

CIA Is Reported to Fear Link To Three Assassination Plots

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The Central Intelligence Agency is concerned that current investigations may pursue the alleged involvement of the agency in three assassination plots aimed at foreign political leaders, Fidel Castro in Cuba, Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic and Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, according to a reliable source.

The CIA, which refused to comment on this report, has repeatedly denied over the years that it ever had a policy of directing the murder of foreign leaders.

The agency maintains that position; according to the government source, but it has acknowledged privately that in two episodes—Cuba and the Dominican Republic—attempts may have been carried forward by people who were in close contact with CIA officers.

In the Congo, according to the source, the agency reportedly acknowledged that an assassination of the left-oriented leader was discussed in some agency circles, but no action was taken and Lumumba's murder in 1961 was done by others not connected with the U.S. intelligence agency.

Trujillo, the Dominican dictator for 31 years and for many years a close ally of the United States, was shot by assassins in late May of 1961.

Castro and his supporters claim to have squelched several assassination plots against him in the early 1960s, for which they blamed the CIA.

Lumumba, the deposed premier of the newly-independent Congo, died mysteriously in February of 1961 and the secessionist Katanga Province government that opposed him gave cash-

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tion on their own.

It is well known, for instance, that the CIA sent various Cuban emigres back into Castro's Cuba during the early 1960s, but the agency insists that none of them were sent there to kill the Cuban premier. One former CIA official, who served in a key post supervising Caribbean activities, suggested that the talk of "assassination teams" may be nothing more than the emotional bravado of the Cuban exiles who often boasted that they would topple the Castro government.

"The people who went into Cuba frankly never got close enough to Havana to do anything like that," the ex-official said. "It all has a terrible air of unreality."

On the other hand, columnist Jack Anderson reported in a 1971 column that he had established that the CIA sponsored six assassination

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rewards to the village tribesmen whom it credited with the killing.

Last weekend, the question of CIA involvement in assassination surfaced in a news report by CBS reporter Daniel Schorr who said that CIA Director William E. Colby briefed President Ford on the subject last December when Colby was reporting to him on the CIA's domestic surveillance activities. The activities are now the subject of three separate investigations.

In theory at least, the assassination issue could become a subject before the presidential commission investigating CIA domestic activities if investigators establish that non-agency people were recruited and equipped in the United States to commit the crime of murder in another country. Conceivably, that could be construed as a "domestic conspiracy" and thus fall within the limited scope of the eight-member investigating commission chaired by Vice President Rockefeller.

Government officials are concerned, the source said, that at the very least a public airing of these episodes could greatly complicate for-

ign relations, particularly with Cuba.

Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger recently suggested that the United States should strive to re-open relations with Cuba, target of a U.S. embargo since 1961 because of its affiliation with Moscow.

Rumors and published allegations of CIA involvement in various political assassinations have circulated for many years, always denied by the intelligence agency, but sometimes supported by fragments of evidence, never conclusively substantiated or refuted.

One top official who apparently believed the stories was the late President Johnson. A former Johnson aide, Leo Janos, in a 1973 article in Atlantic magazine, said Johnson once declared that after he took office in 1963 he discovered that "we had been operating a damned Murder Incorporated in the Caribbean."

Another former associate of LBJ corroborated that report yesterday, relating that President Johnson "believed there was an attempt to knock off Castro, but he never proved it to me."

A high-level CIA official, when he was asked about assassination several weeks ago in a not-for-attribution interview, gave an ambig-

uous reply. He said it is basically correct that the CIA never assassinated anybody but he wanted to be careful how he phrased that.

"I'd rather not talk about it without doing my homework rather carefully," the official said. "(That's) basically right, fundamentally . . . right, but I don't want to make a flat statement that we never had anything to do with any such thing. There were some things that were a little close to the edge."

Sens. Frank Church (D-Idaho) and John G. Tower (R-Tex.), who head the Senate's select committee investigating the CIA, met yesterday with President Ford to discuss executive branch cooperation with the Senate investigation. Afterwards, Church said that he had raised the question of Colby's oral briefing on assassinations and the President "indicated that when the time came, this would be a matter he would be willing to discuss with me and Sen. Tower."

One of the many ambiguities that surround the subject is the question of whether the CIA could be held responsible if it never officially directed a killing, but trained, equipped and encouraged foreign agents who pursued an assassina-

attempts in Cuba, the last in the spring of 1963. The "teams" were recruited from among Cubans in Miami by John Roselli, allegedly "a top Mafia figure" whom the CIA had recruited to direct the murder missions, according to Anderson.

Roselli could not be reached for comment but his lawyer, Leslie Scherr, said, "Johnny won't talk to you about Cuba under any circumstances. He won't even talk to me about it. His favorite guy is G. Gordon Liddy. Johnny says he knows how to keep his mouth shut."

However, an ex-CIA operative named Bradley Ayers, a former Army captain who helped train CIA agents in tropic survival, related yesterday that he discovered by accident that at least one group, a team of marksmen trained in the Miami area in early 1963, "was to have the role of conducting an assassination effort against Castro." He described Roselli as the CIA's "case officer" for the team.

Ayers said he usually discounted the assassination talk among CIA agents at the Miami station as loose banter until he encountered the marksman team on a tour of secret CIA training

bases in south Florida. "I was told that (Castro's assassination) was what they were practicing for," Ayers said. "The team leader made jokes about it, quite frankly."

Ayers hinted that Roselli subsequently confirmed to him that assassination was the team's assignment, but Ayers would not discuss the particulars of whatever Roselli told him.

A third, less definite reference to assassination attempts in Cuba is included in "Inside the Company," the recently-published diary of ex-CIA officer Philip B. F. Agee, who said he trained an agent named Luis Toroella to penetrate Cuba from Quito, Ecuador, in 1961. Agee said he did not know the agent's mission because the CIA's Miami Station was going to direct the agent by radio.

The agent and his colleagues were arrested and the wire services reported the Havana government's announcement that they had confessed.

"I hadn't known they were planning to assassinate Castro," Agee wrote, "but the press report reveals a detailed plan using bazookas in an ambush near the Havana sports complex."

Agee's book, published in Britain and Canada, also includes a second-hand account of how the CIA aided in the assassination of Trujillo in 1961. Agee writes that the plot was described to him four years later by Ned P. Holman, who was CIA station chief in Uruguay and served on the Caribbean desk at the time of Trujillo's death. Holman retired in 1967 to his hometown of Guthrie, Okla., and died in 1971.

Agee said he was golfing with Holman on a Saturday

afternoon in 1965 during the Dominican uprising when the station chief explained the background of that country's civil strife.

"Holman says it all goes back to the agency's assassination of Trujillo," Agee wrote. "He was chief of the Caribbean branch in headquarters at the time and was deeply involved in planning the assassination, which was done by Cuban exiles from Miami using weapons we sent through the diplomatic pouch. The weapons were passed to the assassins through a U.S. citizen who was an agent of the Santo Domingo station and owner of a supermarket. He had to be evacuated though, after the assassination, because the investigation brought him under suspicion."

Rumors and suspicions have surrounded the death of Lumumba in the Congo for many years, though not aimed exclusively at the CIA. Officials close to African diplomacy in that period said there were a variety of different parties who might have launched the plot to kill the premier.

Sen. Church, in his meeting with the President yesterday, sought a White House directive instructing the various intelligence agencies to cooperate with the Senate investigation. Church also hoped to get a copy of CIA Director Colby's 50-page report to Mr. Ford on domestic activities.

Church said he did not get either but was satisfied with the President's assurances of cooperation. "He indicated that our requests would have to be taken up on a case-by-case basis," Church said.