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C.I.A. INQUIRY SAID TO PREDATE ORDER

Staff of Rockefeller Panel Reportedly Assayed Plots Before Move by Ford

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WASHINGTON, July 3—Staff

members of the Rockefeller commission quietly began investigating the Central Intelligence Agency's involvement in plots to assassinate foreign leaders nearly a month before President Ford officially gave them the assignment, according to authoritative sources.

The staff of the commission received its first evidence of C.I.A. involvement in plots against foreign leaders when it asked the agency to fill in gaps and deletions it found in what was to have been a comprehensive internal report on C.I.A. wrongdoing turned over to the commission by the agency.

The requested material was given to the commission in late January, the sources said, and it showed that the gaps and deletions dealt with C.I.A. involvement in the plans to kill Cuban Premier Fidel Castro.

The staff began investigating the implications of these disclosures under its mandate to inquire into any violations of the law by the C.I.A. It had already done a substantial amount of work on assassination matters when President Ford ordered the commission to make an official investigation in early March, these sources said.

Inquiry Called Deep

The commission staff's inquiry into assassinations both before and after it was officially authorized to proceed was substantial, lasting about four months, according to two sources. One of the sources said that the still secret summary on the assassination question was a "good survey on the question."

The original material on C.I.A. involvement in assassinations, other than occasional and incomplete press reports over the last 10 years, came from the agency itself. In May, 1973,

James R. Schlesinger, then Director of Central Intelligence, asked employees to report any wrongdoing. Before the end of the month the agency compiled what has come to be known as the Schlesinger Report, which included material on some of the plots.

Last Jan. 19, William E. Colby, the current director, used the Schlesinger Report as the basis for briefing President Ford. It was at this time, the President has said that he learned that the C.I.A. had been involved in plots to kill the leaders of other governments.

The President, however, did not order the Rockefeller commission to investigate the matter until early March after C.B.S. and other news agencies began to report about C.I.A. involvement.

When the Rockefeller commission made its report on June 6, however, the section on assassinations was not included. Among several reasons given was that the commission's work had been hurried and incomplete.

"Based upon their resources for information and time they had," one source outside the commission said, "they did a very adequate survey. What the Church committee [Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, headed by Senator Frank Church] will turn out will be far richer in detail, but the basic element of our [Government] involvement will not change."

Report on Colby Denfed

On another matter, several sources said that neither the commission nor its staff ever recommended the reoval of Mr. Colby from the C.I.A., as publishing reports today said. David W. Belin, the former commission counsel, broke his policy of not commenting on commission matters to state publicly that the commission had not investigated the Phoenix program (a counter-insurgency program Mr. Colby headed in Vietnam) or ever urged Mr. Colby's removal because of it.

Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, negotiations continued between officials of Howard R. Hughes's Summa Corporation and the Los Angeles County tax assessor over the ownership and tax liability of the Glomar Explorer, which, according to authoritative press accounts, was a ship financed by the C.I.A. to recover a sunken Soviet submarine from the Pacific Ocean.

Philip E. Watson, the tax assessor, has said that if the ship is privately owned and not the property of the agency she is liable for \$7.5-million in personal property taxes.

Lawyers for Summa and the Global Marine Company, which operates the vessel, said earlier this year in private meetings with Mr. Watson that she was the property of the C.I.A. and thus not taxable.

Yesterday and today Mr. Watson and other Los Angeles officials held meetings with John S. Warner, an agency official, to establish whether the agency wants to document that it owns the vessel or whether she is, in fact, the property of Summa. There was no public announcement of any decision.