Assassination Made Castro Fear for Cuba, Papers Show

By NEIL A. LEWIS

WASHINGTON, Aug. 19 — Newly released intelligence documents provide evidence that President Fidel Castro of Cuba put his military forces on high alert immediately after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, because he feared that the United States would blame Cuba and launch an invasion in retaliation.

The papers disclosed today by a Federal board, created to review documents related to the assassination, included intercepted conversations in which Mr. Castro is described as being frightened about the possibility that Washington would use the assassination as an excuse to topple his Communist Government. Lee Harvey Oswald, who was arrested for the killing, had ties to pro-Castro groups in the United States and had lived in the Soviet Union.

The documents also show that John J. McCloy, a prominent figure in diplomatic and political circles who energetically pushed the single-assassin theory as a member of the Warren Commission, had privately expressed doubts to others that Oswald was the lone killer.

Michael J. Beschloss, a historian who has written extensively about President Kennedy and his relations with Mr. Castro, said the new information was in line with previous reports that Mr. Castro feared deeply that the United States could invade his country at any time.

"Given that obsession, the second he hears of the Kennedy assassination he must have thought that, if the American people think I was behind it, the first thing they would demand is that President Johnson invade Cuba," Mr. Beschloss said.

Kennedy's assassination in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, has produced a vast body of scholarship, fantasy and conjecture. The Warren Commission, prodded vigorously by Mr. McCloy, concluded that Oswald acted alone. Even to those who accept that conclusion, Oswald's precise motives remain unclear. Oswald was killed by Jack Ruby, a sometime Dallas nightclub owner, in the basement of Dallas police headquarters two days after Kennedy was killed, adding to the

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The intelligence reports suggest that Mr. Castro was caught off guard by the Kennedy assassination. Mr. Beschloss said the documents add weight to the belief that the Cuban leader had no role in Kennedy's death. Several authors have theorized that Mr. Castro wanted Kennedy killed in retaliation for earlier Central Intelligence Agency plots to kill him.

Some documents describe a build-up of naval forces in eastern Cuba and troop movements throughout the country in the first few days after Kennedy was killed. Other informers describe Mr. Castro as nervous and even frightened about the consequences for Cuba.

The documents were released by the Assassination Records Review Board, which was created by statute in 1994 and is authorized to review the 3.7 million pages of Government documents that have been deemed to have some connection to the Kennedy assassination.

The documents released today are from the National Security Agency, based at Ford Meade, Md., which acts as the intelligence community's global eavesdropper. The documents appear to be intercepts of communications or conversations among various foreign diplomats and spies.

In the 84 documents released today, large parts have been blacked out. Nonetheless, they provide a fascinating glimpse of the kind of snatches of intelligence gathered by the security agency's electronic eavesdropping equipment.

The documents about Mr. McCloy, for example, are accounts of remarks he made in a European trip in the weeks after the assassination. The sources are deleted from the documents, but the Assassinations Records Review Board identifies the conversation in which Mr. McCloy is said to have expressed skepticism about Oswald as the lone assassin as one between two Europeans.

Mr. McCloy is quoted by a European official as having told another European that he had "serious doubts of the credibility of the investigation" and believed there might have been two people involved in the Kennedy killing.

But a few weeks later, Mr. McCloy is quoted as having told officials identified as from Eastern Europe that he was angry at criticism of the Warren Commission and that he believed that Oswald acted alone.

Mr. McCloy, a New York lawyer, was widely regarded as the archetypal Establishment figure; at various times, he was president of the World Bank and chairman of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the Council on Foreign Relations. He was a special consultant on national security matters under Presidents Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. During the Warren Commission deliberations, he argued that it was beneficial for domestic tranquility to conclude that Oswald acted alone.