

CIA ex-chief denies he knew of plots to kill Fidel Castro or others



John McCone

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WASHINGTON — Former Central Intelligence Director John A. McCone flatly denied Wednesday any knowledge of an agency plot to assassinate Cuban Premier Fidel Castro or any other foreign official.

"To my knowledge there's nothing that was brought to my attention that involves any attempt against Castro or any other person during my tenure of office," McCone said in a telephone interview. "I had frequent meetings with the president and Robert Kennedy and

with others who were concerned about Cuba and... at no time at any of those meetings was any mention made of the assassination of Castro."

McCone headed the agency from 1961 to 1965 under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Robert F. Kennedy was the U.S. attorney general during his brother's administration and during the early Johnson years.

Time magazine this week cited "credible sources" as saying "the CIA enlisted the expert hired-gun help of U.S. Mafia figures in several unsuccessful attempts to kill Castro both before and shortly after the CIA-planned Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961."

Two former aides to Robert Kennedy, Adam Walinsky and Peter B. Edelman, have said the late senator told them he stopped a CIA effort to use the Mafia to kill Castro prior to the Bay of Pigs.

McCone, who took over the agency after the Bay of Pigs disaster, said he developed a very close relationship with Robert Kennedy while CIA director and "it would have been the most natural thing in the world" for the then-attorney general to tell him of the incident.

"He never said that, and he would have," McCone said.

The former intelligence chief said he was basing his comments both on his own recollection and on a search of his files, which he had ordered after the appearance of news reports of the alleged assassination plots.

"At no time was any such plan of either a contractual arrangement with the Mafia or any arrangement with the

Mafia or any other organization to assassinate Castro ever discussed with me," McCone said, adding he thought it was unlikely such a plot could have existed without his knowledge.

Walinsky and Edelman have said Kennedy told them in 1967 that while serving as chief counsel to a Senate committee investigating organized crime in the late 1950s he played an active role in stopping a CIA contract with the Mafia to assassinate Castro.

"It was unclear whether

COMMENTARY: Since the temporary hiring of assassins for specific assignments was so laxly controlled as Mr O'Donnell has indicated, can he or Mr John McCone state positively that "somebody in the CIA" did not give somebody 100 bucks and say "Here, go knock off President Kennedy!!!"

Since Allen Dulles was the CIA representative on the Warren Commission and spent much time in visiting with the investigative staff, did he not consult with Mr McCone from time to time on the progress of the Warren Commission investigation and how he was handling it ???

the arrangement had been made by someone associated with the agency or whether there was any official sanction within the agency," Edelman said. According to Walinsky, Kennedy had received "assurances in writing" from the CIA the plot had been aborted.

Two former close associates of Kennedy on the Senate rackets committee said in separate interviews they did not recall any CIA-Mafia plot to kill Castro. Kenneth O'Donnell, who served as assistant chief counsel to the committee and later as White House chief of staff, said he never heard any mention of such a plot.

"Bobby had no secrets from me," O'Donnell said of his years on the rackets committee. "I lived in his

house for two years and there wasn't a memo that went through the committee that I didn't see.

"My knowledge is firsthand," O'Donnell said, "and I would like to think that... you're going to consider what I say as opposed to Walinsky and Edelman."

However, he added: "To say that somebody in the CIA didn't give somebody 50 bucks and say 'Here, go knock off (Dominican Republic dictator Rafael) Trujillo, that I can't do.'"

According to Walinsky and Edelman, Kennedy said he first learned of the plot while questioning an unidentified Las Vegas mobster. However, Carmine Bellino, a chief investigator for the rackets committee who said he was present during all of

Kennedy's interviews with gangland figures, said he could not recall any mention of a plot to kill Castro.

Allen Dulles headed the CIA during the period that Kennedy served as chief counsel to the Senate committee. Dulles has since died but Dulles' top aide, Richard

Bissell, said he never discussed a Castro assassination plot with Kennedy and said it was "inherently unlikely" that the agency, then under the control of a Republican administration, would provide written assurances to a Democratically controlled committee that such a plot had been aborted.