

Tracing Any Kennedy Conspirator Is Given Little Chance by Officials

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 31 — The chances of identifying and prosecuting conspirators in the murder of President John F. Kennedy, 15 years after the assassination, appeared remote, several Federal law enforcement officials said today.

The officials declined to comment for attribution on a report by the House Select Committee on Assassinations yesterday that it had found evidence that both Mr. Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the civil rights leader, might have been the victims of separate conspiracies and had not been killed by gunmen acting alone. The committee is expected to give the evidence on which its conclusions were based in its final report this spring.

But the Federal officials said that, from studying press accounts and evidence at public hearings of the committee, they felt it would be, as one put it, "extremely difficult, if not impossible," to identify, apprehend and prosecute conspirators in either death.

Other Countries Ruled Out

The committee's report takes great care to state that, based on the evidence available to it, the Soviet Union, the Republic of Cuba, organized crime or anti-Castro forces were not responsible for Mr. Kennedy's murder. But the committee refused to rule out the possibility that individuals in the anti-Castro groups or individual criminals had done the killing.

"In both cases," said one Federal official, "many of the key people are dead or

have disappeared." Lee Harvey Oswald, Mr. Kennedy's apparent killer, is dead, as are Jack Ruby, who shot Mr. Oswald to death, and two key figures in the King case.

The Federal officials said that they could not rule out the possibility that the "Carter Justice Department" might make a "political decision" to open further investigations of the two deaths. They said they were making their evaluation of the first formal finding that Mr. Kennedy and Dr. King may have been the victims of conspiracies only from a professional investigative standpoint.

Representative Louis Stokes, the Ohio Democrat who presided over the committee, acknowledged in an interview that it

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He said that he and members of the committee hoped the Justice Department would order a competent analysis of a film taken of the Kennedy shooting by Charles L. Bronson, which had been made available to the committee too late for it to properly investigate.

He also urged, as the committee did in its report, that the department review the evidence provided by experts on acoustics, which led in part to the conclusion yesterday that "President Kennedy was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy."

Mr. Stokes said he also hoped that the Federal Bureau of Investigation would open an investigation of allegations that there was a conspiracy in St. Louis to kill Dr. King. He said the committee's final report would include circumstantial evidence that linked a \$50,000 bounty offer for Dr. King's murder in 1967 to James Earl Ray Jr., the man convicted of killing the civil rights leader. He was the gunman, the committee concluded.

1973 Allegation Traced

Mr. Stokes said the committee developed this information by following up on an allegation that had come to the F.B.I. in 1973 but which the bureau never investigated. The allegation, later made in public testimony by Russell G. Byres, was that two Imperial, Mo., businessmen were offering \$50,000 to anyone who would kill Dr. King.

Mr. Stokes said that William Webster,

the bureau director, had withheld a current investigation of the matter so as not to interrupt the committee's work. He said that Mr. Webster, however, asked him if it would be all right for the bureau to conduct an internal administrative inquiry to determine why the allegation was ignored.

Mr. Stokes said that he now hoped that the F.B.I. would investigate the matter formally "for its own satisfaction."

Nevertheless, it was clear today that the committee's findings on Dr. King's death were overshadowed by the new evidence on the Kennedy assassination.

Last spring the committee discovered a dictograph belt recording of a radio transmission of one of the police motorcycles in President Kennedy's motorcade in Dealey Plaza in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. Though the Warren Commission was aware of the tape recording, without special examination it appeared to contribute little new evidence to the investigation.

Acoustics Expert Called

But the House Select Committee asked Dr. James E. Barger, an acoustics expert of the Boston concern of Bolt, Beranek and Newman, to make a more detailed analysis of the recording. Dr. Barger's group had done some of the acoustical analysis on the 18 1/2-minute gap in the Nixon tapes.

Dr. Barger, key committee personnel have told The Times, concluded in early August that the tape contained the noise of a fourth gunshot. This indicated that two gunmen fired at Mr. Kennedy and thus there might have been a conspiracy.

Up until virtually the night before Dr. Barger took the witness stand in a public session of the committee on Sept. 11, Mr. Stokes and Robert G. Blakey, the committee's chief counsel, and certain key investigators were convinced the acoustics expert would report the fourth shot.

Instead, Dr. Barger said under oath that he could only confirm that there was a "50-50 probability" that the tape contained the noise of an additional gunshot.

"I think at the last minute he realized that his whole professional career would come to be identified with this report and he wanted some corroboration for it," one committee member said.

Conclusion Is Supported

It was after Dr. Barger's testimony that the tape was turned over to two other acoustics experts, Mark Weiss and Ernest Aschkenasy of Queens College in New York for further tests. The two, supported by Dr. Barger, testified last week that there was a 95 percent chance that the tape contained the noise of a fourth gunshot, and that the gunshot had probably come from a grassy knoll a little ahead and to the right of President Kennedy's car.

Mr. Stokes said this new evidence melded closely with evidence of a second gunman gathered by his committee and by the Warren Commission. For instance, he said, some 21 percent of the 178 witnesses interviewed by the Warren Commission said they believed the shots had come from the grassy knoll.

In one case, a motorcycle policeman

was so sure that he had started up the slope with his gun drawn. In another instance, the chief of the Secret Service detail riding in the lead car of the Kennedy motorcade had said in testimony he believed the location of the shot was definitely the grassy knoll. There were also two reports that a puff of smoke, as though from a gunshot, had been seen in the grassy knoll area.

The Warren Commission also found evidence that a man had left the grassy knoll area shortly after President Kennedy was shot by identifying himself to police as a Secret Service agent. There were no agents assigned to this area, however,

Committee Cites Oswald

Lee Harvey Oswald, the man who, both the Warren Commission and the committee concluded, did the shooting fatal to President Kennedy, was in the Texas Book Depository Building to the rear of the Presidential car. Therefore, proof of a shot from the grassy knoll would confirm the existence of a second gunman.

If the committee is correct, and President Kennedy was killed by a group of conspirators, law enforcement officials have said it would have strong ramifications for the concept of political security in this country.

A good deal of organization of security for political figures has been based on the belief that the greatest danger lay in the attack by an isolated madman, not by a conspiracy of political radicals, foreign agents or paid criminals. Groups operating with this kind of economic and technical support could be far more dangerous to Presidents and other leading figures than individual taking a shot at a public gathering.

Though Mr. Stokes said the full committee report, expected to be published by late March, would contain evidence that Mr. Oswald was not a "loner," he acknowledged that it would shed little light on which of Mr. Oswald's associations could have been the connection with a plot to kill President Kennedy. It is unclear whether there is sufficient public or political support for further investigation to draw up these links.
