

## I. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

This interim report covers allegations of United States involvement in assassination plots against foreign political leaders. The report also examines certain other instances in which foreign political leaders in fact were killed and the United States was in some manner involved in activity leading up to the killing, but in which it would be incorrect to say that the purpose of United States involvement had been to encourage assassination.

The evidence establishes that the United States was implicated in several assassination plots. The Committee believes that, short of war, assassination is incompatible with American principles, international order, and morality. It should be rejected as a tool of foreign policy.

Our inquiry also reveals serious problems with respect to United States involvement in coups directed against foreign governments. Some of these problems are addressed here on the basis of our investigation to date; others we raise as questions to be answered after our investigation into covert action has been completed.

We stress the interim nature of this report. In the course of the Committee's continuing work, other alleged assassination plots may surface, and new evidence concerning the cases covered herein may come to light. However, it is the Committee's view that these cases have been developed in sufficient detail to clarify the issues which are at the heart of the Committee's mandate to recommend legislative and other reforms.

Thorough treatment of the assassination question has lengthened the Committee's schedule, but has greatly increased the Committee's awareness of the hard issues it must face in the months ahead. These issues include problems of domestic and foreign intelligence collection, counterintelligence, foreign covert operations, mechanisms of command and control, and assessment of the effectiveness of the total United States intelligence effort. The Committee intends, nevertheless, to complete, by February 1976, its main job of undertaking the first comprehensive review of the intelligence community.

### A. COMMITTEE'S MANDATE

Senate Resolution 21 instructs the Committee to investigate the full range of governmental intelligence activities and the extent, if any, to which such activities were "illegal, improper or unethical." In addition to that broad general mandate, the Committee is required to investigate, study and make recommendations concerning various specific matters, several of which relate to the assassination issue.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For example, S. Res. 21 requires the Committee to study and investigate the following:

The extent and necessity of \* \* \* covert intelligence activities \* \* \* abroad;  
[The] nature and extent of executive branch oversight of all United States intelligence activities;

The need for improved, strengthened, or consolidated oversight of United States intelligence activities by the Congress \* \* \* and the need for new legislation.

Although the Rockefeller Commission initiated an inquiry into reported assassination plots, the Commission declared it was unable, for a variety of reasons, to complete its inquiry. At the direction of the President, the Executive Branch turned over to the Select Committee the work the Commission had done, along with certain other documents relating to assassination.

## B. COMMITTEE DECISION TO MAKE REPORT PUBLIC

This report raises important questions of national policy. We believe that the public is entitled to know what instrumentalities of their Government have done.<sup>1</sup> Further, our recommendations can only be judged in light of the factual record. Therefore, this interim report should be made public.

The Committee believes the truth about the assassination allegations should be told because democracy depends upon a well-informed electorate. We reject any contention that the facts disclosed in this report should be kept secret because they are embarrassing to the United States. Despite the temporary injury to our national reputation, the Committee believes that foreign peoples will, upon sober reflection, respect the United States more for keeping faith with its democratic ideal than they will condemn us for the misconduct revealed. We doubt that any other country would have the courage to make such disclosures.

The fact that portions of the story have already been made public only accentuates the need for full disclosure. Innuendo and misleading partial disclosures are not fair to the individuals involved. Nor are they a responsible way to lay the groundwork for informed public policy judgments.

## C. SCOPE OF COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION

Investigating the assassination issue has been an unpleasant duty, but one that the Committee had to meet. The Committee has compiled a massive record in the months that the inquiry has been underway. The record comprises over 8,000 pages of sworn testimony taken from over 75 witnesses during 60 hearing days and numerous staff interviews. The documents which the Committee has obtained include raw files from agencies and departments, the White House, and the Presidential libraries of the Administrations of former Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.<sup>2</sup>

We have obtained two types of evidence: *first*, evidence relating to the general setting in which the events occurred, the national policy of the time, and the normal operating procedures, including channels of command and control; and *second*, evidence relating to the specific events.

A Senate Committee is not a court. It looks to the past, not to determine guilt or innocence, but in order to make recommendations for the future. When we found the evidence to be ambiguous—as we did on

<sup>1</sup> When the name of a participant in the plot did not add to the presentation and its inclusion may have placed in jeopardy his life or livelihood, the Committee, on occasion, resorted, on balance, to the use of an alias or a general description of the individual or his position.

<sup>2</sup> The Committee has served both general and specific document requests upon the Executive Branch. The Administration represented to the Committee that it has produced all the relevant documents.

some issues—we have set out both sides, in order that the evidence may speak for itself.

Despite the number of witnesses and documents examined by the Committee, the available evidence has certain shortcomings.

Many of the events considered occurred as long as fifteen years ago. With one exception, they occurred during the administrations of Presidents now dead. Other high officials whose testimony might have shed additional light on the thorny issues of authorization and control are also dead. Moreover, with the passage of time, the memories of those still alive have dimmed.

The Committee has often faced the difficult task of distinguishing refreshed recollection from speculation. In many instances, witnesses were unable to testify from independent recollection and had to rely on documents contemporaneous with the events to refresh their recollections. While informed speculation is of some assistance, it can only be assigned limited weight in judging specific events.

Although assassination is not a subject on which one would expect many records or documents to be made or retained, there were, in fact, more relevant contemporaneous documents than expected. In addition, in 1967 the Central Intelligence Agency had made an internal study of the Castro, Trujillo and Diem assassination allegations.<sup>1</sup> That study was quite useful, particularly in suggesting leads for uncovering the story of the actual assassination activity. Unfortunately, the working papers relating to that investigation were destroyed upon the completion of the Report, pursuant to instructions from CIA Director Richard Helms. (Memorandum for the Record, 5/23/67) These notes were destroyed because of their sensitivity and because the information they contained had already been incorporated into the Report. In fairness to Director Helms, it should be added, however, that he was responsible for requesting the preparation of the Inspector General's Report and for preserving the Report.

Some ambiguities in the evidence result from the practice of concealing CIA covert operations from the world and performing them in such a way that if discovered, the role of the United States could be plausibly denied. An extension of the doctrine of "plausible deniability" had the result that communications between the Agency and high Administration officials were often convoluted and imprecise.<sup>2</sup>

The evidence contains sharp conflicts, some of which relate to basic facts. But the most important conflicts relate not so much to basic facts as to differing perceptions and opinions based upon relatively undisputed facts. With respect to both kinds of conflicts, the Committee has attempted to set forth the evidence extensively so that it may speak for itself, and in our section on findings and conclusions, we suggest resolutions for some of the conflicts. However, because

<sup>1</sup> Those studies were made at the direction of CIA Director Richard Helms to provide him with information to answer questions from President Johnson. The President's questions concerning Castro were provoked by a Drew Pearson newspaper column in March 1967. The column alleged that the CIA had attempted to kill Castro using the Mafia. The President also asked Helms for information concerning possible United States involvement in the assassinations of Trujillo and Diem.

<sup>2</sup> For a full discussion of this doctrine, see pages 11-12.

the Committee's main task is to find lessons for the future, resolving conflicts in the evidence may be less important than making certain that the system which produced the ambiguities is corrected.

## D. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

### 1. THE QUESTIONS PRESENTED

The Committee sought to answer four broad questions:

*Assassination plots.*—Did United States officials instigate, attempt, aid and abet, or acquiesce in plots to assassinate foreign leaders?

*Involvement in other killings.*—Did United States officials assist foreign dissidents in a way which significantly contributed to the killing of foreign leaders?

*Authorization.*—Where there was involvement by United States officials in assassination plots or other killings, were such activities authorized and if so, at what levels of our Government?

*Communication and control.*—Even if not authorized in fact, were the assassination activities perceived by those involved to be within the scope of their lawful authority? If they were so perceived, was there inadequate control exercised by higher authorities over the agencies to prevent such misinterpretation?

### 2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS ON THE PLOTS

The Committee investigated alleged United States involvement in assassination plots in five foreign countries:<sup>1</sup>

<i>Country</i>	<i>Individual involved<sup>2</sup></i>
Cuba -----	Fidel Castro.
Congo (Zaire)-----	Patrice Lumumba.
Dominican Republic-----	Rafael Trujillo.
Chile -----	General Rene Schneider.
South Vietnam-----	Ngo Dinh Diem.

The evidence concerning each alleged assassination can be summarized as follows:<sup>3</sup>

*Patrice Lumumba (Congo/Zaire).*—In the Fall of 1960, two CIA officials were asked by superiors to assassinate Lumumba. Poisons were sent to the Congo and some exploratory steps were taken toward gaining access to Lumumba. Subsequently, in early 1961, Lumumba was killed by Congolese rivals. It does not appear from the evidence that the United States was in any way involved in the killing.

*Fidel Castro (Cuba).*—United States Government personnel plotted to kill Castro from 1960 to 1965. American underworld figures and

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the plots discussed in the body of this report, the Committee received some evidence of CIA involvement in plans to assassinate President Sukarno of Indonesia and "Papa Doc" Duvalier of Haiti. Former Deputy Director for Plans Richard Bissell testified that the assassination of Sukarno had been "contemplated" by the CIA, but that planning had proceeded no farther than identifying an "asset" whom it was believed might be recruited to kill Sukarno. Arms were supplied to dissident groups in Indonesia, but, according to Bissell, those arms were not intended for assassination. (Bissell, 6/11/75, p. 89)

Walter Elder, Executive Assistant to CIA Director John McCone, testified that the Director authorized the CIA to furnish arms to dissidents planning the overthrow of Haiti's dictator, Duvalier. Elder told the Committee that while the assassination of Duvalier was not contemplated by the CIA, the arms were furnished "to help [the dissidents] take what measures were deemed necessary to replace the government," and it was realized that Duvalier might be killed in the course of the overthrow. (Elder, 8/13/75, p. 79)

<sup>2</sup> Assassination plots against the Cuban leadership sometimes contemplated action against Raul Castro and Che Guevarra. In South Vietnam Diem's brother Ngo Dinh Nhu was killed at the same time as Diem.

<sup>3</sup> Section III contains a detailed treatment of the evidence on each country.

Cubans hostile to Castro were used in these plots, and were provided encouragement and material support by the United States.

*Rafael Trujillo (Dominican Republic).*—Trujillo was shot by Dominican dissidents on May 31, 1961. From early in 1960 and continuing to the time of the assassination, the United States Government generally supported these dissidents. Some Government personnel were aware that the dissidents intended to kill Trujillo. Three pistols and three carbines were furnished by American officials, although a request for machine guns was later refused. There is conflicting evidence concerning whether the weapons were knowingly supplied for use in the assassination and whether any of them were present at the scene.

*Ngo Dinh Diem (South Vietnam).*—Diem and his brother, Nhu, were killed on November 2, 1963, in the course of a South Vietnamese Generals' coup. Although the United States Government supported the coup, there is no evidence that American officials favored the assassination. Indeed, it appears that the assassination of Diem was not part of the Generals' pre-coup planning but was instead a spontaneous act which occurred during the coup and was carried out without United States involvement or support.

*General Rene Schneider (Chile).*—On October 25, 1970, General Schneider died of gunshot wounds inflicted three days earlier while resisting a kidnap attempt. Schneider, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and a constitutionalist opposed to military coups, was considered an obstacle in efforts to prevent Salvador Allende from assuming the office of President of Chile. The United States Government supported, and sought to instigate a military coup to block Allende. U.S. officials supplied financial aid, machine guns and other equipment to various military figures who opposed Allende. Although the CIA continued to support coup plotters up to Schneider's shooting, the record indicates that the CIA had withdrawn active support of the group which carried out the actual kidnap attempt on October 22, which resulted in Schneider's death. Further, it does not appear that any of the equipment supplied by the CIA to coup plotters in Chile was used in the kidnapping. There is no evidence of a plan to kill Schneider or that United States officials specifically anticipated that Schneider would be shot during the abduction.

*Assassination capability (Executive action).*—In addition to these five cases, the Committee has received evidence that ranking Government officials discussed, and may have authorized, the establishment within the CIA of a generalized assassination capability. During these discussions, the concept of assassination was not affirmatively disavowed.

*Similarities and differences among the plots.*—The assassination plots all involved Third World countries, most of which were relatively small and none of which possessed great political or military strength. Apart from that similarity, there were significant differences among the plots:

- (1) Whether United States officials initiated the plot, or were responding to requests of local dissidents for aid.
- (2) Whether the plot was specifically intended to kill a foreign leader, or whether the leader's death was a reasonably foreseeable consequence of an attempt to overthrow the government.

The Castro and Lumumba cases are examples of plots conceived by United States officials to kill foreign leaders.

In the Trujillo case, although the United States Government certainly opposed his regime, it did not initiate the plot. Rather, United States officials responded to requests for aid from local dissidents whose aim clearly was to assassinate Trujillo. By aiding them, this country was implicated in the assassination, regardless of whether the weapons actually supplied were meant to kill Trujillo or were only intended as symbols of support for the dissidents.

The Schneider case differs from the Castro and Trujillo cases. The United States Government, with full knowledge that Chilean dissidents considered General Schneider an obstacle to their plans, sought a coup and provided support to the dissidents. However, even though the support included weapons, it appears that the intention of both the dissidents and the United States officials was to abduct General Schneider, not to kill him. Similarly, in the Diem case, some United States officials wanted Diem removed and supported a coup to accomplish his removal, but there is no evidence that any of those officials sought the death of Diem himself.

### 3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS ON THE ISSUES OF AUTHORITY AND CONTROL

To put the inquiry into assassination allegations in context, two points must be made clear. First, there is no doubt that the United States Government opposed the various leaders in question. Officials at the highest levels objected to the Castro and Trujillo regimes, believed the accession of Allende to power in Chile would be harmful to American interests, and thought of Lumumba as a dangerous force in the heart of Africa. Second, the evidence on assassinations has to be viewed in the context of other, more massive activities against the regimes in question. For example, the plots against Fidel Castro personally cannot be understood without considering the fully authorized, comprehensive assaults upon his regime, such as the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and Operation MONGOOSE in 1962.

Once methods of coercion and violence are chosen, the probability of loss of life is always present. There is, however, a significant difference between a coldblooded, targeted, intentional killing of an individual foreign leader and other forms of intervening in the affairs of foreign nations. Therefore, the Committee has endeavored to explore as fully as possible the questions of how and why the plots happened, whether they were authorized, and if so, at what level.

The picture that emerges from the evidence is not a clear one. This may be due to the system of deniability and the consequent state of the evidence which, even after our long investigation, remains conflicting and inconclusive. Or it may be that there were in fact serious shortcomings in the system of authorization so that an activity such as assassination could have been undertaken by an agency of the United States Government without express authority.

The Committee finds that the system of executive command and control was so ambiguous that it is difficult to be certain at what levels assassination activity was known and authorized. This situation creates the disturbing prospect that Government officials might have undertaken the assassination plots without it having been uncon-

trovertibly clear that there was explicit authorization from the Presidents. It is also possible that there might have been a successful "plausible denial" in which Presidential authorization was issued but is now obscured. Whether or not the respective Presidents knew of or authorized the plots, as chief executive officer of the United States, each must bear the ultimate responsibility for the activities of his subordinates.

The Committee makes four other major findings.<sup>1</sup> The first relates to the Committee's inability to make a finding that the assassination plots were authorized by the Presidents or other persons above the governmental agency or agencies involved. The second explains why certain officials may have perceived that, according to their judgment and experience, assassination was an acceptable course of action. The third criticizes agency officials for failing on several occasions to disclose their plans and activities to superior authorities, or for failing to do so with sufficient detail and clarity. The fourth criticizes Administration officials for not ruling out assassination, particularly after certain Administration officials had become aware of prior assassination plans and the establishment of a general assassination capability.

There is admittedly a tension among the findings. This tension reflects a basic conflict in the evidence. While there are some conflicts over facts, it may be more important that there appeared to have been two differing perceptions of the same facts. This distinction may be the result of the differing backgrounds of those persons experienced in covert operations as distinguished from those who were not. Words of urgency which may have meant killing to the former, may have meant nothing of the sort to the latter.

While we are critical of certain individual actions, the Committee is also mindful of the inherent problems in a system which relies on secrecy, compartmentation, circumlocution, and the avoidance of clear responsibility. This system creates the risk of confusion and rashness in the very areas where clarity and sober judgment are most necessary. Hence, before reviewing the evidence relating to the cases, we briefly deal with the general subject of covert action.

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<sup>1</sup> The Committee's findings are elaborated in Section IV, *infra*.

