

Mafia offered to kill

WASHINGTON (AP) - The CIA offered \$150,000 to assassinate Fidel Castro in the early 1960s, but the mob insisted on taking the job for free, according to a newly declassified document.

"We were at (ideological) war," says Robert Maheu, who as a Las Vegas private investigator on the CIA payroll in 1960 hired Chicago crime boss Sam Giancana for the hit. "Would it be folly to go after Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War or to go after Hitler during World War II?"

The underworld murder-for-hire contract was detailed in a summary of a May 1962 CIA briefing for then-Attorney General Robert

Kennedy. By then, the Kennedy White House had launched its unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and several assassination attempts against Mr. Castro had failed.

The memo is among 450 documents, nearly all newly declassified, that are included in a soon-to-be released State Department volume, "Cuba, 1961-62." Only two copies of the three-page memo were made, one each for the attorney general and CIA headquarters.

In the memo, then-CIA director of security Sheffield Edwards writes that senior agency officials approved plots to kill Mr. Castro between August 1960 and May 1961. The White House isn't mentioned. "Knowledge of

Castro for CIA...free of

this project ... was kept to a total of six persons," Mr. Edwards wrote.

At least two assassination attempts were made with CIA-supplied lethal pills and organized crime-made muscle in early 1961, according to the memo and congressional hearings in 1975. Lawmakers counted a total of eight CIA tries to kill Mr. Castro in the early 1960s; Mr. Castro bragged the number was two dozen.

The memo said Mr. Maheu contacted John Rosselli, a top Giancana lieutenant, to arrange the hits on Mr. Castro.

"A figure of \$150,000 was set by the agency as a payment to be made on completion of

the operation," the memo said. Mr. Rosselli and Mr. Giancana "emphatically stated that they wished no part of any payment," it added. Still, \$11,000 in expenses were paid.

Mr. Rosselli and Mr. Giancana, both later victims of mob hits, weren't told the U.S. government put the contract out on Mr. Castro, but they "guessed or assumed that CIA was behind the project," the memo concludes.

After the Bay of Pigs invasion failed to oust Mr. Castro in April 1961, President Kennedy and his brother, the attorney general, tacitly approved a renewed CIA effort to kill the Cuban leader.

charge

"They were telling the CIA, 'Do whatever it takes to get rid of Castro,'" says Peter Kornbluh, senior analyst at the National Security Archives.

In last January's issue of *Vanity Fair*, Judith Campbell Exner, a reputed mistress of both President Kennedy and Mr. Giancana, wrote that she carried messages between the president and the gangster, including details of a plot to assassinate Mr. Castro.

Louis Smith, senior State Department historian for "Cuba, 1961-62," said the Kennedys were obsessed with eliminating their communist nemesis.