

Richard Helms Testimony

HSCA Volume IV

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Summary

Former Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms testified in open session before the HSCA on September 22 and 25, 1978. The testimony covered a wide range of topics including: an examination of Nosenko information on Oswald, discussion of CIA assassination plots, CIA's relationship to the Warren Commission and the ZRRIFLE project.

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9 *Helms said that when the Warren Commission was formed that the CIA did "everything in its power" to cooperate with the Commission and with the FBI. He said the FBI had the lead in the investigation and that the Agency saw its role to be, as the HSCA staffer put it, "somewhat secondary" to the FBI's role. As DDP Helms believed his responsibility to be one which saw to it that inquiries given to the Agency were answered "as well and as expeditiously as possible." When asked which staff or unit within CIA had primarily responsibility for coordinating the investigation, he answered the counterintelligence staff in the DDP.*

12 *Helms stated that Nosenko's remarks that the KGB had never been in touch with Oswald and knew nothing about him "strained credibility at the time. It strains it to this day."*

12 Helms, when asked if all information pertinent to the Warren Commission's work was promptly given to it, danced around the question, saying he did not know how to answer it. While saying CIA made a major effort to be as cooperative and prompt as possible, he qualified it by saying that after what he had been through in recent years that he knew enough to realize you can't make a flat statement about anything. He said there "maybe" were some places where help was not as prompt as it should have been but that he was not in a position to identify them.

13 Mr. Helms stated that he did not "have any sensation" that Allen Dulles played any special role on the Warren Commission as far as CIA was concerned. Helms, when also asked to what extent did Dulles attempt to represent the interests of the CIA while serving on the Commission said he had no idea.

14-15 The testimony contained a memorandum of July 8, 1964 from the Chief of the SR Division to Richard Helms regarding the former's conversation with Allen Dulles on the Nosenko information concerning Oswald. The memo dealt with an earlier conversation that the Chief, SR Division had with Dulles that there were some members of the Commission who were concerned that if they suppressed the Nosenko information now it would only resurface later. The memorandum discussed steps to take if Dulles is unable to persuade his colleagues to eliminate any reference to Nosenko's information in the final report.

19 Mr. Helms was asked if the exhibit containing this memorandum

refreshed his memory on the extent to which Mr. Dulles may have represented Agency interests while serving on the Commission. Helms replied that he did not read the memorandum this way. When the HSCA staffer tried a second time to ask Mr. Helms if Dulles was attempting to represent Agency views to the Commission, Helms again said "I don't get that from reading this exhibit."

121 Mr. Helms was very elusive when Representative Dodd asked him if he knew whether any member of the Warren Commission or its staff was ever informed by the CIA of their anti-Castro assassination plots. Helms replied that other assassination plots, ones not involving the Mafia, he does not accept as assassination plots saying "we have a definitional problem." When Dodd refined his question to ask if the Commission was ever informed about any of these attempts on the Cuban regime, whether on Castro, or to try and overthrow his government, or to try and knock him off, Helms replied "I don't know what the Warren Commission knew." Helms went on to say that he did not inform them of these things but noted that both Dulles and Senator Russell were aware of what was going on regarding Castro and that then DCI McCone also knew what was happening. Helms says that what the Commission knew from these individuals, he doesn't know. He said he never spoke to them himself about it.

126-150 Inclusion in the HSCA record of the April 25, 1967 IG report that reconstructs CIA involvement in plans to assassinate Fidel Castro, JFK Exhibit F-527.

151-152 Exchange between Dodd and Helms about whether or not McCone knew about assassination plots against Castro. Dodd searched for words that he and Helms could agree upon in discussing assassinations and what Dodd used in asking Helms about this were the words "efforts to get rid of Fidel Castro." When Dodd asked Helms if McCone knew about CIA's efforts to "get rid of Castro" Helms replied that "He certainly was on top of all the operations that we mounted against Cuba...[but Helms went on to say] I believe he has testified to the effect that he did not know of what he called specific efforts to kill Castro. I don't know whether he knew about it or not. I will accept his word."

152 Dodd quoted from the Church Committee report that McCone testified that he was not aware of the assassination plots against Castro which occurred during the years he was DCI and that he did not authorize them. Dodd then asked Helms for his reaction to these remarks. Helms said he would not "take issue with it. I would simply end up in a lengthy hassle between me and Mr. McCone. I have better ways to spend my time."

157 Helms said he did not talk with anyone on the Warren Commission staff about these efforts to get rid of Castro; on another matter when Dodd asked if August 1963 would have been the first time McCone was aware of any of the assassination efforts Helms said "I think that is plausible. I can accept that." When Dodd asked if Helms himself talked to the Commission or its staff about the efforts to get rid of Castro, Helms said no. When Dodd probed further to ask if Helms talked about these plots to anyone who had "any connection

whatsoever" with the Commission, Helms said "Not that I know of; no."

158 Helms and Dodd spar on the issue of why he did not tell the Warren Commission about the efforts to get rid of Castro or to overthrow the Cuban Government. Helms did not like Dodd's "singling him out" as to why he did not tell the Commission when Helms said these operations were known to officials [such as] the Attorney General, the Secretaries of State and Defense and the President of the United States. Helms said "it was a Government wide operation."

173 Helms talks about the AMLASH operation saying it "was a political action operation to get a political grouping together to unseat Castro...It was not an assassination operation or designed for that purpose."

182 When asked if CIA ever conducted an investigation to determine whether Oswald had been connected with the Agency, Helms said yes and believed McCone had presented a sworn affidavit to the Commission saying that Oswald had no formal connection of any kind with the Agency. Helms was clearly exasperated by the question for he added "Can't this ever be put to rest? What does it take to put it to rest?"

184 In response to a question as to whether it would have been standard operating procedure for the Agency to debrief Oswald upon his return from the USSR, Helms said "I would not have thought so." He thought it would be SOP for the Navy to debrief Oswald after he returned to the United States because

he had been a member of the Marine Corps. Helms said that in any event "the understandings" were that military officers were handled by "the intelligence organs" of the Defense Establishment.

189 When Helms was asked by an HSCA staffer whether 201 files are ever maintained on a covert basis or if there is ever such a thing as a fake 201 file, he replied that he did not know and said he was not aware of the "phenomenon" prior to this staffer's bringing it to his attention.

189-191 When Helms was asked about ZRRIFLE, he gave an indirect answer. He began by saying his understanding from the Church hearings was that it "originally started out as an indicator for a project which was supposed to cover a man who in turn had been taken on to have available an operational capability to kill people. This man was hired before I was aware of these things...after I became Deputy Director for Plans, I put on the shelf for good any and all use of his capacity for killing people." Helms went on to say that if ZRRIFLE continued it was in another context and he can not remember it precisely. Helms also says it was his recollection that Division D was the operational staff in the Agency which attempted to procure code and cipher materials overseas for use by the NSA. When Helms was asked if the reference to Division D (referred to in the ZRRIFLE memo described below which he was given a copy of to read) has no bearing at all upon any type of assassination program, he replied that he wouldn't have thought so and that if it was in Division D, it might have been there for convenience [saying] "Maybe they didn't know where else to put

it."

197-203 JFK Exhibit F-522 (handwritten notes) on Project ZRRIFLE is included in redacted form and mentions QJWIN and that files of the Bureau of Narcotics reflect an excellent performance by QJWIN. In discussing Project ZRRIFLE, mention is made of the objective being "the procurement of code and cipher materials, and information concerning such materials; in accordance with requirements levied on the Clandestine Services, primarily by the National Security Agency."

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