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Highlights of Hoover Testimony to Warren Probers

ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT
JOHN F. KENNEDY

Here are highlights of testimony given to the Warren Commission by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover when he appeared before the panel last May 14.

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Rep. Gerald Ford — Is the Federal Bureau of Investigation continuing its investigation of all possible ramifications of this assassination?

Hoover — That is correct. We are receiving and we, I expect, will continue to receive for days or maybe weeks to come, letters from individuals that normally would probably be in the category of what we would call crank letters in which various weird allegations are made or in which people have reported psychic vibrations. We are still running out letters of that character and in turn making a report to this Commission upon it, notwithstanding the fact that on the face of it the allegation is without any foundation . . .

I, personally, feel that any finding of the commission will not be accepted by everybody, because there are bound to be some extremists who have very pronounced views, without any foundation for them, who will disagree violently with whatever findings the Commission makes . . .

I can assure you so far as the FBI is concerned, the case will be continued in an open classification for all time. . . I think this will be a matter of controversy for years to come, just like the Lincoln assassination. . .

Hoover—If any person has fought communism, I certainly have fought it. We have tried to fight it and expose it in democratic ways . . .

is the thing we have to very definitely keep in mind in this whole problem in the security of the President and the successor to office.

Just how far you are going to go for his protection and his security. I don't think you can get absolute security without almost establishing a police state, and we don't want that. You can't put security in a black groove or a white groove. It is in a gray groove, and certain chances have to be taken. You are dealing with a human being when you are dealing with the President of the United States. President Johnson is a very down to earth human being, and it makes the security problem all the more difficult, but you can't bar him from the people.

Suggests Steps

There are certain things that can be done, and I submitted a memorandum to the Secret Service, and to the White House on certain security steps that might be taken and tightened up. But when you are dealing with the general public, and that is what has given me great concern in the recent expansion, of the criteria for dissemination that we have adopted after the assassination.

Prior to that time we reported to the Secret Service all information that dealt with individuals who were potential killers or by whom acts of violence might be anticipated. The Secret Service would take that information and would do with it as they saw fit. I gave great consideration to it because I am not very happy with the criteria expansion, but I felt we had to include subversives of various character, and extremists. We

have in turn, furnished their names to the Secret Service. I think five thousand names up to the present time already have been submitted and there are at least three or four thousand more that will be submitted within the next few months.

Then you come to the problem of what you are going to do when the Secret Service gets those names. They have to call upon the local authorities. Just recently, in the city of Chicago, when the President was there, the local authorities were asked

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to give assistance as they usually do to the Secret Service and they went to the homes of some of these people, and it resulted really almost in a house arrest.

Now, I don't think there is any place in this country for that kind of thing, but these people who belonged to extreme subversive organizations or organizations that advocated the overthrow of government by force and violence were told that they couldn't leave their house or if they did they would be accompanied by a police officer. That gives me great concern because in New York City alone, you run into maybe three or four thousand such individuals who would be members of subversive organization, and then you get into the twilight zone of subversive fronts.

Merely because a man belongs to subversive front organizations in my estimation doesn't mean that he is black-listed and is a menace to the country for life...

But I was startled when I learned the week before last of the incident in Chicago because there you come pretty close to a house arrest and we don't want that. We don't want a gestapo. We have got to, I think, maintain an even balance.

Oswald Checked

Allen Dulles — May I ask you, Mr. Hoover, was this house arrest based on names you had furnished the Secret Service and they furnished the local authorities?

Hoover—Yes, sir . . .

Hoover—We found no indication at all that Oswald was a man addicted to violence.

The first indication of an act of violence came after he, Oswald, had been killed, and Mrs. Oswald told us about the attempt on Gen. Walker's life by Oswald.

No one had known a thing about that . . .

We went back into his Marine Corps record. He was a "loner." He didn't have many friends. He kept to himself, and when he went abroad, he defected to Russia. The first evidence we had of him in our file was a statement to the press in Moscow. And then later, about

22 months later, he returned to the embassy there and according to the report of the embassy we have and which the Commission has been furnished with, the embassy gave him a clean bill. He had seen the error of his ways and disliked the Soviet atmosphere, et cetera, and they, therefore, cleared him, paid his way and paid his wife's way to come back to this country . . .

Rep. Hale Boggs — You have spent your life studying criminology and violence and subversion. Would you care to speculate on what may have motivated the man?

Hoover — My speculation, Mr. Boggs, is the fact that this man was no doubt a dedicated Communist. He preferred to call himself a Marxist but there you get into the field of semantics. He was a Communist, he sympathized thoroughly with the Communist cause.

I don't believe now, as I look back on it, that he ever changed his views when he asked to come back to this country. I personally feel that when he went to the American Embassy in Moscow originally to renounce his citizenship he should have been able right then and there to sign the renouncement. He never could have gotten back here. I think that should apply to almost all defectors who want to defect and become a part of a system of government that is entirely foreign to ours. If they have that desire, they have got that right, but if they indicate a desire for it, let them renounce their citizenship at once . . .

. . . We had interviewed him I think, three times. Of course, our interviews were predicated to find out whether he had been recruited by the Russian intelligence service, because they frequently do that.

No Proof

Boggs—And had he been?

Hoover — He had not been, so he said, and we have no proof that he was.

He had been over there long enough but they never gave him citizenship in Russia at all. I think they probably looked upon him more as a kind of a queer sort of individual and they

didn't trust him too strongly . . .

They do have espionage and sabotage schools in Russia and they do have an assassination squad that is used by them but there is no indication he had any association with anything . . .

There are many people who read the Daily Worker, or what is now the Worker, and you certainly can't brand them as hazards to the security of the country or as potential assassins. It is in that area that I am particularly concerned that we don't become hysterical and go too far in restricting the citizens of our country from exercising their civil and constitutional rights. The mere fact a person disagrees with you in a matter on communism doesn't mean he should be arrested . . .

But, all in all, I think that the enforcement of security and the enforcement of laws dealing with subversion ought to be handled in the American manner . . .

We have participated in the protection of the President since the assassination. The Secret Service indicates how many agents it needs when the President is traveling somewhere or going somewhere in Washington, and then I assign that number of agents to the Secret Service. They are not under my direction. They are under the direction of the Secret Service because under law they are charged with the protection of the President. We have never done that before, but I felt that it was something we must do if the Secret Service desired it . . .

Had To Be Cleared

Prior to the assassination of the President, a defector, before he came back was always cleared for return by a representative of the State Department or the military abroad. When he came back we immediately interviewed him. It had to be done at once to determine whether he could be a potential intelligence agent.

Now, in December of last year, following the assassination, we expanded the criteria of what should be furnished to the Secret Service, and all defectors automatically go on the list to be furnished to the Secret Service.

There are 36 defectors that we know of in this country who have been under investigation. Some of those men may have changed their views sincerely. Some of them may not have. But as a matter of general precaution, as a result of the Oswald situation, we are seeing that all go to the Secret Service.

J. Lee Rankin — I think the Commission would desire to have your comments or whatever you care to tell them, concerning the reasons why you did not furnish the information you had concerning Lee Harvey Oswald to the Secret Service prior to the time of the President's assassination.

Hoover — Well, I have gone into that very thoroughly because that was obviously one of the questions that I had in my

mind when the tragedy occurred in Dallas.

In going back over the record, and I have read each one of the reports dealing with that and the reports of Mr. Hosty (James Hosty, FBI agent in Dallas) who had dealt with the Oswald situation largely in Dallas, we had the matter that I have previously referred to, the report of the State Department that indicated this man was a thoroughly safe risk, he had changed his views, he was a loyal man now and had seen the light of day, so to speak.

How intensive or how extensive that interview in Moscow was, I don't know. But, nevertheless, it was in a State Department document that was furnished to us.

Quizzed Oswald

Now, we interviewed Oswald a few days after he arrived. We did not interview him on arrival at the port of entry because that is always undesirable by reason of the fact it is heavily covered by press, and many relatives generally are there, so we prefer to do it after the man has settled down for two or three days and become all composed. We do it in the privacy of our office or wherever he may be, or in his own home, or apartment. We interviewed him twice, in regard to that angle that we were looking for. We had no indication at this time anything other than his so-called Marxist leanings, Marxist beliefs.

We wanted to know whether he had been recruited by the Soviet government as an intelligence agent, which is a frequent and constant practice. There is not a year goes by but that individuals and groups of individuals, sometimes on those cultural exchanges, go through Russia and recruits are enlisted by the Russian intelligence, usually through blackmail. The individual is threatened that if he doesn't come back to this country and work for them they will expose the fact that he is a homosexual or degenerate or has been indiscreet . . .

In Oswald's case we had no suspicion that any pressure like that had been brought to bear

voluntarily and had obviously wanted to live in Russia and had married a Russian woman.

After those interviews had been completed the next incident was the difficulty he had at New Orleans.

We were concerned there as to whether he was functioning officially for the Fair Play for Cuba Committee which was financed and supported by Castro and Castro's government, and, if he was, where he obtained money and with whom he had dealt.

Kept Track of Him

He apparently had the leaflets printed himself. There was no reason for us, then, to have any suspicion that he had any element of danger in him.

However, we did not ignore or forget the fact that he was still in the country. We kept track of him and when he went from New Orleans to Dallas, and that was one of the reasons why Hosty went to the home of Mrs. Paine. She told us where Oswald was working, at the Texas book house. Hosty gave her his telephone number and his name so that if there was any information or any contact she wanted to make she could phone him at the Dallas office.

Up to that time, there had been no information that would have warranted our reporting him as a potential danger or

hazard to the security or the safety of the President or the Vice President, so his name was not furnished at the time to Secret Service.

Under the new criteria which we have now put into force and effect, it would have been furnished because we now include all defectors. As to the original criteria, which we felt were sound, and which we felt no one, not even the most extreme civil rights proponent could take exception to, we limited the furnishing of names to persons potentially dangerous to the physical well being of the President. We included emotionally unstable people who had threatened the President or the Vice President. . . .

Facilities Limited

Dulles — How many names, Mr. Director, in general, could the Secret Service process? Aren't their facilities limited as to dealing with vast numbers of names because of their limited personnel . . .

Hoover — I think they are extremely limited. The Secret Service is a very small organization and that is why we are fortifying them, so to speak, or supplementing them by assigning agents of our Bureau which is, of course, quite a burden on us.

Now, the Secret Service has a very small group and I would

estimate that the names we have sent number over 5,000. I would guess there are about another four thousand that will go over in the next month to them.

Frankly, I don't see how they can go out and recheck those names. They will have to call upon the local authorities, unless the Secret Service force is enlarged considerably so that they can handle it entirely on their own . . .

Many local police departments are capable and efficient, some are not. Many have good judgment and some have not. Whoever you have a police department of 10, 15, 20 thousand men you are bound to find a few who will just barge in and do something which better judgment would dictate should not be done as in the incident which occurred out in the Midwest where they placed these people practically under house arrest.

I think it was very bad judgment and should not have been done but the Secret Service, of course, turned the names over to the local authorities, and the local authorities do what they think is right.

Now, I guess their attitude with all justice to them is "Well, we will resolve the risk in our favor. If we keep these people under surveillance and keep them in the house until the President gets out of town nothing can happen from them" That is what you would call totalitarian security. I don't think you can have that kind of security in this country without having a great wave of criticism against it.



J. EDGAR HOOVER