

same questions wondering whether they would get different replies from the heads of the two agencies." Angleton gave examples of what questions might be asked and how they should be answered:

- (1) Q. Was Oswald ever an agent of the CIA?
A. No.
- (2) Q. Does the CIA have any evidence showing that a conspiracy existed to assassinate President Kennedy?
A. No.

Angleton chose his team from his own counterintelligence staff, which was preoccupied with the Soviet Union and the KGB. There was no one from Fitzgerald's task force on Cuba. Exhaustively, the Angleton group analyzed Oswald's activities in the Soviet Union, and assiduously it stayed away from every Oswald link with Cuba. Indeed, as the Senate report noted with astonishment, AM/LASH, who still had access to high officials in Havana, "was never asked about the assassination of President Kennedy in meetings with the CIA in 1964 and 1965." It could only be assumed the CIA was afraid of what Cubela's answer might be. Angleton, who believed that all Communist activities basically started with the KGB, would have loved to find a Russian conspiracy. Unfortunately for that search, Lieutenant Colonel Yuri Nosenko of the KGB, who had defected early in 1964, only offered information to counter such a theory. The report of his interrogation was filed with a mass of material at the end of the Warren investigation, but never mentioned in the hearings. Angleton, to this day, believes Nosenko was a plant, although the CIA — after three years of dealings with Nosenko as their prisoner — had long ago concluded that Nosenko told the truth.

The Warren Commission did not push the CIA for information about Oswald's Cuban associations, this despite the fact — or perhaps because of the fact — that one of its members was former CIA Director Allen Dulles, who knew about the early plots against Castro. Of thirty-four requests for information from the Warren Commission to the CIA, fifteen dealt with the Soviet Union, one with Cuba. That one asked about Jack Ruby's alleged visit to Cuba in 1959. In the Warren Commission, former Senator John Sherman

Cooper told the Senate committee, no word was ever said about CIA anti-Castro plots. "The subject never came up . . ."

CIA officials, such as Helms, who knew about AM/LASH, insisted in 1975 that there had been no reason to see any connection with the Kennedy assassination. But in 1965, when the CIA finally gave up on AM/LASH, fearing that the operation had become too widely known and might blow up in its face, the counterintelligence officer of the task force on Cuba wrote this assessment for the CIA:

The AM/LASH circle is wide and each new friend of whom we learn seems to have knowledge of plan. I believe the problem is a more serious and more basic one. Fidel reportedly knew that this group was plotting against him and once enlisted its support. Hence, we cannot rule out the possibility of provocation.

By then the Warren Commission — to whom Helms had indicated that the case would remain open — had gone out of business.

"All the Government agencies have fully discharged their responsibility to cooperate," said this high board of inquiry, as it concluded:

. . . no evidence that Oswald was involved with any person or group in a conspiracy to assassinate the President . . .
. . . no evidence to show that Oswald was employed, persuaded, or encouraged by any foreign government to assassinate President Kennedy . . .

The Warren Commission's confidence in 1964 that government agencies "fully discharged their responsibility to cooperate" sounded in 1976 like a melancholy travesty as the final report of the Senate Intelligence Committee concluded that "for different reasons, both the CIA and the FBI failed in, or avoided carrying out, certain of their responsibilities in this matter." The FBI mainly covered up the extent of its contacts with Oswald; the CIA worked assiduously to steer the Warren Commission away from any knowledge of its own activities in Cuba.

Would anything be different if the Warren Commission had not been so manipulated?

The commission might have probed the "Castro retaliation" theory and run up against lack of evidence of Cuban involvement. It might have investigated the alternate theory of the commission staff — that Oswald could have been programmed by anti-Castro exiles to simulate a pro-Castro assassination — and also run up against a blank wall. What the commission might have discovered was not evidence of a conspiracy, but a clear indication of what set Oswald off. It could probably have wound up its historic mission less baffled about his possible motive, less mystified about when the assassination idea formed in his disordered mind.

Had the commission not been so completely sidetracked from every Cuban lead, it might have found what this reporter was able to find — buried in the commission's own files or later dug up in congressional investigations and from other sources.

Where the "Castro revenge" theory had run aground was on the lack of evidence that Oswald had any contact with anyone who knew about the CIA's secret plotting against the Cuban leader. But Oswald did not need to have such contact to reach the conclusion that Castro, his hero, was being threatened and that he, in turn, could become a hero in Cuba by responding to the threat.

Oswald, his wife, Marina, testified, was an avid newspaper reader. On September 9, 1963, Castro's Associated Press interview was printed on the top of page 7 of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. It started this way:

HAVANA (AP) — Prime Minister Fidel Castro said Saturday night "United States leaders" would be in danger if they helped in any attempt to do away with leaders of Cuba.

Bitterly denouncing what he called recent U.S.-prompted raids on Cuban territory, Castro said, "We are prepared to fight them and answer in kind. United States leaders should think that if they are aiding terrorist plans to eliminate Cuban leaders, they themselves will not be safe."

The interview was not mentioned in the Warren Commission's report. It was not simply an oversight. A staff member, Wesley J. Liebler, had written a memorandum urging that attention be paid to it, but General Counsel J. Lee Rankin ruled against its inclusion

on the ground that there was no evidence that Oswald had seen it. Liebler shot off another memo saying that Rankin seemed to be applying a different standard with regard to some Dallas leaflets that Oswald had almost certainly never seen, and he charged that the exclusion of the Castro interview had "obvious political overtones."

The CIA's liaison officer with the Warren Commission, Raymond Rocca, said — eleven years later — that he thought the Castro interview was pretty important. In May 1975 Rocca wrote a memorandum to the Rockefeller Commission expressing the personal view that the Castro threat "represented a more-than-ordinary attempt to get a message on the record in the United States"* and that it "must be considered of great significance in the light of the pathological evolution of Oswald's passive-aggressive make-up." When Rocca wrote this, he still did not know about his agency's anti-Castro plotting, which would be revealed only a few months later.

The Castro accusation of "plans to eliminate Cuban leaders" and his warning to "United States leaders" came at a time when Oswald was in New Orleans in a state of agitation and frustration. In July, he had lost his job in a coffee machinery plant. In August, he had been arrested in a scuffle while distributing pro-Castro leaflets, and had engaged in angry debate on the radio, asserting that "Cuba is the only real revolutionary country in the world today."

After the publication of the Castro interview, events in Oswald's life began to move decisively. On September 17, he cashed his unemployment check at a Winn Dixie store. On September 23, he sent his wife and child to Irving, Texas, to live with their friend Ruth Paine. Oswald stayed behind in New Orleans, ostensibly to look for work.

Instead, in great secrecy, he left by bus for Mexico City, arriving on September 27 and going almost directly to the Cuban consulate to ask for an immediate visa, announcing himself as a "friend of Cuba." He signed an application for a transit visa, saying he was on

*In a June 1977 interview with Barbara Walters on ABC, Castro said he was reluctant to make charges against the late John and Robert Kennedy, but did say, "I think it is absolutely impossible that the CIA adopts decisions of such importance and such intransigence on its own. It seems to me absolutely impossible that they could have carried out...these kinds of plans...for almost ten years without the express or explicit authorization of the top authorities of the country."

his way to the Soviet Union, but Marina Oswald later testified that Cuba had been his real destination.

Silvia Duran, a Mexican clerk in the Cuban consulate, arrested on the day after the Kennedy assassination, told the Mexican police that Oswald, upon being refused permission to enter Cuba until he could obtain a Soviet visa, got into an argument with Consul Eusebio Asque. The consul finally ordered Oswald to leave the office, telling him that he would never give him a visa because "a person like him, instead of aiding the Cuban Revolution, was really doing it harm."

The CIA had attempted to prevent the arrest of Señora Duran, but by the time its station in Mexico City got the message from Washington, it was too late. Asked why the CIA tried to interfere, Thomas Karamessines, who had been Helms' deputy in covert operations, was quoted, in April 1976 testimony before the Senate committee, as having "speculated that the CIA feared the Cubans were responsible [for the Kennedy assassination] and that Duran might reveal this during an interrogation." In other words, if the Cubans had, in fact, been involved in the Kennedy assassination, the CIA would have preferred to see that information suppressed rather than risk disclosure of the agency's plotting against Castro.

Señora Duran's statement — which the Warren Commission had to get directly from the Mexican police — did not implicate the Cubans in any way. The consular clerk, who later complained of having been mishandled by the police, did not say in her statement what had made her boss so angry with Oswald as to throw him out of the consulate and accuse him of wanting to harm Cuba. There was clearly something missing in her account. Coleman and Slawson, the commission staff lawyers in charge of investigating conspiracy theories, wanted to go to Mexico City and interview her, but Chief Justice Earl Warren vetoed the idea — as everything connected with Cuba seemed to be mysteriously vetoed.

Nonetheless, unsolicited, the commission got further word on what had happened at the Cuban consulate. On June 17, 1964, J. Edgar Hoover sent, by special courier, a top-secret letter to Counsel Rankin. It said that "through a confidential source which has furnished reliable information in the past, we have been advised of some

statements made by Fidel Castro, Cuban Prime Minister, concerning the assassination of President Kennedy."

The paragraph containing what Castro said was deleted from the letter as released in 1976. It stated, I have since learned, that Oswald, on his visit to the consulate, had talked of assassinating President Kennedy. The consul had taken this as a deliberate provocation. The Cuban ambassador in Mexico City had reported the incident to Havana. It had not been taken seriously at the time, but after the Kennedy assassination, Castro had come to suspect that the effort to get Oswald into Cuba was part of a right-wing conspiracy. Oswald would return from Cuba, then assassinate the President, and it would look as though Castro had been responsible.

Like so many Cuban clues, the Hoover memo was not acted upon. Slawson does not recall even having seen it.

What the FBI learned through secret means in 1964 was told by Castro publicly in more detail three years later. In an interview in July 1967 with a British journalist, Conner Clark, Castro said that Oswald had come to the Cuban consulate twice, each time for about fifteen minutes. "The first time — I was told — he wanted to work for us. He was asked to explain, but he wouldn't. He wouldn't go into details. The second time he said he wanted to 'free Cuba from American imperialism.' Then he said something like, 'Someone ought to shoot that President Kennedy.' Then Oswald said — and this was exactly how it was reported to me — 'Maybe I'll try to do it.'"

Castro said that he had not thought of warning the United States government because Oswald had been considered a "wild man" and not taken seriously. "We didn't have any relations with the American government anyway," his interview continued. "If I'd taken it seriously I might have informed the United Nations or some other official agency like that. But who would have believed me? People would have said that Oswald was just mad, or that I'd gone mad . . . Then, too, after such a plot had been found out, we would be blamed — for something we had nothing to do with. It could have been used as an excuse for another invasion try."

When Castro said the assassination was "something we had nothing to do with," he may not have been quite accurate. It was likely

that Castro had had an effect on Oswald that he did not realize or preferred not to speculate about. Former President Johnson, a year before his death, told columnist Marianne Means of his conviction that Oswald acted "either under the influence or the orders of Castro." The "influence" may have been as simple as reading Castro's public denunciation of attempts on him and the warning of possible retaliation.

The possibility that Oswald acted on his own, inspired by Castro's statement, cannot today be proved, but it has the elements of the fortuitous and the lunatic that sometimes govern history. The "conspiracy," then, would have been a conspiracy of interlocking events — the incessant CIA plots to kill Castro, touching off a Castro warning, touching off something in the fevered mind of Lee Harvey Oswald.

It would be comforting to know that Oswald acted on his own — not as part of some dark left-wing or right-wing plot to strike down a President. It is less comforting to realize that the chain of events may have started with the reckless plotting of the CIA against Castro, perhaps in pursuit of what it thought to be Kennedy's aim. An arrow launched into the air to kill a foreign leader may well have fallen back to kill our own.

(HOUGHTON MIFFLIN, 1972)

IX

THE LEAK AGE

WATERGATE HAD BROUGHT the "leak" into its own. The anonymous source acquired a new degree of respectability. Because anonymous sources had been mainly "good guys" blowing the whistle on the misdeeds of "bad guys," status was conferred on the whole process. The specter of the leak also became a new kind of ombudsman. The risk that secrecy would be "blown" became a factor to be considered in the early planning stage of any bureaucratic project or in the later stage of a brewing scandal. It was less a matter of post-Watergate morality than post-Watergate caution. "How will we look if this leaks?" was a question that probably aborted many a gestating plot. After Watergate, the drought of cover-up had produced the deluge of disclosure.

The leak was not new to Washington — it was as old as the secret, which is, roughly, as old as the government. But it was an institution in a process of evolution. For one thing, it had evolved grammatically — from a noun into a verb. Once a leak, as the word implies, had been an accidental seepage — a loose-tongued remark picked up by a sharp-eared reporter, a lost document, a chauffeur's unwary anecdote about his boss. The government turned the leak into a verb — something consciously done to enhance an official, float a trial balloon, promote a viewpoint or torpedo a contrary viewpoint. The air force "leaked" classified information about what was wrong with the army's missiles; at appropriations time the whole Pentagon leaked classified studies of Soviet armed might; a "senior official" traveling on Secretary Kissinger's shuttle-diplomacy plane developed leaking