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Box 450

FDB: OPERATION MONGOOSE

The Special Group, The Special Group (Augmented) and "Operation
Mongoose."

Control over covert operations conducted by the CIA during the period 1959 to 1965 was exercised by the Special Group, a subcommittee of the National Security Council composed of the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, the Director of Central Intelligence, the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. Today this group is known as the 40 Committee. In addition, during the period 1961 to 1965 another subcommittee of the NSC was established to oversee covert operations relating to Cuba. It was known as the Special Group (Augmented) and was composed of the members of the Special Group and Attorney General Robert Kennedy. Other high government officials frequently attended Special Group (Augmented) meetings on an ad hoc basis.

The overriding purpose of the Special Group was to exercise political control over covert operations abroad. The Special Group was charged with the responsibility of considering the objectives of any proposed activity, whether or not it would accomplish these aims, its likelihood of success and in general whether or not it would be "proper" and in the American interest. In addition, the Special Group had the responsibility for framing covert operations in such a way that they later could be "disavowed" or "plausibly denied" by the United States Government -- or at least by the President.

Political sensitivity was the chief criterion for submission of programs and activities to the Special Group. Also, the Director

of Central Intelligence would submit programs or activities to the Special Group if unusually large sums of money were involved, defined as \$25,000 or more. Despite these two general submission criteria, however, the procedures that were followed during the period 1959 to 1963 in determining which covert operations required Special Group approval were characterized by an internal CIA memorandum as "somewhat cloudly and thus can probably best be described as having been based on value judgments by the DCI."1/

The memorandum went on to say:

- b. It is obvious that a compilation of Special Group approvals in no way reflects the totality of significant CIA activities carried on over the past 15 years. With respect to overall DDP activity, it does not include any mention of FI/CI actions or, of course, any decisions in the overt field. Even within the restricted framework of covert action alone, a 1963 study prepared by this office showed that of the 550 existing CA projects of the DDP which were reviewed against the background of our own internal instruction on Special Group submission (CSI 50-20, 4 March 1963), only 86 were separately approved (or reapproved) by the Special Group between 1 January and 1 December 1962.
- c. From the above it seems that the procedures for determining which CA operations require approval were not only somewhat imprecise prior to 1963, but also, and equally important, we did not keep adequate records of just what projects (and in what detail) were discussed with the Special Group.2/

1/Memorandum for the Record, C/CA/PEG, Subject: "Policy Coordination of CIA's Covert Action Operations," 21 February 1967

2/Ibid.

Not until the CIA's own internal instruction, dated March 4, 1963, on Special Group submissions did the criteria for submissions become more formal and precise. The instruction (CSI 50-20) detailed the following types of programs or activities which, as a general rule, would require Special Group action:

Political and propaganda action programs involving direct or indirect action to influence or support political parties, groups, or specific political leaders, including operations which use labor, youth, students, and influential military organizations as political pressure groups.

Economic action programs designed to influence governments to support U.S. national policy objectives, or to prevent Bloc countries from obtaining some strategic politico-economic advantage in countries or areas of importance to U.S. global strategy.

Paramilitary action programs.

CIA clandestine and covert action annexes to U.S. Country Internal Defense Plans.^{3/}

The 1963 instruction also dealt with cases requiring resubmission to the Special Group. This was required where there was a need for a new policy determination or to reaffirm the previous policy decisions; when developments or changes were such as to make the subject a matter for re-examination by the Special Group; and if specifically required by the Special Group in its approval of the program or activity.

Meetings of the Special Group were infrequent until, at the beginning of 1959, regular weekly meetings were instituted. Presentations by the DCI to the Special Group took two basic forms: memoranda

^{3/}Ibid

requesting approval of specific, usually one country, undertakings and general memoranda or oral presentations describing broader international capabilities and actions. Such memoranda were to include a summary of the proposal, the problem to which the proposal was addressed, and the factors bearing on the problem.

In addition to its primary function of approving major covert action operations, the Special Group, during the 1959-1965 period, pursued its second responsibility of framing these operations in such a way that they could be "plausibly denied" by the U.S. Government, or at least by the President. As Richard Helms stated before the Select Committee:

...(the) Special Group was the mechanism...set up ...to use as a circuit-breaker so that these things did not explode in the President's face and that he was not held responsible for them. (Helms testimony, pp. 28-29)

According to one NSC staff official who served during the Eisenhower Administration, the concept of "plausible deniability" was taken in almost a literal sense: "The Government was authorized to do certain things that the President was not advised of."⁴

In November of 1961, after a major reassessment of United States strategy towards Cuba had been completed following the Bay of Pigs debacle President Kennedy decided to mount a substantial effort designed ultimately to lead to the overthrow of the Castro regime. The effort, ultimately code-named "Operation Mongoose,"

⁴/Interview with Bromley Smith, May 8, 1975.

was under the overall policy direction of the Special Group (Augmented) ("SGA"). The SGA was chaired by General Maxwell Taylor, who had conducted the study of U.S. strategy concerning Cuba and the reasons for the failure of the Bay of Pigs and operation. Attorney General Robert Kennedy was also a vigorous participant in its activities and to many seemed the principal driving force.^{5/} General Edward Lansdale was personally selected by the President as the Chief of Operations for Mongoose activity. Lansdale's role was to prepare and develop plans as tasked by the SGA and then to submit specific plans and actions to the SGA for approval. This prior approval was the core of the SGA's role.

Mongoose aimed for the overthrow of the Castro regime. The plan was to use propaganda and economic pressure--both covert and over through sabotage -- to build ultimately toward a hoped for internal revolt of the Cubans themselves. Liberal use was made of Cuban exiles, initially primarily infiltrated for intelligence gathering purposes and later for sabotage purposes.

The CIA was the principal action arm of Mongoose. William Harvey headed its Task Force W supported by the JM/WAVE station in Miami, Florida. Some 400 persons were directly employed by the CIA in the operation. The CIA was, in turn, given material support by the DOD.

^{5/}Other members were Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, or his deputy Roswell Gilpatric; Secretary of State Dean Rusk, or his deputy U. Alexis Johnson; CIA Director John McCone; USIA Director Edward Murrow; and McGeorge Bundy. Each of the constituent departments or agencies also had operational or working members assigned to perform tasks assigned by the SGA. These included William Harvey from CIA, Generals Benjamin Harris, _____ Craig, and George Johnson from DOD, Don Wilson from USIA, Robert Hurwitch from State.

Beginning in August 1962, but particularly in October 1962, the Mongoose plan for a build up toward a Cuban revolution was upset by the Cuban missile crisis. For the first time Cuba appeared to be an immediate threat to the security of the United States. The Mongoose operations were stood down, and with the successful conclusion of the missile crisis, the Special Group (Augmented) was disbanded.

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10 April 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
THROUGH: Deputy Director (Plans)
SUBJECT: Operation MONGOOSE - Appraisal of Effectiveness and Results which can be Expected from Implementing the Operational Plan Approved at the Meeting of the Special Group (Augmented) on 16 March 1962

1. Action: This memorandum contains the conclusions reached as a result of the reassessment of the MONGOOSE operational plan, conducted pursuant to your oral instructions to Mr. Helms on 5 April 1962. The recommendations for action are contained in Paragraph 11 below.

2. Under the MONGOOSE operational plan as approved, CIA is authorized and directed between now and 31 July 1962 to mount a concentrated operational program to collect intelligence concerning Cuba and to develop, insofar as possible, clandestine resistance cadres inside Cuba. This plan permits intelligence, political, economic, and covert actions, short of those reasonably calculated to inspire revolt within the target area, or other developments which would require U.S. armed intervention. These actions, insofar as possible, will be consistent with overt policies of isolating Castro and of neutralizing his influence in the Western Hemisphere and will be taken in such a way as to permit disengagement with minimum losses in assets and United States prestige. The plan provides that major operations going beyond the collection of intelligence be approved in advance by the Special Group. The plan does not provide for maximum, or even extensive, use of U.S. military personnel, bases, and facilities. No decision has been made that U.S. Military Forces will be committed at any time to support a revolt within Cuba or to intervene for any other cause.

3. Barring unforeseen difficulties, CIA can substantially fulfill the requirements of the present operational plan. However, this plan does not provide for a maximum intelligence

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and covert action program against Cuba. It probably does represent the maximum such program that can effectively be created within the current policy and other limitations. Fully effective implementation of the present program may require some limited use of U.S. military facilities, particularly training areas and submarines for agent infiltration and exfiltration. If a more intensive effort is to be undertaken, maximum use must be made of U.S. military facilities, personnel, and bases.

4. Under the present program, by August 1962 we will have far better hard intelligence coverage of Cuba, but it is doubtful if we will have achieved fully effective penetration of the top hierarchy of Cuban leadership. During the same period, we will have materially increased the clandestine resistance potential controlled by us in Cuba, but it will not be possible for us to field, activate, and keep alive large resistance groups. Our assets will consist of a number of small clandestine teams with limited supplies and possessing varying degrees of resistance and revolt potential. The teams will not be knit together into any central organization within Cuba. It is unlikely that by this time we will have developed any viable long term political leadership for a new Cuba. Such leadership does not exist in the emigration and it is doubtful if it can be developed within Cuba at any time prior to the forceful overthrow of the Castro regime, although some potential leaders of promise possibly can be developed.

5. Given the anticipated success in carrying out the currently approved plan, we should be able by August 1962 or within a reasonable time thereafter, provided policy approval is given, to begin to prepare these assets for an organized revolt of substantial proportions. This additional time will be required since under existing limitations we are not permitted to prepare the teams or cadres from their inception for any concerted revolt nor, in fact, give them any assurance of ultimate U.S. assistance which would support and preserve such revolt.

6. Any revolt we are able to generate within a reasonable time after the expiration of Phase I of the current plan, although possibly substantial in size, could not be considered a really full scale revolt in the sense that it alone could overthrow the regime. In the face of Cuban counteraction, the revolt could only be kept alive for a few days unless supported by active U.S. military intervention.

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7. The increased operational activity of the present program will attract some attention, may raise the Cuban and U.S. "noise level", and could lead to some public criticism and an increase in Cuban propaganda play. Any intelligence or covert action which is surfaced will, of course, be charged to the United States and specifically to CIA. If a maximum program is undertaken it will inevitably attract more attention and possibly lead to more intense criticism. The level of activity envisaged by the present plan is not likely to convince the Castro regime or the Cubans themselves that the United States is seriously contemplating either invading Cuba or intervening to assist any planned revolt.

8. There is substantial dissatisfaction in Cuba and a considerable latent resistance potential which is disorganized and dispirited at the present time. Internal Cuban conditions, including the availability of food and the general state of the economy, will probably deteriorate during the next several months. Basically, however, time is running against us and Cuba is likely to be a tougher nut to crack a year from today than it is now. The effective communization of the Cuban State, the increasing effectiveness of its security and control apparatus, the increased discouragement of the populace, including a measurable loss of hope and lessening of sporadic spontaneous resistance can only lead to this conclusion. We cannot completely rule out the possibility of a spontaneous uprising of greater or lesser proportions, but the possibilities of this are not believed great and, in any event, unless the United States is at the time of any such spontaneous uprising prepared to and does intervene, this uprising will be ruthlessly and rapidly crushed. Even if the Cuban economy continues to deteriorate, it will in our opinion be bolstered to the extent necessary to preserve the status quo by the Soviet Bloc which cannot afford to lose the Cuban bridgehead in the Western Hemisphere. The Castro regime will not fall as a result of such deterioration or such economic counteraction as we can take. In fact, after a period of deterioration, it is entirely possible that the economic situation may gradually improve. There are some possibilities that the Castro regime may be seriously threatened by a power split at the top level or by a palace guard revolt. These possibilities do not appear at the present time great and certainly any such development is insufficiently probable to count on, although efforts are being made to develop and exploit any opportunities to this end. In any event, even

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if such opportunities develop and can be exploited, this is likely to be a long and involved operation with marginal chances of complete success.

9. Even if the current operational plan attains maximum success, it is our firm conclusion that it will not lead to the overthrow of the Castro regime and that if that overthrow is a serious objective of the U.S. Government, it will be necessary at the conclusion of the present plan to face the decision of military intervention, then prepare for it and intensify the preparation for any necessary revolt or provocation upon which it is based. This will require additional time and will be more difficult to do some months from now than it will be if it is commenced now.

10. CONCLUSIONS: Based on the reassessment that has been made and following the above comments, set out below are our conclusions:

a. The current plan does not constitute and does not permit a maximum intelligence and covert action program against Cuba. The plan is not likely to result in the overthrow of the Castro regime unless followed by extensive additional preparation and action based on a firm decision to use U.S. Military Forces at the appropriate point to destroy the regime.

b. If a maximum effort is to be mounted, the decision to use military force must be made now and the planning must go forward in phase to permit a concentrated and planned uprising with the immediate support of military forces to prevent its destruction. In addition, in preparing for the necessary revolt and/or provocation endangering U.S. lives and property, maximum use must be made not only of CIA assets and capabilities, but of the assets and capabilities of the respective military services.

c. To permit requisite flexibility and professionalism for a maximum operational effort against Cuba, the tight controls exercised by the Special Group and the present time-consuming coordination and briefing procedures should, if at all possible, be made less restrictive and less stultifying.

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d. The planning for the use of U.S. Military Forces must contemplate minimum reaction time and sufficient pre-positioning to permit the most rapid possible elimination of organized opposition within Cuba. If at all possible, the military intervention should be so planned and prepared that from the time of decision to intervene until the elimination of organized military opposition is only a few days, preferably not more than four or six. It is believed that this is extremely important in order to cut down the time available to the USSR and the Bloc to react and take counteraction elsewhere using Cuba as a pretext, and also to cut down the available time for a coalescing of intense domestic and foreign political press and propaganda opposition to this action. If the U.S. Forces to be committed can be pre-positioned in such a way that a landing in force takes place rapidly, it is believed that a substantial number of Cubans, including those in the militia and the armed forces, will give up quickly. The United States must, however, be prepared to cope with at least some substantial prolonged hard core resistance. In addition, the U.S. Government must be prepared with plans and resources to establish a military government within Cuba and maintain it for an appreciable period, probably at least a year, until the situation can be stabilized, political parties, movements, and leadership developed, and free elections insured.

11. ACTION:

A. If you concur with the above conclusions, it is recommended that you propose to the Special Group (Augmented) at its meeting on 11 April 1962 that it approve and propose for the approval of higher authority a plan of operations against Cuba requiring decision now to:

(1) Make maximum use of CIA and military resources to create a revolt in Cuba and/or provocation endangering U.S. lives and property, and

(2) Upon the activation of this revolt and/or provocation intervene immediately with sufficient military strength to eliminate organized military opposition within Cuba at the earliest practicable time.

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B. If such a plan is not approved, or if the decisions to take the actions necessary to ensure the overthrow of the Castro regime are indefinitely delayed, it is believed that you should give careful consideration as to whether, in the face of other heavy demands and commitments, the Clandestine Service can long continue to afford the present level of effort against Cuba and the heavy expenditure of funds and manpower involved in the operation of Task Force W, which comprises a substantial percentage of the overall assets of the DD/P.

WILLIAM K. HARVEY
C/TFW

CONCUR:

Deputy Director (Plans)

The recommendations contained in Paragraph 11 are approved:

Director of Central Intelligence

Date _____

EYES ONLY

TO : Fritz Schwarz and Curt Smothers

FROM: Joseph E. diGenova

DATE: July 7, 1975

EDWARD G. LANSDALE: SHORT SUMMARY

Edward G. Lansdale was the Chief of Operations for Operation Mongoose from November 30, 1961 until early 1963. He was present at the Special Group meetings at which sabotage was discussed and provided the overall planning framework for the approval of that Group. He was present at the August 10, 1962 meeting of the Special Group when Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara broached the subject of the assassination of Castro. He wrote a memo on August 13, 1962 which tasked the CIA with developing plans "including liquidation of leaders." Lansdale's testimony should involve the following questions:

- Did any of the Special Group meetings implicitly or explicitly contemplate or plan assassination attempts against Castro?
- To what extent were CIA plans against Castro authorized or made known to President Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, DCI John McCone, or the Special Group as a whole? (It was established practice and policy that all proposed specific actions were reviewed before implementation.)
- What was the process involved in making decisions; what was Lansdale's authority?
- If the Special "turned down" the idea of assassinating Castro on August 10, why did Lansdale task the CIA on August 13, 1962 with developing plans "including liquidation of leaders?"
- What was the "sensitive work" referred to in Lansdale's January 18, 1962 memo to RFK which he did not tell the Special Group about? What was the "touchdown play?"

Questioning of Lansdale should focus upon the following documents:

- Inspector General's 1967 Report, page 113.
- Memorandum of August 13, 1962 from Lansdale to Wm. Harvey.
- Memorandum of August 14, 1962 from Harvey to DDP (CIA).
- Memorandum of January 27, 1962 from Lansdale to R. Kennedy.
- Memorandum of January 18, 1962 from Lansdale to R. Kennedy.

PERTINENT RELATIONSHIP

President Kennedy	Lansdale was personally selected by the President to coordinate Mongoose after the Bay of Pigs.
Robert Kennedy	Lansdale's direct link to the President during Operation Mongoose. In essence, he headed the SG.
William Harvey	The CIA operational representative under McCone to the Special Group. He coordinated the agent infiltration into Cuba. He frequently attended SG meetings.
John McCone, DCI	Met with Lansdale at the Special Group.
Robert McNamara	Lansdale was his Assistant for Special Operations before he became the Mongoose Chief of Operations.

July 7, 1975

TO: Fritz Schwarz and Curt Smothers
FROM: Joe diGenova
SUBJECT: Preliminary Interview With Brig. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale

Gen. Lansdale was interviewed on July 7, 1975 from 11:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. by Fritz Schwarz, Curt Smothers, Mike Madigan, Charles Kirbow and Joe diGenova.

I. GENERAL BACKGROUND

In late October of 1961, President KENNEDY asked Gen. LANSDALE personally to investigate what was being done in regard to Cuba by the U. S. Government. LANSDALE discovered that U.S. activities included minor harassment and sabotage. He felt that these acts were counter-productive since they seemed to sharpen police controls over the people of Cuba. Because Castro was so charismatic, these actions worked in his favor with the people creating a "David and Goliath" syndrome.

After his study, LANSDALE considered the possibility of forming a group to do a "modified revolution in Cuba." He concluded that it would take a long time and would require a firm unifying political platform for Cubans to adopt and to find attractive. It would have to be something of their own. He hoped that this group could be formed from diverse groups in Florida and Venezuela. "President KENNEDY personally told me sometime in 1962 'you go ahead with that.'"

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LANSDALE suggested that he report to the PRESIDENT through a trusted subordinate. "He told me to see RFK."

The organization developed very quickly with representatives of each department (DOD, State, CIA, White House). LANSDALE outlined his general idea which was to talk to Cuban exiles and develop them as the actors so that the U.S. wouldn't be the "doer" but would merely guide the Cubans who had the will, desire, and capability to do something; i.e., develop a political program that would gain support of the Cuban people in order to have a country more compatible with the U.S. as a neighbor.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY personally told LANSDALE that he wanted him to work on getting approval at each stage from the Special Group. "My duty became to draw up plans for approval for the Special Group for each stage."

Strategy

The idea was to organize both in and out of Cuba and establish safe entry and exit for people declared enemies of the Castro regime. This included establishing "cellular organizations in Cuba to achieve political results when the right time came."

Bay of Pigs

LANSDALE said that this project was a failure due to the fact that no political ground work had been done inside of Cuba before the exercise. The success of such an operation, he said, shouldn't rely on military support but rather on the people accepting those who are coming into the country. In this regard LANSDALE noted that

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people in the Special Group confused hit and run tactics with a concept of revolution. Their backgrounds, he said, were obviously not in this area.

II. THE PROCESS

Plans were drawn up by LANSDALE and taken to the Special Group. Initially the Special Group did not accept his overall plan; both in terms of general strategy and tactics. It was during this time that he spoke with the Attorney General and explained to him that patience was needed in a project of this magnitude. LANSDALE claims that during this time he criticized the ongoing harassment raids along with JOHN MCCONE. "Some place in there there was a very definite feeling, which I thought came from the President, that the harassing should stop." LANSDALE associated this feeling with the missile crisis or the prisoner release crisis. At this juncture he was shown his August 8, 1962 memo to the Special Group Augmented and he could not reconcile that memo with his recollection of a cutback on harassment. When shown a January 24, 1962 JCS memo which said that he had wanted paramilitary operations all along, he denied that that was his position. LANSDALE noted that there were limitations on what he could do. Guidelines had to be approved by the Special Group. He felt, after he "tried to get plans brought forward, that there wasn't an understanding that Americans wouldn't go in. The CIA didn't see it that way. They kept trying to do things themselves. The concept of getting Cubans to do things in a Cuban manner was foreign to the CIA." Merely because the sabotage effort was minuscule during this time BW/CW was tasked out to the Department of Defense for a

feasibility study. They determined it was infeasible and it was cancelled. He noted, however, that if it had been a possibility, it would have been a go project if DOD had determined it was feasible.

III. ASSASSINATIONS

LANSDALE personally opposed assassination of Castro because he was concerned that that in itself might lead to a disastrous end because the only heirs apparent were RAUL and CHE GUEVARA. "Castro had more breaks on him." He indicated that the subject of assassination came to him initially through rumor because there was talk of this from Cuban refugees in Florida. He got these rumors from people in the intelligence community. He thought that he might have talked to RFK about these reports.

According to him, the only time assassination was ever brought up in the Special Group "it was turned down very hard." Initially during the interview, he said it was turned down, he felt, because of the ethics or morality and it was done openly at the meeting. He noted, however, that he didn't remember MCCONE's "oration of the immorality of assassinations. He might have (raised the subject of assassination). The idea was to explore drastic actions, ideas or plans. But I don't recall ever talking to RFK about assassination except at that one meeting (Aug. 10, 1962.)" Yet LANSDALE sent a memo to Harvey on August 13 which included tasking HARVEY to prepare plans for the "liquidation of leaders." LANSDALE said "If I used the word liquidation, that mean't killing." He did not recall, however, having the phrase including liquidation of leaders blocked out from his August 13 memo after a call from HARVEY. He indicated that

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