

White House Not Linked To Plots Against Castro

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 20—The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence reported today that it had not found any evidence of White House authorization for repeated attempts by the Central Intelligence Agency to inspire a bizarre variety of plots against the life of Prime Minister Fidel Castro of Cuba.

In the report issued by the committee today, nearly a third of which was devoted to the agency's persistent but unsuccessful efforts to arrange for the deaths of Mr. Castro and his two principal associates, the panel said that it had uncovered "at least" eight separate plots conceived by C.I.A. officials in the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

The death plots some of which never progressed from the planning stage, were aimed variously at the Cuban leader, his brother Raul and Ernesto Che Guevara, the late Cuban Finance Minister, the committee said, and spanned the period from 1960 to 1965.

There was no clear indication, according to the report, that any of the plots, which involved as prospective assassins American underworld figures, Cuban exiles and a C.I.A. agent within the Castro Government, had been approved in advance, or even made known to, Government officials outside the C.I.A.

The First Plot

In addition, the committee said that there was no indisputable evidence that Allen W. Dulles, the Director of Central Intelligence when the first plot was conceived, had been made aware of it in detail by his subordinates, and no evidence at all that John A. McCone, his successor, was told of the plotting that took place within the agency in his tenure.

The Senate report conceded that to provide the United States with a "plausible denial" in the event the anti-Castro plots were discovered, Presidential authorization might have been subsequently "obscured." It also declared that, whatever the extent of their knowledge, Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson should bear the "ultimate responsibility for the actions of their subordinates.

The report termed "particularly reprehensible" the apparent failure of Richard Bissell, the C.I.A.'s chief of clandestine operations when the initial attempts were made on Mr. Castro's life, to make certain that Mr. Dulles and Presidents Kennedy and Johnson knew what was afoot.

And the committee described as "a grave error in judgment" the failure of Richard Helms, Mr. Bissell's successor and now the American Ambassador to Iran, to inform Mr. McCone in early 1962 that plotting against Mr. Castro's life was continuing.

The initial planning for a Cuban assassination, the report said, involved an attempt to arrange for a fatal accident involving not Mr. Castro, but his brother Raul. The plan was aborted by Tracy Barnes, then Mr. Bissell's deputy and now deceased, shortly after he had approved it, and the accident never took place.

That effort was followed by the preparation by C.I.A. scientists of a box of cigars, of the brand favored by the Cuban Prime minister, that had been impregnated with a poison. But the Senate committee found no evidence that the cigars had ever been delivered.

The attempt to arrange the accident, the report said, was little more than a response by the C.I.A. to an opportunity that one of its Cuban agents was to have for close access to Raul Castro, and the poisoned cigars seemed almost an afterthought.

The Plotting Starts

But the plotting within the C.I.A. against Mr. Castro's life began in earnest some eight months before the 1961 invasion of Cuba by an anti-Castro exile force trained by the agency.

The report said that beginning in August 1960, three months before the election of President Kennedy, the C.I.A., working through Robert A. Maheu, a former F.B.I. agent who later served as a top aide to Howard R. Hughes, the billionaire industrialist, asked John Roselli, a reputed organized-crime figure, to locate one or more Cubans willing to make an attempt on Mr. Castro's life.

Mr. Roselli eventually brought two other top underworld figures into the operation—Sam Giancana, now dead but for years the head of an important Chicago crime syndicate, and Santos Trafficante, a Cuban exile who has been associated with criminal elements in Tampa, Fla.

Mr. Bissell told the Senate committee that he knew that underworld figures had been enlisted on behalf of the C.I.A. to arrange for the murder, which was to have coincided with the Bay of Pigs invasion the following April, and which was to have involved the slipping of pills containing toxin into Mr. Castro's food by a waiter in a Havana restaurant.

Mr. Bissell told the panel that

he and another agency official Col. Sheffield Edwards, had briefed Mr. Dulles "circumlocutiously" about an "intelligence operation" then underway against the Castro Government, and that they believed he understood that it revolved around assassination, although the word was never spoken.

Mr. Bissell also said that he assumed that Mr. Dulles had informed General Eisenhower and Mr. Kennedy, on the basis of that indirect briefing.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation became aware in May, 1962, more than a year after the Cuban invasion—and the assassination attempt—had failed, that Mr. Giancana had told associates of his involvement in a scheme to kill Mr. Castro.

The F.B.I., according to documents obtained by the committee, also discovered that Mr. Maheu and Mr. Giancana had been involved in tapping a telephone in a Las Vegas, Nev. hotel room, and learned upon investigating that the C.I.A. apparently as a favor to Mr. Giancana, had paid for the installation.

A Second Effort

Robert F. Kennedy, the late President's brother who was Attorney General at the time, inquired about the details of the relationship and was told by Colonel Edwards in May 1972, that Mr. Giancana and others had been involved in an assassination plot against Mr. Castro that ended after the abortive invasion.

But the Senate report said that a second effort, also involving poison pills designed for Mr. Castro's food was at that moment under way within the C.I.A., that Colonel Edwards, who knew about it, did not tell Mr. Kennedy and that Mr. Helms, who had taken over from Mr. Bissell, did not come forward when he learned that the Attorney General had been misled.

Mr. Helms's reasons for not having told Mr. Kennedy, Mr. McCone or any other superior about the continuing assassination efforts, according to his testimony, concerned his assumption that the efforts had previously been authorized by higher-ups. Also, he said that he assumed that the Kennedy Administration's internal expressions of antipathy toward the Castro Government amounted to tacit approval.

In any event, according to the Senate report, the plot involving the underworld and the poison pills was subsequently abandoned by the C.I.A. after several of the Cuban operatives assigned to administer the poison to Mr. Castro got "cold feet."

Other schemes were hatched at C.I.A. headquarters in 1963, including one that suggested placing an exploding seashell in the water near Mr. Castro's favorite bathing spot in the Caribbean, and another, equally bizarre designed to supply Mr. Castro with a skindiving suit that had been contaminated in advance by bacteria.

Neither of those schemes, the report said, appears to have been taken beyond the C.I.A. laboratory, but later in 1963 a C.I.A. agent inside the Cuban Government, known by the agency cryptonym Am-Lash, was offered a pen containing a poison needle after he expressed a willingness to take Mr. Castro's life.

The agent, the report said, rejected the device as too amateurish. The Senate panel noted that the offer was made to him on Nov. 22, 1963, at almost the precise moment time Mr. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas.

It was ironic, the report said, that almost at the same moment a special envoy from Mr. Kennedy was meeting with Mr. Castro "to explore the possibility of improved relations."

Warren Not Told

The Warren Commission, which investigated the circumstances in the Kennedy assassination, was never made aware of the C.I.A.'s attempts on Mr. Castro's life as an adjunct to its inquiry, according to former commission lawyers.

Mr. McCone, who was subsequently told about the plotting against Mr. Castro before the Bay of Pigs invasion, never told the Warren Commission of which he was a member, of what he knew, and Mr. Helms did not volunteer his knowledge the Senate report said, "because the precise question was not asked" of him.

The C.I.A. continued to encourage Am-Lash, the report said, by providing him with a cache of weapons in Cuba and later by putting him in touch with a group of anti-Castro exiles in this country who could also supply arms.

These efforts continued into 1965, the Senators found, and said that Mr. Helms, who knew about some of them, denied to Secretary of State Dean Rusk that Am-Lash had ever been involved in such assassination attempts.

According to the report, when Mr. Helms later briefed President Johnson on the early Castro plots, he did not describe for him the Am-Lash operation, the only one that had continued into his presidency.