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The FBI-CIA Cover-up

By Tad Szulc

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The FBI and the CIA engaged in a cover-up of highly relevant information when the Warren Commission was investigating President John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963 and 1964.

President Lyndon Johnson and Attorney Gen. Robert F. Kennedy became party to the effort which consisted of withholding key facts from the Warren Commission.

The cover-up continues even now, 12 years later: The FBI still refuses to turn over to congressional investigators some of its most sensitive files on the circumstances of the killing in Dallas.

The Warren Commission was never told that Robert Kennedy secretly formed — before his brother was killed — a special intergovernmental committee which included FBI and CIA representatives to look into the possibility that Cuban Premier Fidel Castro might organize

attempts on the lives of high U.S. government officials.

THAT THIS committee existed has been kept secret although information about it reposes in FBI files.

The top-secret committee was created by Robert Kennedy presumably out of concern that Castro might retaliate against CIA attempts on his life, carried out directly by the agency's operatives and with help from the Mafia.

That anti-Castro assassination

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plots were afoot in the early 1960s was unknown at the time (they were disclosed last year by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities) and the Warren Commission was not told of them. Only Allen W. Dulles, who had been CIA director, had knowledge of the anti-Castro plots.

In its ignorance the commission couldn't search more intensively into the possible motives of Lee Harvey Oswald in killing the President. The commission concluded that Oswald

was the lone assassin in Dallas, but it acknowledged its inability to come up with the motive.

IT DOES NOT follow, of course, that the Warren Commission would surely have traced Oswald's motives had it known of the anti-Castro conspiracies and of the establishment of Robert Kennedy's secret group sometime before Dallas. There is no proof that Castro was behind Oswald.

But the cover-up made it impossible for the commission to seriously

pursue a line of inquiry in this area even though there had been much discussion of the significance of Oswald's links with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (a pro-Castro group in the United States) and his aborted effort to go to Cuba two months before he killed John Kennedy.

Robert Kennedy, the CIA and the FBI decided to keep from the Warren Commission the fact that the special group had been set up. To justify its

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JFK

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existence, it would have been necessary to expose the CIA's own conspiracies against Castro. These were among the most closely held secrets of the Kennedy-Johnson period.

THAT THE CIA failed to inform the Warren Commission of anti-Castro plots — even though the agency was under presidential orders to provide maximum assistance to the commission — was confirmed in a memo on April 20, 1975, written by CIA Insp. Gen. Donald F. Chamberlain to CIA Deputy Director E.H. Knoche. It said:

"As far as we can tell from all of the materials at our disposition, no one discussed with the Warren Commission any alleged plan to assassinate Castro. There is also no evidence that anyone known to our records made a decision not to tell the Warren Commission anything about this topic or any other matter."

Chamberlain added that "we have no evidence in our material indicating Castro's knowledge or the possession of documentation of alleged assassination plots directed against him."

Two days later, on April 22, 1975, Raymond G. Rocca, then deputy chief of the CIA's counterintelligence staff, informed Knoche that "our records show at every point a marked intent to make as much available to the (Warren Commission) as was consistent with the security of the ongoing operations."

ROCCA ALSO reported that his files do not show whether the Warren Commission was informed of a 1962 report from the CIA's station in Guatemala according to which a statement was made at a Guatemalan Communist party meeting that "we need not preoccupy ourselves over the politics of President

Kennedy because we know, according to prognostication, that he will die within the present year."

Although, as Rocca put it, the counterintelligence staff was the CIA's "working-level point of contact with the Warren Commission," plans to assassinate Castro were not "known to us in CIA staff."

In all likelihood Johnson, who knew of the anti-Castro plotting, also knew that Robert Kennedy had set up his special committee. But there is no indication that he shared that knowledge with Chief Justice Earl Warren when the commission was organized in November 1963.

Robert Kennedy's testimony before the Warren Commission likewise omitted mention of his own fears that assassinations might breed assassinations.

BUT IT IS part of the public record that Johnson subsequently commented, without elaborating, that President Kennedy might have been killed in retaliation for his administration's anti-Castro policies. At the time, this remark was taken to mean possible retaliation for the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion and subsequent CIA operations against Cuba.

All these facts, secret at the time, may have influenced the Kennedy family in its decision to oppose any reopening of the assassination probe. Again, a new investigation might have led to public disclosures of the CIA plotting and tarnishing the memory of John and Robert Kennedy.

Robert Kennedy's interest in aggressive operations against Cuba was reported in a document written by John McCone, then CIA director, on Oct. 4, 1962, describing a top-level strategy meeting chaired by the attorney general. McCone wrote that "the attorney general reported on discussions with the President on Cuba; dissatisfied with lack of action in the sabotage field, went on to stress that nothing was moving forward, commented that one

effort attempted had failed. . . ."

ANOTHER ELEMENT of the cover-up was that in at least 50 instances the CIA had, according to an internal FBI memo, ignored materials supplied by the bureau on Oswald's foreign connections.

The responsibility for following up such FBI leads was in the hands of an ad hoc group built around the CIA's so-called "D Staff," a clandestine operations center then headed by William Harvey, a senior agency official. The CIA's counterintelligence office, directed by James Angleton, reported directly to Harvey's "D staff," and it too was involved in investigating certain aspects of the Kennedy assassination.

Sources contend that the CIA actually destroyed some of the materials provided by the FBI. Angleton, according to those sources, may have suspected Soviet "plants" in the FBI material. The Warren Commission never knew about any of it.

As has been reported earlier, the FBI destroyed at least one letter Oswald sent to the Dallas police department shortly before the assassination. Oswald de-

manded that the FBI stop "harrassing" his Russian-born wife Marina and threatened to blow up the Dallas police headquarters if the FBI failed to desist.

THIS BECAME known only last year, and the FBI never offered a conclusive explanation for destroying the note.

Likewise, the FBI inexplicably failed to place Oswald on its "dangerous list" although it did so with other members of the Fair Play Committee.

A CIA memorandum to the Rockefeller Commission, which last year investigated CIA abuses, said that the agency still feels, as it did in 1964, that the Warren Commission should have given more credence in its final report to the possibility of foreign links in the conspiracy against Kennedy. The memo said

leak?

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Not as serious

that there were promising leads that were not followed up.

This statement contradicts the FBI memorandum now in the possession of the Senate Select Committee that the CIA refused to pursue leads obtained by the bureau. However acute rivalry between the CIA and the FBI already existed at the time — they actually stopped cooperating altogether in 1970 — and their estrangement could account for the contradictions.

THE COVER-UP is among the reasons the Senate Select Committee voted on May 13 to recommend a congressional inquiry into the role of the intelligence agencies in the Warren Commission investigation and into Oswald's motives.

The Senate committee first learned of the cover-up a few months ago. This is the new evidence the panel claims it has obtained about Oswald's motives. Sen. Richard Schweiker of Pennsylvania and Sen. Gary Hart of Colorado, who constitute a special subcommittee on the Kennedy assassination, have written a separate report on the subject.

Neither Schweiker nor Hart has publicly revealed thus far the nature of the new evidence. There is said to be great pressure to sanitize this report while the full secret information would be turned over to the Senate's new permanent oversight committee on intelligence or whatever other panel might undertake the recommendation investigation of the Kennedy death.

The subcommittee report, to be issued in mid-June, will first be inspected by the FBI and the CIA to remove what they consider

"embarrassing information."

ALTHOUGH senators are far from certain that the proposed inquiry would actually provide a conclusive answer about Oswald's motives — the trail has become cold in the opinion of many senators — the FBI and CIA could find themselves under charges of obstruction of justice for having withheld significant material from the Warren Commission.

Among the questions likely to be raised in a new investigation is why Dulles concealed from the Warren Commission, on which he served, the plotting against Castro by the CIA. CIA's own records, released in mid-May, show that the agency had already begun to plan Castro's assassination in March 1960, when Dulles was CIA director, and planning had by then begun for the Bay of Pigs.

Excerpts from transcripts of the Warren Commission's executive sessions (published in The New Republic on Sept. 27, 1975) show that Dulles informed his colleagues that there were certain CIA secrets that he would keep from everybody except the president. Dulles was addressing the still unclarified question of whether Oswald, as maintained by some assassination buffs, had been an undercover FBI informer.

A **SIMILAR** question could be raised with John McCone who was CIA director during the Warren Commission investigations and who should be called to testify in any new Senate inquiry. McCone was familiar with the anti-Castro plots and probably knew about Robert Kennedy's secret committee.

All the indications are that the existence of this committee was known to very few people: Robert Kennedy himself, probably Dulles and McCone, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, and a few selected associates.

Several aides of Robert

Kennedy, including a former assistant director of the FBI, said in interviews last week that they had not known of the committee. They said, however, that it was possible that the group could have been acting in secrecy out of the White House or attorney general's office before and after the Kennedy assassination.

The Senate Intelligence Committee learned of the cover-up in the course of its long investigation of the intelligence community. After references were made by witnesses to the Robert Kennedy committee in testimony touching on foreign assassination plots by the CIA, the Church Committee asked the FBI and the CIA for their relevant files.

IT IS UNDERSTOOD that the CIA made some material available; the FBI refused to do so for many months. Only recently did the bureau agree to allow Senate committee members to read parts of its secret files, but the senators have to do it at FBI headquarters.

It was in this manner that senators learned of the scope of the cover-up by the intelligence agencies. They've now requested additional materials from the FBI. Some senators are said to believe that further vital information on the Kennedy assassination investigation may turn up in the FBI files.

It remains unclear why, after 12 years, the FBI is still reluctant to let senators see all its files on the assassinations.

DECISION ON JFK PROBE IS SIX MONTHS DISTANT

Associated Press

A delay of six months is expected before the new Senate Intelligence Oversight Committee decides whether to reopen the investigation into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Chairman Daniel K. Inouye, D-Hawaii, said yesterday.

Inouye, who spoke with reporters after the committee's first meeting yesterday, said the committee will concentrate first on drafting new charters for the CIA and other intelligence agencies.

Results of an investigation of the Kennedy assassination by the Senate Select Intelligence Committee, which spent 15 months studying the case, are expected to be made public within the next two weeks. Senators who have seen the report are predicting it will raise more questions than answers.

The 172-page report, drafted by a subcommittee, will focus on the performance of the CIA and FBI before and after the Nov. 22, 1963, slaying and will go into the possible motives of Lee Harvey Oswald.

The report is expected to detail both allegedly deliberate and accidental failures by the CIA and FBI to provide the Warren Commission with information crucial to its investigation of whether Oswald was part of a foreign conspiracy.
