

ALLEGED ASSASSINATION PLOTS
INVOLVING FOREIGN LEADERS

AN INTERIM REPORT
OF THE
SELECT COMMITTEE
TO STUDY GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS
WITH RESPECT TO
INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES
UNITED STATES SENATE
TOGETHER WITH
ADDITIONAL, SUPPLEMENTAL, AND SEPARATE
VIEWS

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Introduction by Senator Frank Church



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"Executive Action" was a CIA euphemism, defined as a project for research into developing means for overthrowing foreign political leaders, including a "capability to perform assassinations." (Harvey, 6/25/75, p. 34) Bissell indicated that Executive Action covered a "wide spectrum of actions" to "eliminate the effectiveness" of foreign leaders, with assassination as the "most extreme" action in the spectrum. (Bissell, 7/22/75, p. 32) The Inspector General's Report described executive action as a "general standby capability" to carry out assassination when required. (I.G. Report, p. 37) The project was given the code name ZR/RIFLE by the CIA.¹

A single agent ("asset") was given the cryptonym QJ/WIN, and placed under Harvey's supervision for the ZR/RIFLE project. He was never used in connection with any actual assassination efforts. Helms described QJ/WIN's "capability":

If you needed somebody to carry out murder, I guess you had a man who might be prepared to carry it out. (Helms, 6/13/75, p. 50)

Harvey used QJ/WIN, to spot "individuals with criminal and underworld connections in Europe for possible multi-purpose use." (Harvey, 6/25/75, p. 50) For example, QJ/WIN reported that a potential asset in the Middle East was "the leader of a gambling syndicate" with "an available pool of assassins." (CIA file, ZR/RIFLE/Personality Sketches) However, Harvey testified that:

During the entire existence of the entire ZR/RIFLE project * * * no agent was recruited for the purpose of assassination, and no even tentative targeting or target list was ever drawn. (Harvey, 6/25/75, p. 45)

In general, project ZR/RIFLE involved assessing the problems and requirements of assassination and developing a stand-by assassination capability; more specifically, it involved "spotting" potential agents and "researching" assassination techniques that might be used. (Bissell, 7/17/75, p. 11 and 6/9/75, p. 73; Harvey, 6/25/75, pp. 37-A, 45) Bissell characterized ZR/RIFLE as "internal and purely preparatory." (Bissell, 7/22/75, p. 32) The 1967 Inspector General's Report found "no indication in the file that the Executive Action capability of ZR/RIFLE QJ/WIN was ever used," but said that "after Harvey testified over the Castro operation, he ran it as one aspect of ZR/RIFLE." (I.G. Report, pp. 40-41)

2. THE QUESTION OF WHITE HOUSE INITIATION, AUTHORIZATION, OR KNOWLEDGE OF THE EXECUTIVE ACTION PROJECT

Harvey testified that Bissell had told him that "the White House" had twice urged the creation of such a capability and the Inspector General's Report quoted notes of Harvey's (no longer in existence) to that effect. Bissell did not recall any specific conversation with the "White House," but in his initial testimony before the Committee he assumed the correctness of Harvey's notes and stated that, while he could have created the capability on his own, any urgings would have come from Bundy or Walt Rostow. In a later appearance, however, Bissell said he merely informed Bundy of the capability and that

¹ ZR/RIFLE was a cryptonym relating to two areas. One was the Executive Action assassination capability. The other ZR/RIFLE area is not part of the subject matter of this report. This second program was genuine, but it was also meant to provide a cover for any Executive Action operation. William Harvey had been in charge of the CIA section with general responsibility for such programs. (Harvey, 6/25/75, p. 49)

can Republic. There was no modification or rescission of the "inherited" Special Group approval and it would seem fair, therefore, to regard the approval as having been at least acquiesced in by the new Administration.

During March and early April 1961, operational levels within both the CIA and the State Department learned of increasingly detailed plans by the dissidents to assassinate Trujillo. There is no evidence that this information was passed to the White House or to any member of the Special Group, except Allen Dulles.¹ Similarly, there is no evidence that the passage of the pistols or the carbines or the pouching of the machine guns to the Dominican Republic was disclosed to anyone outside of the CIA during this period.²

7. APRIL 17, 1961-MAY 31, 1961 (BAY OF PIGS THROUGH TRUJILLO ASSASSINATION)

Following the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, attempts were made by State and CIA representatives in the Dominican Republic to dissuade the dissidents from a precipitous assassination attempt. These efforts to halt the assassination of Trujillo were the result of instructions from CIA Headquarters and were prompted by concern over filling the power vacuum which would result from Trujillo's death.

The machine guns arrived in the Dominican Republic but permission to pass them to the dissidents was never given and the guns never left the Consulate.

Dearborn returned to Washington for consultation and a contingency plan for the Dominican Republic was drafted.

The day before Trujillo's assassination, Dearborn received a cable of instructions and guidance from President Kennedy. The cable advised that the United States must not run the risk of association with political assassination, since the United States, as a matter of general policy, could not condone assassination. The cable further advised Dearborn to continue to hold open offers of material assistance to the dissidents and to advise them of United States support for them if they were successful in overthrowing the Trujillo government. The cable also reconfirmed the decision not to pass the machine guns.

(a) *Decision not to pass the machine guns and unsuccessful United States attempt to stop assassination effort*

By April 17, 1961, the Bay of Pigs invasion had failed. As a result, there developed a general realization that precipitous action should be avoided in the Dominican Republic until Washington was able to give further consideration to the consequences of a Trujillo overthrow and the power vacuum which would be created. (Bissell, 6/11/75, p. 113) A cable from Headquarters to the Station, on April 17, 1961, advised that it was most important that the machine guns not be passed without additional Headquarters approval.

¹ Copies of CIA cables, including the March 20, 1961 cable describing the plan to assassinate Trujillo in the apartment of his mistress, were apparently sent to the office of the Director of Central Intelligence.

² Although a copy of the CIA cable advising that the pistols were being pouching was sent to the Director's office, Dulles apparently did not receive copies of the cables approving passage of the carbines or pouching of the machine guns.