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A Straw In The Wind

In the violent winds of political controversy, roofs of carefully built structures sometimes are lifted, affording glimpses into rooms and places otherwise hidden from view. And bits of secrets are blown about. Many the world over recognized the assassination of President John F. Kennedy immediately as political murder in motivation and objective, but truth was locked from sight in the temple of lies built by the Warren Commission which, in executing the mandate and policy of Kennedy's successor, falsified the event as an unmotivated senseless killing. Critics, like sappers, undermined the evidentiary foundations of the government's case, and some, convinced the way to truth lay in political analysis, research, and exposure, and confident time and work would disclose what the government hid, sought motive and source in interests alien to Kennedy's policies and the interests they nourished. But no one dreamed the storm attending efforts of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to probe the "decision-making process" of the Johnson Administration in the matter of North Vietnamese attacks in August 1964 on American naval vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin would uncover a part of the truth about the assassination of Johnson's predecessor. And with vengeful irony it is none other than ^{I.F.}Stone, a supporter of the Warren Commission's findings, who is the unintentional instrument of exposure. In the first installment "in what will be an exploration in depth of McNamara's record as Secretary of Defense," under the title, McNamara and Tonkin Bay; The Unanswered Questions, in the New York Review of Books, March 28, 1968, Stone wrote:

" I now want to bring up a matter I cannot prove, though I am willing to give the (Fullbright) Committee the name of

The witness who will confirm it. This is that a few days after the assassination of Kennedy, Secretary McNamara, with the support of McGeorge Bundy and Secretary Rusk urged on the new President the need for a decisive commitment in Vietnam and insisted-over Johnson's reluctance to be rushed quite that fast into so important a decision-that it had to be made quickly. This is known to quite a few insiders---."

Stone feels the "Committee ought to recall McNamara and insist that he clear up the whole question of just when this major step-up in the war was initiated. For all this goes back to the question not just of decision making in a crisis but of crisis making to support a secretly pre-arranged decision (Stone's emphasis). Here the war-making power of Congress was clearly usurped by a private cabal in the executive department...." ↗

Some support for Stone's allegations undoubtedly will be forthcoming, and error will be noted in his account. Other interpretations than his will be placed on whatever is factual in his revelation. And it is equally certain his disclosure will be contradicted, repudiated, and derided. It is the fate of both lies and truth in the maelstrom of American politics.

But two politicians in particular should be interested keenly in probing the truth of what Stone wrote. One is Senator Fullbright, the other New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison. For Fullbright, ostensibly concerned above all with Executive arrogation of Constitutionally exclusive Congressional authority to declare war and approve peace, Stone's allegation of a "private cabal in the executive department which "usurped" the war making power of Congress and resorted to "crisis-making to support a secretly pre-

arranged decision," should be an irresistible invitation to investigation. For if true, blinding light would be shed, not only on the genesis of the Johnsonian policy of gradual escalation of the undeclared war in Vietnam, but on intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965, and on the miscarriage of the Pueblo affair when spok^kesmen for the Pentagon appeared in the White House in less than half an hour after the American ship was seized by North Korean naval vessels, with a plan apparently rejected by Johnson for commando seizure of the North Korean port of Wonsan where the Pueblo and its crew had been taken by their captors.

Mr. Garrison should be especially interested in Stone's revelation of a "private cabal" which resorted to "crisis making to support a secretly pre-arranged decision," for Stone is charging conspiracy.

^{Who was} While Garrison thundered ~~in the index~~ about EXCIA agents using anti Castro refugees to assassinate President Kennedy in revenge for Presidential abortion of the Bay of Pigs invasion, and mumbled later about responsibility of the "military-industrial" complex for the murder, Stone, his eye intent on other targets, indicates nevertheless a fascinating investigatory road to pursue in alleging a conspiracy in the executive department by officials of Kennedy's Administration strong enough in "cabal" to confront and prevail upon his successor. But Stone, who is committed to Johnson's policy with respect to his predecessor's murder and makes no comment in the first installment of his study in depth of McNamara's record as Secretary of Defense on the possible connection between the conspiracy he alleges and the assassination of President Kennedy, has no intention of pursuing this line of investigation. [Those who are interested in doing so will note the "cabal" urged on the new President the need for a "decisive com-

mitment in Vietnam," which Johnson, understandably enough so soon after Kennedy's death and in view of his public commitment to continue his predecessor's policy of detente with the communist world, was reluctant to undertake at that time. Obviously, the removal of Kennedy and the accession to power of his successor, a practiced demagogue and servitor of large and powerful military and defense interests, created a favorable occasion for the "cabal" to press its anticommunist wa^v policy on the new President. Removal of President Kennedy was the indispensable condition for the change in government policy urged on his successor. As removal by political electoral process was precluded for more than a year and appeared unlikely for five years, elimination of Kennedy by murder was the only means left those interests whose prosperity and power demanded quick and basic re^{ri}mentation of American foreign policy. Stone's "cabal" comprised high government officials; he does not suggest they plotted to seize power, scrap the Constitution, over^othrow existing political institutions, and install a dictatorship. Their aim was less[?] reversal of American foreign policy. Was not this also the aim of the assassination? Was not attribution of the murder of President Kennedy to a communist by the Dallas police, Texas officials, and the mass-communication media immediately following the assassination intended to whip up national an^{ti} communist hysteria with the objective of reversing Kennedy's policy of detente with the communist world?

Was Kennedy killed at the behest of the "cabal?" In time we will know. Now we can note Stone charges the conspiratorial "cabal" engulfed Johnson and through him reversed the policy orientation of the government. In doing so it Premeditatedly

and surreptitiously usurped the exclusive war-making power of Congress. The boldness, ruthlessness, and secrecy of the "cabal", as revealed by Stone, are of a piece with the assassination of Kennedy. The thought is inescapable: did the men conspiring to constrain the most powerful state in the world and a nation of almost 200 million to wage war on a part of the communist world in behalf of vast military and industrial interests undertake the assassination of so powerful and otherwise immediately irremovable an obstacle to the realization of their plans as the President of the United States? The idea acquires force from its ^{CO} ~~collary~~ ^W ~~more~~ powerful the obstacle the more compelling the necessity to eliminate it by whatever means were available; in the circumstances there was only ~~one means~~ murder.

One is reminded of the secret "cabal" in the government which, appalled and outraged by Lincoln's policy of temporizing with slavery after military victory, and of conciliating the defeated slaveholders, either inspired Booth's conspiracy to kill the President or, on learning of it, permitted it to reach fruition and then falsified the event as the vengeful deed of an embittered Southern sympathizer acting in conspiracy with the Confederate government. Who having read it can forget the impassioned accusation flung by President Andrew Johnson from the steps of the White House in February 1866, ^{during} the conspiracy trial of Booth's accomplices, against the Radical Republican opponents of his conciliatory policies toward the South?:

"Are those who want to destroy our institutions and change the character of the government not satisfied with the blood that has been shed?"

Are they not satisfied with one martyr? Does not the blood of Lincoln appease the vengeance and wrath of the opponents of this government? Have they not honor and courage enough to effect the removal of the Presidential ~~obstacle~~ obstacle otherwise than through the hands of the assassin?"
(Mask For Treason; The Lincoln Murder Trial, Vaughan Shelton, P. 25)

Had the Radical Republicans succeeded later in impeaching Johnson would Kennedy have lived? In pondering the implications of this question Constitutional lawyers, historians, and Americans generally should take rueful note "Chairman" Nikita Krushchev was removed from the summit of power in the Soviet Union and reduced to impotence ^{by normal Soviet legal-political process} less than a year after the murder of the head of state of the United States.

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