

JFK Rejected Trujillo Slaying, Aide Says

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President Kennedy personally ruled out U.S. involvement in the assassination of Rafael Trujillo shortly before the Dominican dictator was killed in May of 1961, according to a former Kennedy White House aide.

Richard Goodwin, who was Kennedy's principal adviser on Latin American affairs, said the late President not only disapproved of U.S. participation in the scheme, but inserted a strong warning against such involvement in a May, 1961, cable

to the U.S. consul general in the Dominican Republic.

"He said, 'Look, if Trujillo goes, he goes, but why are we pushing that?'" Goodwin recalled of a conversation he had with Kennedy at the time.

The injunction the President laid down in the cable, Goodwin added, stated that the "U.S., as a matter of general policy, cannot condone assassination."

Then an assistant special counsel to the President, Goodwin said he was speaking up publicly now to refute suggestions that John F. Kennedy, who was sworn in as President on Jan. 20,

1961, may have known and even approved of Central Intelligence Agency complicity in efforts to kill foreign leaders.

Some of the documentary evidence Goodwin cited indicated, instead, that high officials of the Eisenhower administration had encouraged such undertakings.

In an interview, Goodwin said, for example, that on Jan. 12, 1961, while Eisenhower was still President, the White House's so-called Special Group in charge of covert CIA operations authorized the CIA to turn over several guns to certain

Dominican dissidents who were later involved in the Trujillo assassination.

Three .38-caliber revolvers and three carbines with accompanying ammunition, it was confirmed by other sources, were handed over to the dissident group.

The Special Group had approved the transfer only on the condition that it take place outside the Dominican Republic—with the understanding that the underground rebels would have to smuggle the guns into the country themselves.

The CIA, however, sent them straight to Ciudad

See KENNEDY, A6, Col. 1

KENNEDY, From A1

Trujillo (now Santo Domingo) in a diplomatic pouch, Goodwin declared. The guns were turned over to the dissidents with the help of Henry Dearborn, the U.S. consul general there.

Trujillo had a very tight grip on the country, another source said, and the rebels were unable to work out their own method of getting the guns in.

Alluding to documents he saw as a White House aide, Goodwin said the revolvers and carbines were depicted by the CIA as intended for the personal defense of the dissidents "attendant to their projected efforts to neutralize Trujillo."

According to evidence now in the hands of the Senate intelligence committee, the CIA also sent four .45-caliber submachine guns and some grenades to the Dominican Republic, apparently in another diplomatic pouch. The CIA informed the White House on May 13, 1961, that these, too, could be provided to the anti-Trujillo group "for their use in personal defense" if authorization were granted.

Goodwin said he vetoed the suggestion, at Kennedy's instructions, in the same late May cablegram to Con-



RICHARD GOODWIN

... quotes cables

sul General Dearborn.

Dearborn, now retired, declined to comment. However, he worked closely with both pro-U.S. dissidents and the CIA at the time. Dearborn, it was learned, doubled as the CIA's unofficial station chief in the Dominican Republic for several months in 1960 when the United States withdrew its diplomatic recognition of the country and called back many of its employees, including CIA personnel.

There is no evidence that the carbines or the revolvers were used when Trujillo was gunned down on May 30, 1961, Goodwin said, but he maintained that the machine guns were sought for that purpose. "They weren't intended for personal defense," he declared.

Another source, who

ever, took comfort in a suggestion from the State Department that the rebels might ask in advance for military support from the United States, the Organization of American States and other sister republics such as Venezuela. Dearborn was sent a draft request for troops that selected dissidents might sign at the right moment in the name of "the people of Santo Domingo" and give back to Dearborn to hold for release.

When Dearborn said he would like to give the document to dissidents he trusted for possible future use, however, the State Department balked, apparently worried by now that Trujillo was about to be killed with U.S. encouragement. Word that the CIA had given the dissidents guns and stood ready to produce more had gotten around by then, Goodwin said.

By May 26, following a meeting of the Kennedy administration's Special Group, officials at State proposed sending a cable to Dearborn telling him not even to inform trusted underground leaders of the existence of the draft request for troops. The more important thing, the proposed cable suggested cautiously, was "to disassociate U.S. from any obvious intervention in Dominican Republic and even more so from any political assassination which might occur."

The CIA agreed to the text. A copy was then sent to the White House for the President's approval and it landed on Goodwin's desk. He said he thought it much too cautious and so did the President who told him to rewrite it in stronger language.

Goodwin said he did so, emphasizing that "we must not run risk of U.S. association with political assassination. This last principle is overriding and must prevail in doubtful situation."

At another point, he said he wrote for Dearborn's guidance that "at the present time we are unable to transfer arms to dissidents.

asked not to be named, maintained that the CIA guns, both those the dissidents got and those they didn't, were all sought simply as a token to satisfy the skeptics among them that the United States supported their efforts to overthrow Trujillo.

"There's a difference between overthrow and assassination. We never favored assassination," this source said. [Trujillo's] assassination. As far as I'm concerned, it did not occur to anyone that they would use these weapons" to kill the dictator.

In any case, the United States was evidently not in control of what happened. Goodwin gave this account:

On May 5, 1961, following the Bay of Pigs debacle in mid-April, Kennedy informed the National Security Council that the United States "should not initiate the overthrow of Trujillo" without knowing what government would succeed him.

Informed of that by the State Department on May 17, a puzzled Dearborn replied to Washington that it was "too late" to worry about it since the dissidents' efforts to oust Trujillo had been under way for approximately a year at that point.

The consul general, how-



JOHN F. KENNEDY



HENRY DEARBORN

... President is said to have cautioned envoy.

Tell them this is because of our suspicion that method of transfer would serve very little purpose and expose the United States to great danger of association with assassination attempt." (The words, "association with," was jotted down by hand over a crossed-out phrase that read "ultimate disclosure of participation in" an assassination attempt.)

The former White House aide said he then took the paper to Kennedy who made the cable stronger, changing it to read, "We must not run risk of U.S. association with political assassination, since U.S. as a matter of general policy cannot condone assassination."

The italicized words, shown to a reporter, were handwritten and Goodwin said the writing was either the President's hand or that of a secretary taking dictation from him. "Those are his words," Goodwin said. "I drafted the cablegram at the President's personal instruction and I signed it. But he's laying down a general principle on assassination."

The State Department quickly sent the revised cable to Dearborn, presumably on May 26, Goodwin said. Trujillo was assassinated four days later in a barrage from weapons that included a 12-gauge shotgun, two M-1 rifles, and an assortment of pistols and revolvers, but, Goodwin insisted, "we were caught completely by surprise."

Reports to Washington had been saying the assassination was imminent, Goodwin acknowledged, "but we'd gotten a lot of warnings like that. It looked like

it was 50-50 . . . Trujillo was, hardly a popular leader. He butchered people . . . If anyone wanted to assassinate him, we didn't object—but not with our help."

The Washington Post reported in March that Dearborn, too, was unaware of just when the assassination might be attempted and so were the conspirators. They were waiting for a night when Trujillo and his driver would head for his country place in San Cristobal without the heavy guard that usually surrounded him.

Although Goodwin described Kennedy's words as a general policy against assassination, it is not known whether the late President ever made it clear to the CIA itself, which continued to be involved in schemes against Castro. Goodwin said, however, that Kennedy consistently disapproved of such proposals in several other conversations on the subject of which Goodwin is aware.

The former White House aide took particular exception to Vice President Rockefeller's televised suggestions last month that President Kennedy and his brother Robert may have known and approved of CIA assassination plots.

Speaking on NBC's "Meet the Press," Rockefeller said the assassinations of the

Kennedy brothers and "a real problem of amnesia" among others still around made firm conclusions impossible. But after calling the evidence inconclusive, the Vice President added:

"I think it's fair to say that no major undertakings were taken by the CIA without either knowledge and/or approval of the White House."

Goodwin, however, declared that "there is no evidence that John Kennedy authorized, or condoned in any way, assassination attempts on either Castro or Trujillo. Implications to the contrary by the Rockefeller commission are totally unjustified by the evidence and constitute either a diversion or efforts to make political capital by defaming a dead President."

The former Kennedy aide added that neither the Rockefeller commission nor its staff ever called him as a witness although he has testified before the Senate committee and is expected to appear again Monday.