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Fear of Retaliation Curbed Anti-Castro Plots

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Long before John F. Kennedy was killed, according to a former White House aide, high U.S. officials, including the President himself, voiced the thought that real or alleged involvement in foreign assassinations could unleash similar efforts here.

"If we get into that kind of thing, we'll all be targets," former White House aide Richard Goodwin quoted Kennedy as telling him in November of 1961.

"He wasn't talking about people like you or me," Goodwin said in an interview. "He was talking about

chiefs of state, such as himself."

Goodwin said the conversation with Kennedy took place at the White House just two days after the President raised the idea of Cuban Premier Fidel Castro's assassination in a chat with journalist Tad Szulc, then of The New York Times.

Szulc has said that Kennedy asked him, "How would you feel if the United States assassinated Castro?" The journalist said he told the President it was a very poor idea and quoted Kennedy as responding, "I'm glad you feel that way because suggestions to that effect keep coming to me, and

I believe very strongly that the United States should not be a party to political assassination."

The President's chief adviser on Latin-American affairs and chairman of a high-level Cuban task force at the time, Goodwin said he was present at the meeting with Szulc and, out of curiosity, raised the topic with the President again a couple of days later.

"I said it sounded like a crazy idea to me," Goodwin recalled. It was then, he said, that Kennedy told him, "If we get into that kind of thing, we'll all be targets."

According to Goodwin, Secretary of State Dean

Rusk expressed a similar apprehension following the assassination of Dominican Republic dictator Rafael Trujillo on May 30, 1961.

The CIA had informed the White House in mid-May of 1961 that it had already turned over some revolvers and carbines to Dominican dissidents who were later involved in the Trujillo assassination.

In a document now in the hands of the Senate intelligence committee, the CIA said it also, stood ready, if authorized, to supply the dissidents with four submachine guns and a small number of grenades which were

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RICHARD GOODWIN  
... quotes Kennedy



## GOODWIN, From A1

"in the direct custody of our station in Ciudad Trujillo."

Although Kennedy vetoed the transfer and personally ruled out U.S. involvement in an assassination shortly before Trujillo was killed, Goodwin said suspicions of American complicity were raised when White House press secretary Pierre Salinger unwittingly announced the dictator's death to the world.

"It was a disaster," Goodwin recalled. The Dominicans did not announce Trujillo's death, but Washington was immediately informed by a cable from U.S. Consul General Henry Dearborn who had been in close contact with the dissident group.

The word was promptly relayed to Kennedy, who was in Paris at the time meeting with French President Charles de Gaulle. Unaware that Trujillo's death was still a secret, Salinger casually informed the press on the morning of May 31, 1961.

Because of that, Goodwin said, "the Cubans thought Kennedy was involved. At least (Cuban Foreign Minister) Raul Roa did."

Salinger's announcement also pained officials in Washington. "Rusk really blew up," Goodwin said. "He told me, 'If people think we did anything to Trujillo, they might look at this as a license to go after Kennedy.'"

Goodwin also recalled a chat with Kennedy following the August, 1961, conference in Punta del Este, Uruguay, where the Alliance for Progress charter was signed by the United States and 19

other American countries—with Cuba abstaining.

Cuba's Ernesto (Che) Guevara was also at the conference and when he noticed Goodwin smoking a cigar, Guevara told an Argentine delegate "he'd bet I wouldn't smoke a Cuban cigar." Goodwin said he told the delegate he would if he could get any. Guevara responded through an intermediary with a box of 50 Havana cigars "inlaid with a Cuban seal."

"It had a handwritten card in it from Che," Goodwin related. "It said, in Spanish: 'Since I have no greeting card, I have to write. Since speaking to an enemy is difficult, I extend my hand.'"

Goodwin brought the cigars back to Washington and, he said, took the box to the President.

"He took one out and started puffing on it," Goodwin said. "Then he looked at me and said, 'you should have smoked the first one.'"

After the Bay of Pigs fiasco in 1961, Kennedy approved a secret campaign of economic warfare and underground sabotage—which came to be known as "Operation Mongoose"—in hopes of unseating Castro. Goodwin said the President's brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, was named to overall command of it on Goodwin's recommendation in November of 1961.

However, Goodwin said he felt certain that the President never authorized or condoned the CIA's secret plots and attempts to kill Castro "and I don't think Bobby could have done it on his own without telling

Jack." The former White House aide also said Robert Kennedy told him on a trip to Latin America in 1966 that he had "turned off" an effort against Castro's life.

Despite this, Goodwin said he has since been informed, the CIA made repeated efforts to kill Castro, even after Kennedy's assassination and as late as 1965.

"The CIA was moving all the time," he said. "Why I don't know. My own theory is that it was the humiliation of the Bay of Pigs; they thought they could make up for that."

Whatever the answer, Goodwin said he knew of no high-level official of the Kennedy administration who ever advocated Castro's assassination except for reports, which Goodwin would not confirm, concerning then-Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara.

According to a CIA memo now in the hands of Senate investigators, McNamara "raised the question" of killing Castro at an Aug. 10, 1962, meeting of the so-called "Special Group Augmented" which was in charge of Operation Mongoose. Held in Rusk's conference room, the meeting was called to discuss reports that Soviet-made nuclear missiles were about to be installed in Cuba.

Robert Kennedy, the "real boss" of the group although he was not the formal chairman, was not present at the meeting. Goodwin, however, was. He is quoted in the current issue of Harper's magazine as saying that McNamara proposed Castro's assassination as "the only productive way of dealing with Cuba."

Goodwin refuses to confirm the account, but without quite disavowing it. "My memory's much more ambiguous than that," he said. "I'm just not sure."

Now president of the World Bank, McNamara said: "I don't remember the meeting. I might have raised the question but certainly not for the sake of advocat-

ing it. And a written record indicates that a few days later when the matter was raised again, I strongly opposed it."

The matter came up again in the form of a memo from retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale who had been detailed to Operation Mongoose and who has said he drafted contingency plans on Aug. 12, 1962, that "may" have included Castro's assassination. Then-CIA Director John A. McCone has reportedly told the Senate intelligence committee, however, that he objected strenuously to the idea on receiving the Lansdale memo and that McNamara agreed with him in a telephone conversation about it.

McCone has also said publicly that he opposed the thought of Castro's assassination at the Aug. 10 meeting when someone—McCone said he couldn't recall who it was—raised the question.

In any case, Goodwin said that President Kennedy's "whole attitude changed after the (1962) missile crisis" and that he secretly began feeling out prospect for negotiating with Castro shortly before the assassination in Dallas.

"Kennedy was serious about that negotiation," Goodwin declared. "He said that to me."

For his part, Castro has denied any effort to assassinate Kennedy in retaliation for CIA plots against him. In a book-length interview recently published under the title "With Fidel," the Cuban leader said that "there was no reason to wish him personal harm," and "besides, Kennedy could be followed by someone worse . . ."

Castro also said in the same interview that he became aware for the first time of Kennedy's hopes for more amicable relationships on Nov. 22, 1963—through an intermediary—when "the news broke over the radio that an attempt had been carried out against Kennedy's life."