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SUMMARY OF FACTS --
INVESTIGATION OF CIA INVOLVEMENT IN PLANS TO
ASSASSINATE FOREIGN LEADERS

The following is a summary of facts gathered by the Executive Director of the CIA Commission concerning possible CIA involvement in plans to assassinate foreign leaders.

The Executive Director requested complete access to papers of the National Security Council including papers of the Forty Committee and its predecessors and papers of any special groups or special operating groups. Such access was not granted. Also, time did not permit examination of documents that might be available in the Eisenhower, Kennedy or Johnson presidential libraries. Consequently, the investigation is not complete with regard to the question of who, if anyone outside the CIA, authorized or directed the planning of any assassination attempts against foreign leaders. However, with particular reference to the plans directed against Fidel Castro, the investigation is sufficiently complete to show that plans were undertaken by the CIA.

President Ford has announced that assassination is not and should never be a tool of American foreign policy. The Executive Director concurs and believes that it is against the constitutional and moral principles for which this nation stands for there to be any direct or indirect participation of any agency of the United States Government in any plans involving the assassination of any person in peacetime.

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178-10004-10091

A. The Scope of the Commission's Investigation

The first knowledge that the Commission had concerning possible involvement of the CIA in assassination plans directed at foreign leaders was when the CIA informed the Commission staff at the outset of the Commission's work, in response to an overall staff request for possible unlawful activities of the CIA, that such plans existed. The Commission staff was told that there was no evidence of murders or plots for murder against persons in the United States carried on by the CIA. However, the Commission staff was told that there had been discussion of plans for assassination attempts involving overt acts occurring within the boundaries of this country with regard to attempts on the life of Cuban Premier Fidel Castro.

Although there was some question whether or not an assassination plan aimed at a foreign leader fell technically within the charter of the Commission, even though overt acts may have taken place in this country, the Commission and its staff determined that because of the nature and seriousness of the matters involved, the doubts would be resolved in favor of undertaking an investigation of the facts. Only after such investigation could the Commission make an informed decision as to its jurisdiction.

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Furthermore, the Commission and its staff felt that it was also important to proceed in this area because it related to the charges to the Commission and the President's executive order directing the Commission to "determine whether existing safeguards are adequate to prevent any activities which violate the provisions of 50 U.S.C 403" and also related to the charge by the President that the Commission should "make such recommendations to the President and to the Director of Central Intelligence as the Commission deems appropriate."

On the basis of its investigation, the Commission has determined that agents of the CIA were involved in planning in this country with certain citizens and others to seek to assassinate Premier Castro. The Commission has also determined that the CIA was involved in shipping arms from this country to persons in the Dominican Republic, who sought to assassinate Generalissimo Trujillo (who himself had been involved in an attempt to assassinate the President of Venezuela.)

The Commission has not found evidence of any other attempts to assassinate any other foreign leader which had significant overt activities within the United States. However, the nature of the activity and the degree of secrecy and compartmentation within the Agency is such that it is difficult to find any evidence of this kind unless specific facts are brought to the attention of an

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investigating body. With regard to activities outside of the United States, the Commission has not found any evidence of CIA participation in plans to assassinate foreign leaders, except as described in the next four paragraphs. However, the investigation of the Commission in such areas, which had no domestic aspect which might bring it within the Commission's jurisdictional mandate under the President's Order, has not been extensive.

In the course of the first stage of its investigation to determine its jurisdiction, the Commission made a preliminary investigation of charges that the CIA was involved in the death of Patrice Lumumba, who was killed in early 1961. The Commission has not found any evidence that the CIA participated in that killing, although there is evidence that prior to Lumumba's death some CIA personnel and others discussed the possibility of undertaking a plan to assassinate Lumumba.*

*In an affidavit, C. Douglas Dillon, a member of this Commission, stated that while he served as Under Secretary of State from June 1959 until early January 1961, he heard no discussion of assassination attempts against anyone, except discussions which occurred in late July or early August of 1960 at a meeting at the Pentagon which covered a great variety of matters in which "...a question regarding the possibility of an assassination attempt against Lumumba was briefly raised. The CIA representative indicated that the Agency did not undertake this sort of operation. This ended consideration of this subject."

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According to Richard Bissell, who was the CIA Deputy Director of Plans at the time, he was aware of discussion of plans within the Agency concerning the possible assassination of Patrice Lumumba and that "a case officer was directed to look into the possibilities. He reported back in a matter of weeks and convinced me that this was probably unfeasible, and probably an undesirable course of action. According to the case officer, who is now retired, Bissell asked him to go to the Congo and there murder or arrange for the murder of Lumumba, and the case officer said that he told Bissell that he refused to be a party to such an act.* Bissell said the Agency had nothing whatsoever to do with the death of Lumumba.

Bissell also testified that there was discussion within the Agency of the possibility of an attempt on the life of President Sukarno of Indonesia which "progressed as far as the identification of an asset who it was felt might be recruited for this purpose. The plan was never reached, was never perfected to the point where it seemed feasible." He said the Agency had "absolutely nothing" to do with the death of Sukarno.

*The case officer gave this information in an oral telephone conference at which time an appointment was arranged for the taking of his testimony before a member of the Commission staff and a court reporter. The case officer failed to keep his appointment.

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With regard to both plans, he stated that no assassination plans would have been undertaken without authorization outside the Agency, and that no such authorization was undertaken for plans against either Lumumba or Sukarno.

Since the Commission found no aspects to bring the Sukarno and Lumumba matters within the scope of its investigative authority, no further investigation in these two areas was undertaken. However, the Commission did find sufficient domestic aspects in the Castro and Trujillo plans for the Commission to undertake an investigation. The President concurred in the approach of the Commission to interpret its authority so that the Commission would (1) ascertain whether the charges of assassination plots have a basis in fact and involve unlawful domestic CIA activities and (2) determine whether existing safeguards would prevent activities of that nature in the future regardless of whether they might involve domestic or foreign conspiracy.

The following is a summary of facts pertaining to CIA participation in assassination plans to assassinate Premier Fidel Castro. The facts have been developed through a review of the internal investigation of the CIA, examination of documents, and interviews and testimony.

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B. Participation of CIA Personnel in Plans to Attempt to assassinate Fidel Castro

An analysis of the involvement in the CIA in plots to attempt to assassinate Fidel Castro illustrates the development of larger schemes out of smaller schemes, and also illustrates how important it is to have adequate internal and external controls on the Agency.

The initial CIA schemes relating to Fidel Castro were an outgrowth of large-scale plans by the United States Government to attempt to change the government of Cuba. There had been great dissatisfaction with the government of Cuban leader Batista. As Castro's influence increased, attempts were made to persuade Batista to resign and turn over the reins of government to a group that was more attuned to the needs and desires of the Cuban people, particularly in areas of democratic government and social reforms. According to an interview with the former Chief of the CIA Western Hemisphere Division, an unofficial ambassador from this country approached Batista in December 1968, asking that he resign and turn the reins of government to new leadership. This request was refused.

Fidel Castro shortly thereafter took over the Cuban government. There was great concern on the part of American leadership about the presence of a government so closely aligned with the Soviet Union barely ninety miles from American shores.

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Therefore, the CIA, with appropriate authorization, undertook the development of an operation in support of Cuban exiles seeking to overthrow the Castro Government, the culmination of which became the Bay of Pigs disaster in April 1961.

As the plans for the attempted overthrow of the Cuban government were developed, one of the considerations related to Fidel Castro as the dominant figure.

There has also been testimony before the Commission that at the request of the CIA the Air Force provided a plane in late 1959 or early 1960 which was used to fly two Cuban exiles into Cuba. The witness was unable to provide the Commission with names of these two Cuban exiles or names of any CIA personnel which he said were involved. However, at the time of the events the witness was an Air Force officer who had liaison functions between the Department of Defense and the CIA. He testified that he believes a plane was provided and that the two Cuban exiles were to carry with them one or more rifles with telescopic sites to be used in an attempt to assassinate Fidel Castro.

The Commission sought to investigate this matter. In a "Memorandum for the Record" dated May 15, 1975, the CIA admitted that in reviewing its files relating to Cuban operations during the period 1959-1961: "a number of

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documents were found that referred to the intent on the part of some of the Cuban teams operating inside Cuba to attempt to assassinate Castro....Additionally, the files indicate that there was considerable interest in procurement of Helio Courier (the civil version of the L-28), but there is no definite indication that they were intended for Cuban operations. Also, there is mention of the air drop of Springfield rifles with telescopic sights."

1. 1960-61 and the Phase I Plans

The Phase I plans involved the preparation of poison botulism pills by the CIA, the delivery of those pills to organized crime figures who in turn were to get the pills delivered to contacts they had in Cuba, who in turn were to get the pills into the hands of someone who could place them in a beverage to be drunk by Premier Castro.

a. When the Plans Began

There is some disagreement about exactly how the Phase I plans began. The two people in the CIA who were the most intimately involved were Richard Bissell, Deputy Director of Plans, who was the person in the CIA who had direct responsibility for the Bay of Pigs operation, and Colonel Sheffield Edwards, the Director of the Office of Security of the CIA.

According to Richard Bissell, the plans relating to Fidel Castro started in "the very beginning of 1961" when he said he became aware "of the possibility that an assassination attempt might be planned using Mafia resources, or

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syndicate resources. My very uncertain recollection is that I first heard of this possibility from Shef Edwards."

According to Sheffield Edwards, his first contact with these plans "was about the time of the Bay or Pigs." He said he did not "remember exactly" if it was before or after the Bay of Pigs, but when asked whether or not it was in the Eisenhower Administration or the Kennedy Administration for purposes of determining the time of the inception of the plan, he said that "It was in the Kennedy Administration."

Whereas Bissell testified that he "first heard of this possibility (of using Mafia or syndicate resources) from Sheffield Edwards," Edwards testified that his first contact was a request by Bissell who asked Edwards "if I had any assets...that would be available into the syndicate."

Although oral testimony of both said that this began in the early stages of the Kennedy Administration, there is documentation which indicates that these conversations took place in the latter part of 1960 during the Eisenhower Administration. This documentation includes a May 14, 1962 "Memorandum for the Record" entitled "Arthur James Balletti et al--Unauthorized Publication or Use of Communications." The opening sentence of the memorandum states: "This memorandum for the record was prepared at

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the request of the Attorney General of the United States following a complete oral briefing of him relevant to a sensitive CIA operation conducted during the period approximately August 1960 to May 1961." The oral briefing actually occurred in the offices of the Attorney General of the United States, Robert Kennedy, on May 7, 1962, and Attorney General Kennedy received a copy of the May 14, 1962 memorandum for the record.

Attending the oral briefing were three people: Attorney General Kennedy, Sheffield Edwards, and Lawrence Houston, General Counsel of the CIA. The memorandum itself was prepared by Sheffield Edwards and continued after the opening sentence: "In August 1960 the undersigned was approached by Mr. Richard Bissell, then Deputy Director for Plans of CIA, to explore the possibility of mounting this sensitive operation against Fidel Castro. It was thought that certain gambling interests, which had formerly been active in Cuba, might be willing and able to assist and further, might have both intelligence assets in Cuba and communication between Miami, Florida and Cuba."

The memorandum then related that an intermediary who was known to the CIA was approached by Colonel Sheffield Edwards "and asked to establish contact with a member or members of the gambling syndicate to explore their capabilities." The approach was to be made "...to the syndicate as

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appearing to represent big business organizations which wished to protect their interests in Cuba." The contact was made with a "syndicate" member who "showed interest in the possibility and indicated he had some contacts in Miami that he might use." The syndicate member supposedly told the CIA intermediary that the syndicate person "was not interested in any remuneration but would seek to establish capabilities in Cuba to perform the desired project."

The memorandum continued: "Towards the end of September" 1960 contact with another syndicate member from Chicago, Sam Giancana, was made, and in turn an arrangement was made through Giancana for the CIA intermediary and his contact "to meet with a 'courier' who was going back and forth to Havana. From information received back by the courier the proposed operation appeared to be feasible and it was decided to obtain an official Agency approval in this regard. A figure of one hundred fifty thousand dollars was set by the Agency as a payment to be made on completion of the operation and to be paid only to the principal or principals who would conduct the operation in Cuba."

The CIA intermediary reported that Giancana and the other contact "emphatically stated that they wished no part of any payment. The undersigned (Sheffield

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Edwards) then briefed the proper senior officers of this Agency of the proposal. Knowledge of this project during its life was kept to a total of six persons and never became a part of the project current at the time for the invasion of Cuba. There were no memoranda on the project nor were there other written documents or agreements. The project was duly orally approved by the said senior officials of the Agency."

The memorandum continued that during the period from September 1960 to 1961, "efforts were continued" by the CIA intermediary and the Mafia personnel "to proceed with the operation. The first principal in Cuba withdrew and another principal was selected as has been briefed to the Attorney General. Ten thousand dollars was passed for expenses to the second principal. He was further furnished with approximately one thousand dollars worth of communications equipment to establish communications between his headquarters in Miami and assets in Cuba. No monies were ever paid" to the syndicate personnel. There was expense money paid to the CIA intermediary. The memorandum stated that "After the failure of the invasion of Cuba word was sent through" the CIA intermediary to the syndicate personnel "to call off the operation" with the further direction that the syndicate person "was

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told to tell his principal that the proposal to pay one hundred fifty thousand dollars for completion of the operation had been definitely withdrawn." Only two copies of the memorandum were prepared -- one for the Attorney General and one to be retained by the CIA.

b. Factual Background--Preparation of May 14, 1962 Memorandum for Attorney General

The factual situation underlying the preparation of the May 14, 1962, memorandum was that sometime in the fall of 1960 Sam Giancana asked the CIA intermediary to arrange for putting a listening device in the room of an entertainer who at the time was in Las Vegas and who Giancana thought was having an affair with another entertainer, who was reputed to be Giancana's mistress.

According to the Phase I CIA case officer, the request by Giancana came at a crucial time when plans were underway for Phase I. Giancana supposedly stated that if he did not get help to install the listening device, he would have to go to Las Vegas himself. The case officer said "this would have interrupted the project at a very critical time," and therefore he sought the assistance of the CIA intermediary to get a private detective agency to undertake the installation of the listening device.

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The CIA intermediary passed the request over to another private investigator, who in turn contacted Arthur James Balletti (the name of the subject of the May 14, 1962 memorandum for the record given to Attorney General Kennedy.) Instead of putting a listening device in the room, Balletti put a listening device on the telephone. The listening device was discovered and Balletti was arrested by the sheriff of Las Vegas, Nevada. At the time of the incident, the CIA did not know of the specific proposed wiretap.

According to the Agency investigation by the Inspector General's Office in 1967, Edwards had once told the Agency intermediary that if the intermediary ever got in trouble he could say to the FBI that he was working on an intelligence operation being handled by the Agency. An FBI memorandum on that matter stated that the intermediary claimed the telephone tap was ordered on behalf of the Agency's effort to obtain intelligence through hoodlum elements in Cuba. The Agency investigation file also states that a March 23, 1962 FBI memorandum confirmed a meeting with Sheffield Edwards in which Edwards told the FBI that the intermediary was involved in a sensitive project and that the CIA would object to prosecution because it would necessitate CIA information and it could embarrass the United States Government. Subsequently there

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was a meeting between Sheffield Edwards and Sam Papich, the FBI liaison with the Agency, in which Edwards advised Papich that it would not be in the national interest to prosecute. At the time of that meeting, those who had initially authorized the assassination plans (Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell) were gone and no one else in authority (including Richard Helms, who replaced Bissell) had been "cut in on the operation." Thereafter, Sheffield Edwards briefed Lawrence Houston, who in turn briefed General Carter, McCone's Deputy Director of Central Intelligence.

General Carter, who is now retired, lives in Colorado. When interviewed by a member of the Commission staff by long distance telephone, General Carter said that he had no recollection of this.

According to Sheffield Edwards, prior to briefing Attorney General Robert Kennedy, he briefed Lawrence Houston, General Counsel for the Agency. Edwards said that there was nothing that he knew about the plan to assassinate Castro that he didn't tell Attorney General Kennedy and that the briefing lasted "about a half an hour, at least." He said that he told Attorney General Kennedy everything, and that after the briefing was completed Robert Kennedy had no comment to him but Robert

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Kennedy "cautioned Larry Houston to the effect that he was to know about these things. Words to that effect." When asked whether or not the Attorney General had told Colonel Edwards that "you shouldn't do this at all," Colonel Edwards replied "No." When asked whether or not the Attorney General in any way said "that he disapproved of whatever was done in the past," Colonel Edwards said "No."

Lawrence Houston testified, "I was briefed on this subject after it was dropped. I was not party to nor was I asked in advance about it....By the time I heard about it, I think it had been terminated some little time, but there were personalities involved...who were both regarded as part of the Mafia organization, and these were people" that the CIA intermediary "had introduced to us. They had former gambling interests in Havana, and at one time thought they may be able to take action against Castro. After it fell through, my recollection is that they had potential criminal indictments" against the Mafia people "and it seems to me that the bug in the Las Vegas hotel was involved more peripherally, but I cannot remember the details."

Houston also testified that he told Edwards "that I thought the only thing to do was to go and tell the whole story to the Attorney General. So with the

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approval of the Director at that time--, well, it was '63, it must have been McCone. We went down to brief Mr. Kennedy on the full story" that the Agency "had set up a project with its aim the demise of Castro, that the project had fallen through, that these following people were involved, and we gave them the names, and this is what made him unhappy, because at that time he felt he was making a very strong drive to try to get after the Mafia. And so his comment was to us that if we were going to get involved with the Mafia, in the future at any time, to make sure you see me first."

(This is the only evidence in the record to show that John McCone knew about the existence of any specific assassination plan in 1962. There is evidence in the CIA files to show that the actual person with whom the matter was discussed was the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, and this evidence is supported by an August 16, 1963 memorandum from Helms to McCone, which will be discussed in the Phase II portion of this report.)

c. FBI Memoranda Concerning CIA Assassination Plans

According to a May 22, 1961 FBI memorandum entitled "Arthur James Balletti, et al":

"On May 3, 1961, Colonel Sheffield Edwards, Director of Security, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) furnished the following information.

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"Colonel Edwards advised that in connection with CIA's operation against Castro he personally contacted Robert Maheu during the fall of 1960 for the purpose of using Maheu as a 'cut-out' in contacts with Sam Giancana, a known hoodlum in the Chicago area. Colonel Edwards said that since the underworld controlled gambling activities in Cuba under the Batista government, it was assumed that this element would still continue to have sources and contacts in Cuba which perhaps could be utilized successfully in connection with CIA's clandestine efforts against the Castro government. As a result, Maheu's services were solicited as a 'cut-out' because of his possible entree into underworld circles. Maheu obtained Sam Giancana's assistance in this regard and according to Edwards, Giancana gave every indication of cooperating through Maheu in attempting to accomplish several clandestine efforts in Cuba. Edwards added that none of Giancana's efforts have materialized to date and that several of the plans still are working and may eventually 'pay off.'"

The memorandum then went into the Balletti situation and reported that Colonel Edwards had no knowledge of the wire tap.

The memorandum concluded with the following paragraph:

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"Colonel Edwards advised that only Mr. Bissell (Deputy Director of Plans, CIA) and two others in CIA were aware of the Giancana-Maheu activity in behalf of CIA's program and that Allen Dulles was completely unaware of Edwards' contact with Maheu in this connection. He added that Mr. Bissell, during his recent briefings of General Taylor and the Attorney General in connection with their inquiries into CIA relating to the Cuban situation told the Attorney General that some of the CIA's associated planning included the use of Giancana and the underworld against Castro."

Subsequently, on March 6, 1967, J. Edgar Hoover sent to the Attorney General a letter with an accompanying March 6, 1967, FBI memorandum entitled "Central Intelligence Agency's Intentions to Send Hoodlums to Cuba to Assassinate Castro". The memorandum referred to the Balletti wiretap matter and stated that the FBI "checked matter with CIA on 5/3/61 and learned CIA was using Robert Mahue as intermediary with Sam Giancana relative to CIA's 'dirty business' anti-Castro activities.

"By letter 5/22/61 we furnished former Attorney General Kennedy a memorandum containing a rundown on CIA's involvement in this. The originals of the letter and memorandum were returned to us for filing purposes. A copy of that memorandum is being attached to instant letter being sent to Attorney General.

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"On 5/9/62 Kennedy discussed with the Director a number of matters, including admission by CIA that Robert Mahue had been hired by that Agency to approach Sam Giancana to have Castro assassinated at a cost of \$150,000. Kennedy stated he had issued orders that CIA should never undertake such steps again without first checking with Department of Justice and stated because of this matter it would be difficult to prosecute Giancana or Robert Mahue then or in the future." /

The memorandum continued that the FBI had learned on June 20, 1963 that the CIA contacts with the Mafia had "continued up until that time when they were reportedly cut off." The FBI memorandum also stated that it appeared that one Mafia member involved in the plans "is using his prior connections with CIA to his best advantage."

A contemporaneous FBI memorandum dated March 6, 1967 stated that Robert Kennedy following his briefing in May of 1962 informed the FBI on May 9, 1962 about the briefing. "He (Robert Kennedy) indicated that a few days prior thereto he had been advised by CIA" that an intermediary had been hired by CIA to approach Sam Giancana with a proposition of paying \$150,000 to hire some gunman to go into Cuba and kill Castro. The memorandum further continued that "Mr. Kennedy stated that upon learning CIA had not cleared its action in hiring (the intermediary) and Giancana with the Department of Justice he issued orders that CIA should never again take such steps without checking with the Department of Justice.

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"Mr. Kennedy further advised that because of this matter it would be very difficult to initiate any prosecution against Giancana, as Giancana could immediately bring out the fact that the United States Government had approached him to arrange for the assassination of Castro."

d. Statements of Colonel Edwards re May 7, 1962 Briefing

When Sheffield Edwards and the CIA's General Counsel briefed Robert Kennedy on May 7, 1962 concerning the Phase I assassination efforts by the CIA, there is no evidence to indicate that during that briefing Robert Kennedy told the CIA personnel that he already had known of this information because of prior information received from the FBI.

Colonel Edwards confirmed the statement in the March 6, 1967, FBI memorandum that Attorney General Kennedy stated that the CIA should never undertake the use of Mafia people again without first checking with the Department of Justice because it would be difficult to prosecute such people in the future.

e. Statements of Colonel Edwards re Knowledge Inside CIA

According to Edwards the CIA people that knew about the plans while they were going on were himself, his case officer, Bissell, Allen Dulles, Director of Central Intelligence until November 1961, and General Cabell, Deputy Director of Intelligence during this period of time. Both Dulles and Cabell are now dead.

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f. Refusal to Testify of Robert Maheu, CIA Intermediary

Robert Maheu, the CIA intermediary, refused to be interrogated by the Commission staff. His attorney, Morton Galane, told the Executive Director of the Commission that he (Galane) had advised his client to exercise his constitutional rights and not answer any questions other than his name, address, and the fact that he had undertaken work for the CIA.

g. The Carrying Out of the Plan

The following facts primarily come from interrogation of Colonel Edwards and the Phase I case officer:

The particular means by which the plans were to be carried out was "by placing botulism pills in his food."

The syndicate personnel were to get the pills to a person in Cuba who would have access to Castro.

Supposedly, the reason pills were used was that the syndicate personnel could not recruit personnel to undertake the assassination through gunfire because the chance of survival and escape was small. However, the case officer felt that it was the Agency itself that desired to have pills used rather than gunfire.

Colonel Edwards said that he, himself, checked out the pills on some guinea pigs "because I wanted to be sure they worked."

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Corroboration of the Phase I plans was also made by another retired medical officer who was familiar with the preparation of the pills inside the Agency.

Edwards said he did not know of any plans other than those that involved the use of these botulism pills.

Edwards did not have any first-hand knowledge about whether or not the pills ever got to Cuba.

According to the Phase I case officer, he delivered the pills to the syndicate member and was subsequently advised by the syndicate member that the pills were in Cuba, but the case officer had no direct knowledge of his own that the pills actually got there.

Richard Bissell said he did not have any personal recollection as to whether or not poison pills of any kind were ever delivered into Cuba.

There may actually have been two passages of pills to Cuba in the first part of 1961. The first passage was in late February or March from the syndicate through their courier to a Cuban who supposedly had a position in the Cuban Prime Minister's office where he had access to Fidel Castro. According to the interview of Sheffield Edwards with the Executive Director, the Cuban asset "got scared" and did not try to pass the pill. Pills were subsequently delivered to another "asset" who was in a position to slip the pills to

Castro at a restaurant where the asset worked. This took place in the March-April 1961 period. Fidel Castro ceased visiting that particular restaurant at approximately the same time the pills purportedly arrived. The case officer said it was his recollection that there were two passages of pills to Cuba, the second one which was made to someone who had access to a restaurant which Castro frequented. After the second attempt failed, the case officer said the pills were returned to the CIA.

h. How the Plans Got Started

There is inconsistency between the testimony of Richard Bissell and Colonel Edwards concerning how the plans got started.

According to Bissell the original approach was made to the Agency" by the syndicate personnel because "they had their own very strong motivations for carrying out this...they had been powerful under Batista in Cuba, and they had a very lucrative set of interests for the syndicates, and they had been in effect been thrown out, and so they had the strongest sort of reasons for anti-Castro sentiment on their own." Bissell said he first learned about this from Sheffield Edwards and that he had also talked with Allen Dulles about the matter.

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Whereas Bissell testified that he "first heard of this possibility (of using Mafia or syndicate resources) from Sheffield Edwards," Edwards testified that his first contact was a request by Bissell who asked Edwards "if I had any assets...that would be available into the syndicate."

When asked about the inconsistency between his own testimony and that of Sheffield Edwards concerning whether or not Edwards approached Bissell first or Bissell approached Edwards first, Bissell stated that "it is possible that my recollection is wrong,...I think I will stand on that as my recollection...but I seem to remember rather clearly that it was from him (Edwards) that I first learned of the possibility of this operation, and that he came to see me for this purpose rather than my sending for him. Now, could I just say that I had several conversations with Shef Edwards on this matter, and it is very possible that I, that in a subsequent conversation I did take the initiative and send for and discuss it with him."

The case officer stated that he believed it was Bissell who first approached Edwards about making the contacts with a CIA intermediary. The case officer further stated that although he ultimately became aware of the fact that the people contacted by the CIA intermediary were "syndicate"

members, initially neither he nor the intermediary knew this to be the fact. Rather, he said he thought these people whom the intermediary contacted were gangster-type people who were not necessarily members of the syndicate.

i. Possible White House Direction or Approval of Plans

(1) The Testimony of Richard Bissell

recollection" Bissell stated that he had "no clear /of any discussion with anyone in the Eisenhower Administration concerning any possible plan to assassinate Castro," but there could have been. He said that if it would have occurred at all during the Eisenhower Administration, "it would have been with Gordon Gray." Gray testified that there were no such conversations that occurred.

Bissell testified that although "my recollection of this is far from clear... I am satisfied that very early in the Kennedy Administration I did participate" in conversations with someone in the White House concerning the planning of what was called an executive action capability, which was defined in substance as a capability of the Agency to carry out assassinations, if required. When asked with whom these conversations occurred, Bissell said "I am almost certain it was either Walt Rostow (Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security) or McGeorge Bundy (Presidential Assistant for National Security), or probably the former, and possibly both."

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When asked to state what specifically was discussed in these conversations, Bissell said: "My recollection, which isn't too specific, is that this was a discussion of the desirability of developing such a capability within the CIA that presumably would be a small, special unit, and highly compartmented from the rest of the organization."

Bissell said that he had no specific knowledge but that he "had a great deal of confidence that the two gentlemen whose names I have mentioned, would not have discussed this discussed with me or encouraged any course of action that they were not confident the President would approve." When asked whether or not he had any discussions with any official in the Eisenhower Administration concerning the development of an executive action capability, Bissell replied, "not to my recollection, and I think I am almost sure that I did not."

Later in his testimony Bissell said that the possibility of using syndicate people to carry out an assassination attempt against Castro "was discussed by me, again I think probably with Walt Rostow. It may possibly have been discussed directly with McGeorge Bundy, but I suspect that it was through Rostow, who was then Bundy's assistant and on his staff. My impression, but again I must emphasize that this is uncertain impression, was that I was encouraged to go

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ahead with the investigation and planning of this operation, and by investigation I mean simply to find out what would be involved to make some assessment of the likelihood of success, and other aspects of the matter."

According to Bissell, he was "vague as to the final outcome of that attempt." He said that he had "no recollection of a specific authorization that it should go forward. I believe, however, that we probably did move to be in a position to carry it out, or authorize it, if authorization were received." He said that he believed "my own recollection of the final stages of the plan is vague" because the plan involved "furnishing probably some money and such items as pills or other devices through a number of cut-outs or intermediaries to a group which we ourselves, of course, did not, in any direct sense, control. This was not an operation of such a character that the communications would run through Agency channels, or that authorization on the spot would be by Agency personnel, or that the Agency could precisely and tightly control it."

(2) The Testimony of Gordon Gray

Gordon Gray testified that he had no conversations with Richard Bissell or anyone else pertaining to assassination plans.

(3) The Testimony of Walt Rostow

Walt Rostow testified that he did not

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have any recollection of having any discussions with Bissell pertaining to any attempt at assassination plots.

(4) The Testimony of the Phase I Case Officer

The case officer stated that he had been told that the project had been approved by Allen Dulles, Director of Central Intelligence, but he (the case officer) had no knowledge of whether or not there had been any discussion or approval from the White House.

(5) The Testimony of Colonel Edwards

Edwards said that he believed the plans were developed by Bissell and that he was "sure that there were not" any people in the White House that knew about these plans. He also said that he did not know of any attempt of plans to assassinate people other than Fidel Castro.

(6) The Testimony of McGeorge Bundy

McGeorge Bundy said that he was never aware any "actual decision" to go about seeking to assassinate any foreign leader. However, he said that he did "have a vague recollection of the existence or the possible existence of contingency planning in this area. I am sorry to say I cannot help you much with details about it because I can't fish them out of my memory, but I could not exclude that there were contingency plans, and a contingency capability of some sort, or plans for such a capability at some time."

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He said that he did not know of any case where plans went beyond the contingency stage "and I know of no such authorization or any involvement by anybody in the White House staff or anybody else, for that matter."

When asked whether or

not he ever heard any discussion concerning a plot or plan to assassinate Cuban leaders, Bundy replied, "Not that I can remember...I certainly cannot exclude the possibility that you could have had the kind of discussion in which one or another individual would have said it would be, that there is a possibility that thus and such a Cuban group, if landed and infiltrated, might have as one of its missions the following, which might have included an attack on one or another Cuban leader. I do not have any direct recollection that that did happen, but I cannot exclude that it did happen."

Bundy testified that

he did not know of any decision to go ahead and actually undertake a plan of assassination. "That contingent capability may have been authorized in this field I cannot exclude, although I have no direct recollection of it. It is the decision to go ahead that I am sure I do not remember."

Bundy said that he would have been "surprised" if any effort to assassinate a foreign leader had been undertaken without his approval as the President's Assistant for

Security Affairs, and said that he himself would "not have authorized anything of that kind without much higher authority than my own. I could not exclude that there would be communication with the President by other channels. Neither President Kennedy nor President Johnson always used any one channel."

There was direct access of the Director of Central Intelligence to the President, according to Mr. Bundy. He said that based upon his experience, "I would not have expected...the Agency would have undertaken anything like an attack on the life of a foreign leader without direct order from higher authority "...It did not happen in the time I was there...but I can conceive of the President saying to somebody, I do not want to make this decision but giving some indication of the kind of decision he wanted made."

After Mr. Bundy completed his testimony before the Commission, he contacted the Executive Director the next morning and volunteered that in thinking about some of the interrogation overnight "I have had a vague recollection, which I cannot pinpoint in time, that there was discussion that I knew about at some time of a proposal or scheme or project" in relation to the Castro regime "that did involve poison, and the characteristic that sticks in my memory is that it would have involved a rather large scale use of poison and, as I recollect it, it never came anywhere near approval." Proposals under the overall plan with regard

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to Cuba "which did come from time to time (mostly not with respect to assassination) were reviewed in the first instance for practicality and only after that for wisdom or political rightness, and I recall no proposal for liquidation that ever got past the first stage to the second."

A memorandum of the interview with the Executive Director was prepared the next morning to record these additional comments. In this memorandum which was signed by Mr. Bundy and sworn to before a notary public in the form of an affidavit, Bundy said that "I simply have no recollection of plans" that "existed in January or February 1961" which involved the attempted poisoning of any Cuban leader. "I believe my memory tells me in a more general way that my knowledge of a scheme or idea of using poison probably relates to the year 1962."

Bundy further stated: "I am absolutely certain that I never knew of or believed that there was any authorization to go ahead with an effort to liquidate Castro, or any other Cuban leader."

With reference to his testimony concerning an executive action capability, Bundy said that "I recall the words 'executive action capability' more clearly today than I did yesterday...but I do not have any recollection as to what I knew about that or who requested it or how much was done under it. I don't recall having any particular continuing

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interest in or information about that particular activity" which was "something like" a "plan to have some kind of stand-by capability for action against individuals."

(7) Documents of the National Security Council

The Commission requested complete access to papers of the National Security Council, including documents of the predecessors of the Forty Committee, documents of the Special Group, or Special Operations Group, and any other documents which might pertain to the possibility of assassination of Premier Castro. Complete access was not granted. The Commission did not have time or staff to undertake an examination of documents in the Eisenhower, Kennedy or Johnson presidential libraries. The National Security Council in response to the request for access by the Commission Council files on Cuba and the Dominican Republic for the period 1959-64, delivered to the Commission what it said was all of its documents which pertained to the question of possible assassination attempts on the life of Castro or Trujillo. One of these documents was an excerpt from a paper on "United States Policy Toward Cuba" dated May 4, 1961 and prepared for discussion by the National Security Council at its meeting on May 5, 1961.

→ (Paragraphs No. 79 and No. 80 from this excerpt are as follows:

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79. Castro. A political vulnerability of the regime lies in the person of Castro himself. It is not clear whether the regime could continue to operate for long without him. There is no question that the bureaucracy operates relatively freely, and probably makes many decisions without consulting Castro. However, it is equally certain that the Castro personality and his appeal to the Cuban people is an important element in maintaining popular support for the regime. If Castro were removed from the scene the regime might collapse for lack of this central rallying point. On the other hand, the bureaucracy may now be so firmly entrenched that it could function independently--although admittedly without the degree of popular support now enjoyed. Further, by using Castro as a martyr it might be possible to generate at least a temporary support for his successor.

80. A further possibility attendant upon the death of Castro would be the attitude of the PSP. The party would like to assume a more open and dominant role in the Cuban Government. Castro's death might force or encourage the party into a precipitate move to seize power. If this happened it would probably have an adverse reaction on Latin American opinion, though principally at the government level.

(8) General Maxwell Taylor

General Maxwell Taylor, who was referred to in the May 22, 1961 memorandum, when interviewed by the staff said that he had no knowledge of any assassination plans directed against Castro.

(9) June 13, 1961 Taylor Report

According to the June 13, 1961 paper, Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell briefed President-elect Kennedy in November 1960 at Palm Beach. The Taylor paper was

prepared pursuant to an April 22, 1961 direction by the President to Taylor, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Admiral Arley Burke and Allen Dulles for an overall analysis and study of governmental practices for military, paramilitary, guerrilla and anti-guerrilla activity with special attention "to the lessons that can be learned from recent events in Cuba." There is nothing in the June 13, 1961 Taylor report which specifically discusses assassination.

However, during the time the study was being undertaken the aforementioned May 22, 1961, FBI memorandum was prepared and sent to Attorney General Kennedy.

j. Termination of Phase I Plan

After the Bay of Pigs operation in April 1961, according to Sheffield Edwards "the plan, as I recall, petered out." Edwards said that he did not become involved with any other person, after the Bay of Pigs invasion, to try to get the pills into Cuba.

k. Relationship of Phase I Plan with Bay of Pigs

Sheffield Edwards, himself, thought that these plans were developed in connection with the Bay of Pigs, and it was Bissell who was in charge of the overall coordination of the Bay of Pigs operation. Bissell denies that these plans were part of the Bay of Pigs planning. He testified that he was "quite clear" that the plans for attempted assassination of Fidel Castro were not developed as a part of the Bay of Pigs operation.

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1. Knowledge of Phase I Plans Inside Cuba

Bissell also felt that to the extent individuals in the Cuban exile community in Miami may have been involved, "our belief was that Castro was extremely well informed on what was going on."

Bissell stated that he did not think the actual attempt was ever made, although it is physically possible that the poison pills did reach Cuba. He also said that although he did not remember having any evidence that Castro knew of these attempts, "it is perfectly possible that, with some time lag, Castro would have come on some evidence of this operation."

m. Other Plans during Phase I

While the Phase I plans were underway, the Agency received confirmation from contacts in Cuba concerning possible assassination attempts inside Cuba against Castro. Most of these contacts took place in the first part of 1961 immediately preceding the Bay of Pigs landing. In particular, there were several cables received referring to a possible assassination attempt against Fidel Castro on April 9, 1961, during a public appearance at the Sports Palace in Havana. There were also messages received from dissident Cubans inside Cuba in the first few months after the Bay of Pigs invasion. In some of these messages there were references to trying to kill Castro. None of these possible assassination attempts from dissidents inside Cuba appear to have been coordinated with the Phase I plans.

2. 1962-63 and the Phase II Plans

In late 1961 or early 1962, which was shortly after the Cuban missile crisis, Deputy Director for Plans, Richard Bissell, recalled asking a new case officer "to take over a part of our reviving effort against Castro and the Castro Administration...I probably urged him to look into this plan...which had been the subject of active attention nearly a year before. I have no recollection of authorizing him to revive it, except to look at it as a plan, or to proceed with any action along those lines." According to the case officer, he knew of no other plan to assassinate any other foreign leader except Castro.

a. The Testimony of the Phase II Case Officer

The case officer said that he had a conversation with Richard Bissell, which he believed took place in the latter part of 1961 or early 1962, in which Bissell told him in substance that someone in the White House had raised the question whether or not the Agency should develop what was called an "executive action capability", which was a capability of assassination or liquidation of leaders of foreign countries. The case officer said that Bissell briefed him that an operation against Castro "had been mounted" and "that it had been handled through Sheffield Edwards."

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