

C.I.A. Assassination Unit Described

WASHINGTON, Oct. 3 (AP) — The Central Intelligence Agency established an official group during the early nineteen-sixties to develop plans for removing foreign leaders by means that included assassination, two Senators and two former intelligence officials said today.

Senator Frank Church, chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence, confirmed the existence of the group, but he said that the plans it developed were never carried out. A member of the committee staff said that the group "petered out" in 1963.

There was no evidence that President Kennedy, who was in office at the time, knew of or approved of the group.

Mr. Church, an Idaho Democrat, refused to provide details about the unit, but he made it clear that the plans it developed were separate from the C.I.A.'s alleged plot to poison Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba in 1961 in connection with the Bay of Pigs invasion.

"This capability had no connection with the Castro business," Senator Church said. "It was a separate mission." He said that other details should not be made public until the committee releases its report on alleged C.I.A. assassination plots. The report is expected to be made public this month.

A former high official of the intelligence agency, who declined to be identified, acknowl-

edged in an interview the existence of an "executive action" group that probably included no more than three persons. He said that they developed methods for the removal of unfriendly foreign leaders. He said that in addition to assassination, the means could have included coups or shipping foreign leaders "off to the Riviera."

A second former C.I.A. official said the planning effort had begun in the wake of the alleged attempt to poison Premier Castro and was intended to maintain an "assassination capability" in case it was needed for use against other foreign leaders.

The first hint of the group's existence came in the prepared text of a speech by Senator Walter F. Mondale, the Minnesota Democrat, at Denison College in Granville, Ohio.

In that speech, Senator Mondale, a member of the intelligence committee, said that Richard M. Helms, a former C.I.A. director, and Richard Bissell, a former head of the agency's clandestine operations, "have claimed that they had 'higher-level' authorization . . . for setting up and running an institutionalized assassination capability within the C.I.A. called 'executive action.'"

But, Mr. Mondale said, "when we pressed them, neither Helms nor Bissell would say that any president, or anyone represent-

ing a president ever gave specific orders to undertake an assassination or develop assassination plans and capabilities."

Neither Mr. Helms, now the United States Ambassador to Iran, nor Mr. Bissell, now a business consultant in Hartford, Conn., could be reached immediately for comment.

David Aaron, a member of the intelligence committee's staff who was traveling with Mr. Mondale, confirmed the accuracy of the text of the Senator's speech.

Mr. Aaron identified the head of the alleged planning group as William K. Harvey, whose name has also figured in press accounts of C.I.A. plots against Premier Castro.

Mr. Harvey, now a lawyer in Indianapolis, has repeatedly declined to comment on reports about his role in assassination plots.

Mr. Aaron said the planning group existed for "two or three years" and "petered out" sometime in 1963, when Mr. Harvey was transferred to the C.I.A. station in Rome.

The former high official in the intelligence agency said: "In the early days of the Kennedy Administration, there was a request made that the C.I.A. develop an 'executive action' plan." He said he did not know where the request had originated, but suggested that the group was set up before the alleged plot against Premier Castro.