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CIA 702 Rockefeller
Comm.
CIA 4.01 ASSASSINATION

U.S. SAID TO SEEK '61 PLOT ON CASTRO

Intelligence Aides Say Ways of Removal Were Studied

By NICHOLAS M. HORROCKS

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WASHINGTON, May 31—

There was a "frantic" search for ways to remove Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba after the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, former senior intelligence officers have told the Rockefeller commission. This search, the officers said, could have engendered "several" plans to assassinate the Cuban leader.

According to these sources, interviewed over the last several days, the contingency plans formulated by Maj. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale, retired, were only one "track" of the planning in the Central Intelligence Agency and the Department of Defense.

Yesterday, General Lansdale said that in November, 1961, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy ordered him to prepare a secret contingency plan to depose Mr. Castro. General Lansdale confirmed that Robert Kennedy was acting on behalf of President Kennedy.

General Lansdale confirmed in a telephone interview that at Robert Kennedy's orders he prepared a plan that envisioned slipping a politically cohesive group of selected Cuban exiles back into their homeland in the hope they might be able to start a popular uprising against Mr. Castro.

He agreed that it was a plan to remove Mr. Castro in much the same way that Mr. Castro had overthrown the Government of Fulgenco Batista.

In preparing this plan, General Lansdale acknowledged, the matter of assassination as one means of removing Mr. Castro may have been contemplated. He said that he knew as he prepared the plan that "operationally down the pike something like this could emerge—not only assassination, but other things like defamation of character."

He ruled out any notion that he ever received specific orders from either Robert Kennedy or President Kennedy to prepare a plan to assassinate Mr. Castro.

He said that after considerable work on the plan it became clear that it was not "feasible" to find the 20 or 30 Cubans to form the nucleus of movement. The pressure to remove Mr. Castro grew steadily in early 1962 as United States intelligence sources reported that he was allowing the Soviet Union to build ballistic missile sites in Cuba.

Doesn't Recall Memo

General Lansdale said he could not recall writing a memorandum in August, 1962, the C.I.A. to prepare a contingency plan for assassinating Mr. Castro, but he said he could not rule out that such a memo had been written or existed.

He said that to his knowledge his planning never became operational and that when the Cuban missile crisis flared up in October, 1962, he was no longer involved in the operation. He said he had no knowledge of a plot to kill Mr. Castro that involved the C.I.A.'s recruiting two men associated with the Mafia.

Other intelligence sources said that shortly after the Bay of Pigs debacle in April, 1961, C.I.A. officials began a "frantic" search for ways to remove Mr. Castro because it appeared he was consorting with the Soviet Union.

The result of this atmosphere, they said, would have been "several" plans to kill the Cuban leader as one way of getting rid of him. Other sources have said there were "two or three plans."

No published reports have yet answered the question whether President Kennedy or senior members of his Administration ever specifically asked that assassinations be planned. Nor is it clear in the public record who ordered any one of these plans set in motion.

Found Risks Rising

One former senior intelligence officer said that the 1961-62 period must be viewed as a time "when the risks faced by our Government because of Cuba were accelerating."

After the failure of the Bay of Pigs, he said, the United States at first could consider relatively long-term projects, but when it became clear that Soviet missiles might well be based in Cuba, "time for us was running out."

It was his opinion, he said, that General Lansdale's original plan for a popular uprising would have failed on several counts, mainly because it would take too long. He said that "obviously" assassinations was far more "immediate" solution, provided Mr. Castro's heirs in government would bar the Soviets.

Another former senior intelligence officer said he too believed that the Lansdale plan would not work and had told Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara that in a private meeting. This source stressed that at that point he viewed General Lansdale's plan simply as one for a cop d'état and knew of no assassination aspects to it.

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