

CIA Murder Plan



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FOR YEARS, the Central Intelligence Agency's darkest secret was its undercover association with Mafia hit men who were recruited for international murder missions. We finally broke the story that the CIA had used common gangsters in six attempts upon the life of Cuban Premier Fidel Castro.

Now we've learned that the CIA wanted to create its own branch of Murder, Inc. — a killer squad that would assassinate undesirable foreign leaders at \$1 million a head.

It has taken us years to dig out the ugly facts. We were able to report on March 3, 1967 that the CIA had "hatched a plot to knock off Castro." On January 18, 1971 we began a series of three columns describing the six assassination attempts and naming the Mafia killers and their CIA contacts. Not until five years later did the Senate Intelligence Committee finally confirm our story.

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THE CIA recruited the hit men through Robert Maheu, a former CIA undercover operator, who had taken charge of the late billionaire Howard Hughes' Las Vegas empire and had developed mob contacts in Nevada.

Around the time that Maheu was setting up the Mafia plot against Castro, we've just learned, the CIA also approached a former narcotics official with intimate knowledge of the Mafia. He was Charles Siragusa, a former wartime intelligence officer who had become one of the Big Three in the Federal Narcotics Bureau and had

handled the bureau's liaison with the CIA.

The bureau had cultivated informants inside the Mafia and had compiled the best available files on the crime syndicate. Siragusa was a logical person, therefore, for the CIA to sound out about forming a Mafia hit squad to kill for the United States.

The retired Siragusa, breaking a silence of more than 15 years, told us about a strange conversation with a CIA official in Washington around 1960. After a few minutes of chit-chat, the CIA man made this startling suggestion: that Siragusa, drawing on his knowledge and contacts in the underworld, would recruit a crew of Mafia torpedoes for standby assassination duty.

They would be paid a bounty of \$1 million in fees and expenses for each kill. The CIA would assign the missions and underwrite the payoffs from its secret funds.

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AT THIS POINT, the visitor stopped, waiting for Siragusa's reaction. "At first I thought he was joking," Siragusa told us, still amazed at the recollection.

When he realized the proposal was deadly serious, he flatly rejected it. "In wartime, it's one thing," he told the CIA emissary, "but in peacetime, it's something different." He heard nothing more of the matter.

Footnote: We are satisfied after long talks with top CIA officials that the CIA has given up its murder plots and most other dirty tricks.