara suggested "getting rid of Castro," someone from the CIA, perhaps Bissell, then asked if McNamara meant

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"Executive Action." McNamara responded that he did and stressed his interest in the idea. However, Goodwin did not bring the topic up later in the meeting after McNamara left. To Goodwin, the idea was not reasonable even apart from moral objections, for the Bay of Pigs had shown that Cuba was politically stable; Castro would merely have been replaced with Raul or with Che Guevara, both worse than Castro. Somewhat later, Goodwin sat in on an interview Tad Szulc had with Kennedy in which the President pledged not to kill Castro. Szulc reported that pledge in an article in Esquire. When he finished his period as Chairman of the Cuba Task Force, Goodwin wrote a memo recommending that the United States let Castro alone; anything the United States did to him could only buttress his position in Latin America.

During his time at the State Department, Goodwin met every week or so with E. C. King, Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division of the CIA, and King never mentioned a plan to assassinate Castro. Nor did Robert Kennedy ever mention such a plan to Goodwin when Goodwin worked for Kennedy, in 1966 and 1967.

Goodwin did believe, however, that the United States was involved, at least indirectly, in the successful plot on Trujillo's life. During the Eisenhower Administration, the United States had severed diplomatic relations with Trujillo and attempted to isolate the Dominican Republic. There were frequent reports that Trujillo was about to be assassinated, but the assassination never came off. In fact, the government was surprised when it occurred. Henry Dearborn, the American Consul in Santo Domingo, had been charged with staying in contact with anti-Trujillo forces. Prior to the assassination, he had transferred some weapons, presumably handguns, to those forces. Goodwin suspected that

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the President probably did not know of the gun transfer, but he said that the assassination and the U.S. role with respect to it would have come as no surprise to the President. He doubted that the CIA even would have had to clear the transfer, although a general policy of that sort might have been passed by the Special Group.

Goodwin reported no other mention of assassinations. In fact, he said he once heard a CIA man say that assassination was a bad idea because once started, it never ended. However, an agent in the field might regard killings of one sort or another as within his mission in supporting one political faction over another. And of course someone might have gotten carried away. It was clear from the Bay of Pigs that the CIA sometimes acted without, or even against, instructions (e.g. by bringing Batista followers into the Bay of Pigs invasion team). In general, Latin American work seemed to attract the worst personnel in all Washington agencies including the CIA.

2. CIA Activities in Brazil:

Goodwin knew little of CIA activities in Brazil. The United States had strongly backed Quadros and never liked Goulart. In the period before 1964, the U.S. gave political support to anti-Goulart factions: followers of Kubitschek and even to the Furtado in the Brazilian northeast.

On the military side, Walters was brought from Rome to keep a contact with the Brazilian military. How much further Walters' activities might have extended Goodwin did not know.

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3. CIA Activities in Chile:

The Kennedy Administration decided that left wing democratic forces in Latin America were the only means of combatting communist influence and promoting development in the region. That decision was applied to Chile, and the U.S. switched its support from the conservative Alessandri. Goodwin sat in on meetings of the Special Group only rarely, only if Latin America were the subject of the meeting. As he remembered it, the proposals that came to the Special Group were general statements, policy papers, not descriptions of recipients of support or conduits. In line with the policy, support was given to left democratic political elements. The U.S. certainly provided assistance to the Christian Democrats in [redacted] elections, but Goodwin did not know how much. [redacted]

[redacted] He contested, however, the assertion that [redacted]

~~the Chilean election was the most intensely watched election in Washington since the 1948 Italian campaign.~~ From his vantage point in the White House it did not seem so.

4. Changes during the Johnson Administration:

Johnson cared less about Latin America than had Kennedy-- Johnson was interested only in Mexico--and so knew less about covert actions in the region. Thomas Mann was left to run Latin American policy, although the President did become active in the two crises-- Panama and then the Dominican Republic. Goodwin saw a sharp change in United States' policy under Mann. Mann supported the military and conservative elements in Latin American societies, and American support

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for left democratic reform ended. Goodwin professed himself puzzled by Johnson's assertion that he had discovered a "murder incorporated" in the Caribbean. The only specific instance Johnson ever cited was Trujillo, yet Johnson had known about the Trujillo assassination from the very beginning and so could hardly have "discovered" it after he became President.]

5. Covert Operations and Counterinsurgency:

When asked about the ethos surrounding covert actions during the Kennedy Administration, Goodwin responded that the major emphasis was counterinsurgency, not covert action. There was certainly no reluctance to use covert action, but no one believed that American objectives could be secured through it. Counterinsurgency was something different. A good deal of money was spent training police through AID, much more was spent through the Pentagon equipping Latin American militaries, and there was as well some CIA activity. At that point, the U.S. really believed that the communists could not get elected to power and that the threat was subversion. Paramilitary operations were considered by the Special Group (counterinsurgency). Latin American matters were considered there, and in some ways Latin America was considered a kind of training ground for Southeast Asia. Goodwin believed that in sum U.S. counterinsurgency efforts made little difference to the course of events in Latin America. Cuba could not in any case provide support to guerilla movements in South America without substantial support from the Soviet Union, and the guerilla movements that began had little indigenous support.

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In response to a question about NSAM's, Goodwin noted that these came out of the Bundy shop, which had little formal staff. Goodwin often wrote these documents. They were both general and, on occasion, specific, indicating groups to be supported and the like. Kennedy wanted to know the details of American activities in Latin America.

6. Goodwin Suggestions:

Goodwin believed it impossible to control the activities of intelligence organizations without becoming involved in their day-to-day operations. What is required is an active Congressional committee, on the model of the early Joint Atomic Energy Committee, with an active staff. Once the President is permitted both to decide what is a major operation, and thus needs to be communicated to Congress, and who to tell, the game is over. Confidence in men will not do; institutional checks are required.

With respect to people to be interviewed, Goodwin mentioned that the Station Chief in Mexico functioned as a kind of regional sub-director. He also thought we might talk with the FBI person in Puerto Rico, with Arthur Schlesinger, and with Tad Szulc. In response to a question, Goodwin indicated that Nixon had been interested in the Bay of Pigs through Cushman. He thought that Douglas Dillon might know of that.