Prep: S.A. Stern/ew/3-13-64
cc: Mr. Willens
Mr. Stern
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PC 6
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March 13, 1964

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE

At 3:00 P.M. on Wednesday, March 11, representatives of the Department of the Treasury and of the Commission met to consider Secretary Dillon's letter of January 28, 1964, to the Chairman, and his response of February 28, 1964.

Present for the Commission - Chairman Warren, General Counsel Rankin, Messrs. Willens and Stern; for the Treasury - Chief Rowley of Secret Service and Robert Carswell, Special Assistant to Secretary Dillon.

Chairman Warren explained that he had two basic problems:

a. The Commission is unwilling to agree in advance to any limitation upon its prerogative of suggesting any change in arrangements for Presidential protection which it may consider desirable. Of course, the Commission has no interest in publishing in its report any information which might in any way suggest opportunities to a possible assailant. However, the danger of this happening should be eliminated by restricting the information which the Commission obtains about particular protection matters (see point b, below). The Chairman felt that the Commission would itself have to determine what could properly be covered in its report, without being subject to veto by the agency involved, or by the President.*

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*The question of an ultimate determination by the President whether information should appear in the report arose because of a suggestion made at an earlier meeting, on March 6, 1964, when Messrs. Rankin, Willens, and Stern met with Mr. Carswell and General Counsel of the Treasury Belin. At that conference, a possible solution was discussed which would involve notice by the Commission to the Agency originating information concerning Presidential protection that the Commission intended to treat this information in its public report, an opportunity by the agency involved to attempt to dissuade the Commission from doing so because of security, and an opportunity to seek Presidential review of any disagreement.

b. The Chairman also stated that it did not appear to him necessary for the Commission to be informed as to any detail of present procedures for Presidential protection where any question of security is involved. The Commission's main function in this area is to appraise the job done at the time of the assassination by the federal agencies sharing responsibility, and only secondarily to suggest any improvements in procedures or liaison arrangements which occur to the Commission in the course of its main inquiry. In the Chairman's view, the Commission does not require detailed knowledge of present operating procedures which are highly classified and the revelation of which might increase the potential danger to the President. The Chairman stated that he would not want any member of the Commission or its staff to have the burden of knowing such classified details. This should not, in his view, foreclose the Commission from any useful and unclassified information as to operating procedures, and particularly information regarding Protective Research preventative activities.

There ensued a general discussion of the best manner in which to afford the Commission the information it requires, without compromising important security considerations. The Treasury representatives made clear the desire of the Department of the Treasury to withhold nothing from the Commission, provided appropriate security measures could be observed.

A sharp distinction was drawn between information regarding the actual events in Dallas and the advance preparations for the Dallas trip on the one hand, and general procedures and arrangements for the future. As to the information regarding Dallas, all agreed that the Commission was vitally concerned with specific details, and that it should be entirely free to comment upon any aspect of the Secret Service performance during and immediately before the Texas trip, subject only to discussion with Treasury of any aspect which might raise security concerns.

(For example, the unlikely case of something which seemed to the Commission a defect in protection arrangements, but which the Secret Service regarded as incurable, and where revealing the defect would increase the potential danger.) However, as to any examination by the Commission of procedures and arrangements for the future, security concerns would be paramount, and would limit the information to be made available to the Commission.

It was evident that the matter could not satisfactorily be considered in abstract propositions, but rather that it was preferable to proceed on a tentative basis, to ascertain the extent of the information reasonably required for this aspect of the Commission's task and the questions, if any, raised thereby. As a first step, it was agreed that the Commission would prepare a series of questions on any aspect of Presidential protection, both at Dallas and as to future procedures and arrangements. These questions would be submitted to the Treasury Department and formal answers given, within the limits of security. Whenever it became apparent that a question could not be answered satisfactorily without revealing security information, the matter would be discussed further. However, it was hoped that the staff of the Commission working with the Secret Service and Mr. Carswell, would be able to obtain all information required by the Commission for the performance of its tasks, without raising serious security questions.