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Conclusions

Basically, the research effort for the present paper produced two general conclusions. First, the SSC Final Report contains numerous factual errors, both in the extensive treatment of a selected operation (AMLASH) and in a number of separate incidents that it presents. Second, while one can make the point in principle that the Warren Commission could well have broadened its review to include the anti-Cuban programs of the U.S. Government, in trying to make the case for that concept Book V of the SSC Final Report went to such lengths in its treatment as to detract from the point at hand. It is difficult to characterize it more generously.

In a very real sense, the SSC Final Report has compounded the problem of public perception. On a flawed presentation it has accused the intelligence agencies of derelictions and worse. While it has reinforced the public sense of unfinished business yet to be done, it has so badly beclouded the issue as to have done a disservice to

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future attempts at objective and dispassionate inquiry.

While one can understand today why the Warren Commission limited its inquiry to normal avenues of investigation, it would have served to reinforce the credibility of its effort had it taken a broader view of the matter. CIA, too, could have considered in specific terms what most saw then in general terms--the possibility of Soviet or Cuban involvement in the assassination because of tensions of the time. It is not enough to be able to point out erroneous criticisms made today. The Agency should have taken broader initiatives then, as well. That CIA employees at the time felt--as they obviously did--that the activities about which they knew had no relevance to the Warren Commission inquiry does not take the place of a record of conscious review. The present research effort has undertaken to conduct such a review; it is noted that the findings are essentially negative. However, it must be recognized that CIA cannot be as confident of a cold trail in 1977 as it could have been in 1964; this apparent fact will be noted by the critics of the Agency, and by those who have found a career in the questions already asked and yet to be asked about the assassination of President Kennedy.

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CIA Operations Against Cuba

The SSC Final Report speaks of operations against Cuba and the Castro regime, and contends that they should have been reported in detail to the Warren Commission as part of the subject matter that it consciously took into consideration. A case can be made for specific considerations of these various activities by the Warren Commission, at least as part of the unique background of the times; it might have provided it additional investigative leads. However, to advance the general thought is not to discard the usual tests of evidence that must still control how the findings are treated.

It should be noted that at the time of the Warren Commission inquiry there was no secret about the tensions between the Kennedy Administration and the Castro regime. Book V of the SSC Final Report refers briefly to some of the more dramatic events, such as the Bay of Pigs in April 1961 and the Missile Crisis in October 1962 (see pages 2, 3, 10 and 11). In fact, the totality of American policy and practice must have appeared threatening to the Castro regime, and most certainly must have been considered by it as provocative.

Additional U. S. policies and programs that could have been viewed negatively by Castro were the breaking of diplomatic relations,

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economic and political sanctions, paramilitary operations (which received recurring publicity in the press), as well as a variety of covert operations that were not known publicly. On 18 November 1963 President Kennedy -- four days before his death -- delivered a major policy address in Miami, accusing Castro of having betrayed the Cuban revolution; at the time the press, reportedly on the basis of what "White House sources" said about it, viewed it as a call for the Cuban people to overthrow the Castro regime.

The United States provided a haven and base for Cuban exiles, who conducted their independent operations against the Castro government. Some of these exiles had the support of CIA, as well as from other elements of the U.S. Government, and still others had support from private sources. With or without official U.S. support these exiles spoke in forceful Latin terms about what they hoped to do. The Cuban intelligence services had agents in the exile community in America and it is likely that what they reported back to Havana assigned to CIA responsibility for many of the activities under consideration, whether CIA was involved or not.

We do not know the extent to which the Warren Commission took what might be characterized as "judicial notice" of the tensions between the two governments and their leaders; it certainly was in the public domain. That consideration was given the possibility of

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Cuban or Soviet involvement in the assassination is no secret, clearly reflecting a recognition of the question at the time. That a request was not made by the Warren Commission, nor volunteered by the intelligence agencies, for extensive review of all Cuban operations is being faulted today. Yet, in the light of understandings at that time, it could well have appeared to members of the Warren Commission and its staff as not directly relevant, in fact, to the specific issue of the murder of the President. In the absence of evidence to the contrary a case could still be made for that view, although the evolution of public perceptions probably would not accept it without reservation.

The SSC Final Report has fixed on the Cuban operations of the intelligence agencies--primarily those of CIA--for special attention in considering the question. Implicitly it accepts the theory that there could well have been conspiracy in the murder of President Kennedy, and that Castro could have been behind it, having been provoked by depredations against Cuba or plotting against his own life. However, in advancing its thesis, the SSC Report cautioned that it had "seen no evidence that Fidel Castro or others in the Cuban government plotted President Kennedy's assassination in retaliation for U.S. operations against Cuba."

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BACKGROUND

In April, 1976, the Senate Select Committee to Study Government Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities (SSC) published their Final Report (Book V) which in essence faulted the CIA for its errors of omission in not informing the Warren Commission of the Agency's on-going plots against the revolutionary government in Cuba and its attempts on the life of the premier, Fidel Castro. The Committee's rationale is detailed on pages 6-7 of its Findings, but one paragraph succinctly sums up their position.

"Senior CIA officials also should have realized that their agency was not utilizing its full capability to investigate Oswald's pro-Castro and anti-Castro connections. They should have realized that CIA operations against Cuba, particularly operations involving the assassination of Castro, needed to be considered in the investigation. Yet, they directed their subordinates to conduct an investigation without telling them of these vital facts. Those officials, whom the Warren Commission relied upon for expertise, advised the Warren Commission that the CIA had no evidence of a foreign conspiracy." (p. 7, Book V)

Stung by the Senate criticism and the "rippling effect" that Book V occasioned in the media, the CIA prepared a comprehensive report in 1977 designed to answer, at least within the Agency, the critical questions posited in the SSC Final Report. However, even the CIA's 1977 Report tacitly recognizes the inadequacy of the CIA's narrow response to the Warren Commission's quest for all possible relevant information. ("Relevancy" is, of course, the "buyword" upon which both the Senate and Agency each base their position on the importance of the anti-Castro plots to the Commission's work.) On page 10 of the Agency's conclusions, the 1977 Report acknowledges that:

"While one can understand today why the Warren Commission limited its inquiry to normal avenues of investigation, it would have served to re-inforce the credibility of its effort had it taken a broader view of the matter. CIA, too, could have considered in specific terms what most saw in general terms -- the possibility of Soviet or Cuban involvement in the assassination (JFK) because of tensions of the time.The Agency should have taken broader initiatives, then, as well." (p. 10, 1977 Report)

It is not the purpose of this analysis to detail the conflicting viewpoints of the SSC and CIA with regard to the significance to the work of the Warren Commission of the CIA's Castro assassination "attempts" and to resolve the parties controversy as to the operations' importance. Instead, this paper seeks to present a comprehensive review of all the facts, drawn from a variety of sources, of organized crime's involvement or potential involvement in the CIA operations against Cuba during 1960-1963. Certain influences and conclusions will then be drawn upon the nature, scope, and motivation of the syndicate participants in the operations.

INVOLVEMENT OF ORGANIZED CRIME IN CIA PLOTS
TO ASSASSINATE FIDEL CASTRO

The genesis of the utilization of the United States criminal syndicate by the CIA to attempt to assassinate Castro is placed by the 1967 Inspector General's Report as occurring during a conversation between the Deputy Director of Plans, Richard Bissell, and the Director of the Office of Security, Colonel Sheffield Edwards.** (1967 IG Report, p. ; Interim Report, p. 74) Edwards assigned the specific tasks of locating the right party to "eliminate or assassinate" Castro to James "Big Jim" O'Connell, who was the Chief of the Operational Support Division of the Office of Security. Both men agreed that Robert A. Maheu,** who had been previously utilized by the Agency in several sensitive covert operations, would be contacted to recruit the necessary personnel.

Although Maheu and O'Connell differ as to who initially brought up John Roselli's name for consideration, there was a meeting between Maheu and Roselli at the Brown Derby Restaurant in Los Angeles in early September 1960. (Interim Report, p. 75)

Comment: Maheu seems the logical person to have thought of and contacted Roselli for several reasons. In the

** Maheu's CIA history and relationship to O'Connell are detailed on pp. 74-75, Interim Report.

Office of Security file on Ed Morgan, Maheu's attorney, there is a memo to the DCI dated 19 November 1970 which reviews the Mafia operation. Paragraph 5 states that: "Mr. Maheu advised that he had met one John Roselli on several occasions while visiting Las Vegas. He only knew him casually through other clients, but was given to understand that he was a high ranking member of the syndicate and controlled all the ice making machines on the Strip." Maheu reasoned that, if Roselli was, in fact, a member of the clan, he undoubtedly had connections leading into the Cuban gambling interests.")

(Comment: Confirmation of the earliest Maheu-Roselli contact is found in Roselli's FBI file and consists of an alleged telephone call in 1959 from Maheu to Roselli.) (See Roselli Write-up)

(Comment: Maheu and Roselli had mutual contacts in Las Vegas prior to 1960, including Hank Greenspun, editor of the Las Vegas Sun.)

Roselli, although apparently skeptical at first, agreed to a meeting in New York City with Maheu and O'Connell to discuss further details. (Interim Report, p. 76; Office of Security memo from Morgan file, dated 19 November 1970) Although the Inspector General's Report placed the meeting at the Plaza Hilton on 14 September 1960, Roselli recalled that the discussion took place during Castro's visit to the United Nations which began on September 18, 1960.

(Comment: Tony de Varona admits going to New York City at the time of Castro's visit, but it is unlikely that he was in contact with Roselli at this time or (testimony of de Varona) that his visit had an assassination motivation. According to a 19 November 1970 memo to the DCI, it was at this September meeting in New York City, that Roselli "agreed to introduce him (Maheu) to a friend, 'Sam Gold', who knew the Cuban crowd.")

(Comment: The timing of the introduction of both Giancana ('Gold') and Trafficante ('Joe') is important to the analysis of the "true" role of the mob in the Castro assassination plots. According to the 1967 IG Report, the entrance of Giancana took place "during the week of 25 September 1960"... (1967 IG Report, p. 18))

In contrast, the SSC Interim Report at p. 76, does not fix a date certain for Giancana's initial appearance but (although it was "certainly prior to October 18." (p. 76)) because of conflicting evidence between the 1967 IG September date and Maheu's Senate testimony which set the initiation in November 1960. As a compromise, the Interim Report reasoned that Giancana had been introduced to Maheu "prior to October

18" because (1) the Las Vegas wiretap occurred on October 30, 1960; and (2) DDP Bissell had received an FBI memo, dated 18 October 1960, which revealed an FBI ELSUR quoting Giancana as discussing his involvement in an assassination plot against Castro". (FBI memo dated 18 October 1960 from Hoover to Bissell, Interim Report, p. 79)

(Comment: Each of the dual reasons listed in the Interim Report on p. 77 are subject to critical analysis which will be dealt with separately below.)

(Comment: Although the 1967 IG Report stated that "Maheu pointed out 'Gold' to O'Connell from a distance but O'Connell never met either 'Gold' or 'Joe'", the Interim Report disputes this observation by apparently quoting from O'Connell's Senate testimony and stating that "the Support Chief, who was using the name 'Jim Olds'," said he had met 'Sam' and 'Joe', once, and then only briefly. (O.C. 5(30)75, pp. 26-29; Interim Report, p. 77))

(Comment: Conflicts appear also on several relatively minor points surrounding the September 1960 meetings in New York City and Miami. For instance:

1. Did Roselli know from the beginning that the operation was CIA?

a. O'Connell stated that Maheu told Roselli that they were representing international business interests whereas Roselli testified that Maheu told him that O'Connell was CIA (Interim Report, p. 76). Also, footnote 1 on page 76 indicates that Roselli told O'Connell "about three weeks after the New York meeting", which is during the Miami involvement of Giancana, that "I am not kidding. I know who you work for."

The importance of Roselli's recognition of CIA initiation is that it is doubtful if Giancana and Trafficante could have been enlisted unless they could be sure of government protection. This theme will be developed more fully below.

2. Roselli told his Cuban contacts that he was an "agent of some business interests of Wall Street that had... nickel interests and properties around Cuba..." (Roselli; 6/24/75, pp. 9, 17)

Cf. Jack Anderson column of January 19, 1971, which stated that "Could the plot against Castro have backfired against President Kennedy?....None of the assassination teams, however, had direct knowledge of the CIA involvement. The CIA instigators had represented themselves as oilmen seeking revenge against Castro for his seizure of oil holdings."

In Anderson's sources for this article were Roselli and William Harvey, who was not privy to the details of Phase I, it is another example of serious discrepancies which exist between the CIA, Senate, and Anderson versions which all purport to depend, in varying degrees, upon Roselli.

3. The alleged "surprise discovery" by Maheu and O'Connell as to the true identities of "Sam Gold" and "Joe" is really suspect. First, although it is possible that the Senate Committee staff overlooked the specific Miami newspaper Sunday supplement (Parade) which purportedly included pictures of Giancana and Trafficante, thus graphically showing Maheu and O'Connell the nature of the people with whom they were dealing, it is a relatively easy matter to research Parade magazine for the months of October and November. It would appear that O'Connell and Maheu were looking for an ex post facto reason for continuing the operation after the introduction of two of the top Mafiosi in the United States. O'Connell testified that his discovery was after "we were up to our ears in it" which is difficult to fathom since the operation was in the embryonic stage and no pills were delivered to Roselli, et. al, until approximately March 1961. Whatever, the reason, the Senate staff insists it could not find the Parade article. (Interim Report, p. 77, fn. 1)

The principals in Phase I of the operation also disagree as to the roles which were to be played by both "Gold" and "Joe" in the pre-Bay of Pigs phase of the operation.

"Although Maheu described Giancana as playing a 'key' role, (Maheu, 7.2.975, p. 34) and discussed his job as "to locate someone in Castro's entourage who could accomplish the assassination", Roselli downplayed Giancana's part to that of a "back-up" man. (Roselli, 6/24/75, p. 15) (Whether Roselli received a "message" from Giancana's murder four days before Roselli's Senate appearance is open to question.) Roselli's Senate characterization of Giancana's role as minor is in contrast to his alleged recountment of Giancana's due to his "knowledge of the Cuban crowd" which the 19 November 1970 memo recorded.

Trafficante(s) involvement in Phase I is even more jumbled by the available evidence. The 1967 IG Report and Senate Interim Report state that "'Gold' identified 'Joe' to Maheu as a man who would serve as a courier to Cuba and make arrangements there". (IG Report, p. 19; Interim Report, p. 77) To support the description of Trafficante as a courier, the Interim Report quotes p. 19 of the 1967 IG Report in stating that, "At that time, the gambling casinos were still operating in Cuba and Trafficante was making regular trips between Miami and Havana on syndicate business".

(Comment: This factually unsupported assertion runs contrary to the evidence available through official government records of other agencies. As an example, State Department files reflect that Trafficante applied for a passport in Cuba on October 7, 1959, and received that document in Havana on February 2, 1960. (See Trafficante file, State Department) No records available to the Committee from INS, State Department, or FBI record any later 1960 travels even though the Bureau maintained decent surveillance on Trafficante during this period. In his Committee testimony, Trafficante recalled that he made two trips to Cuba after his release from prison in August 1959 and placed these sojourns within two or three months after his release from prison. (Testimony, pp. 4-53, Oct. 1, 1977) His testimony has some logical credibility in that all of the casinos in Havana were either closed or operating in the red by mid-1960, and law enforcement reports placed him in the Tampa-Miami area consistently during the pre-Bay of Pigs period.)

By the time of the Senate testimony of Roselli, however, Trafficante's role had diminished to a point even below Giancana's. He had been reduced from "courier" to a mere "translator" and was needed only to facilitate conversation between Roselli and the Cubans who had been recruited for the actual assassination. Interestingly, Trafficante and Roselli's 1975 and 1977 Congressional appearances dovetail well but remain in contradiction to the facts as they were being reported in 1963 by the principals.

(Comment: The Senate testimony of Trafficante and Roselli needs to be outlined with a view to contrasting the "courier vs. interpreter" role. My memory is that the Senate did not vigorously cross-examine either man on this discrepancy nor did the Interim Report "hint" at the problem.)

Once the actors had been assembled for the launching of the enterprise, a discussion began as to the method to be employed to accomplish the foal. The Agency took the simplistic, straight-forward approach of shooting Castro, but this plan was rejected by Giancana. In a comment to its 1967 Report, the Inspector General noted that "Giancana was flatly opposed to the use of firearms. He said that no one could be recruited to do the job because the chance of survival and escape would be negligible. Giancana stated a preference for a lethal pill that would be put into Castro's food and drink...Trafficante (Joe, the courier) was in touch with a disaffected Cuban official with access to Castro and presumably of a sort that would enable him to surrepticiously poison Castro. The gangsters named their man inside as Juan Orta, who was then office Chief and Director General of the Office of the Prime Minister, Castro. The gangsters said that Orta had once been in a position to received kickbacks from the gambling interests but had since lost that source of income and needed the money. (I.G. Report, p. 25)

with

(Comment: The observations quoted above of the 1967 I.G. Report are extremely significant in several respects. First, the poison pill modus operandi originated with Giancana, not the Agency, a point which is crucial to the final conclusions presented below. Secondly, Trafficante is identified as having access to and providing for the putative assassin in Cuba which is inconsistent which his self-serving role description of "interpreter". His ability to recruit Orta apparently was directly tied to his former gambling empire associations which formed a constant pattern for all his alleged conduct both during and after his Cuban days.) (See Trafficante profile.)

(Comment: Speculation concerning Orta's role arose during the Agency's 1977 Report when it was forced to address a problem raised by an April 23, 1975 article, concerning Frank Sturgis, written by Paul Meskill of the New York Daily News. Sturgis was quoted as saying, "the third (assassination) scheme involved planting a bomb in Castro's office. I had access to the Prime Minister's office," Sturgis said, "I knew Fidel's private secretary, Juan Orta. I recruited him to work with the Embassy." (American Embassy in Havana).

What was disturbing to the writers of the 1977 Report was the fact that Orta's name had surfaced in connection with a Castro assassination plot, before revelation of the CIA-Mafia connection by the Senate Intelligence Committee. The Report references news stories linking Sturgis with Trafficante and with a "gambling partner" of Trafficante's, Norman Rothman. (See Rothman profile) Coupled with Sturgis' alleged mob relationships is the allegation that Sturgis had a role in inspecting the gambling casinos in Cuba on behalf of the Castro government and could have developed an interest with Orta in receiving gambling kickbacks.①

A second aspect of Meskill's news series concerned a claim of Marita Lorenz that she had acted on behalf of Sturgis in 1960 in attempting to poison Castro, which dovetailed with the 18 October 1960 FBI memorandum on Giancana's electronically surveilled conversation in which he stated that "the assassin had arranged with a girl, not further described, to drop a 'pill' in some drink or food of Castro's". (Memo, Hoover to DCI A.H., DD 10/18/60)

The tentative conclusions advanced in the 1977 Report are as follows:

(p.21) It is obvious that many lines of speculation can be developed, not the least of which is that the Agency did not know the full extent of syndicate activities... "

Additional considerations:

1. Criminal syndicate may well have had some independent activities of its own prior to CIA involvement in late 1960. Also, could have been on-going, when CIA reactivated plan in 1962, April.

2. Syndicate operators could have had activities such as these in New York Daily News stories in 1975 and 1976.

3. Frank Sturgis seems to have had contacts with, but not a member of the syndicate. Could well have been used by the syndicate.

4. Sturgis has not been a reliable source. He probably knew Orta in Cuba but he was outside Cuba when Orta assumed role of assassin.

If there was an earlier operation with Orta, it was not CIA; could have been earlier operation of syndicate.

Sturgis could have known or been involved in syndicate operation, or picked up gossip from Miami in 1965 after Orta returned there.

Neither the 1967 I.G. Report or the SSC Interim Report can pinpoint the precise date on which the Agency processed the poison pills which O'Connell delivered to Roselli. (Interim Report, p. 80) The chain of custody, according to the 1967 I.G. Report was for the lethal pills to be delivered from Roselli to Trafficante. Although the next intervening steps remain a mystery, Roselli reported to O'Connell that the pills had been delivered to Orta in Cuba in late February-early March 1961. (Interim Report, p. 27; Interim Report, p. 80)

(Comment: The Senate Interim Report reported the version of Joe Shimon whose memory was that the money and pills for the operation were delivered at a meeting at the Fountainbleau Hotel on March 12, 1961 attended by "Maheu, Roselli, Trafficante and the Cuban." (Interim Report, p.81) Shimon's story is filled with vivid details, which are documented on p. 82 of the Report, but his credibility is subject to serious question as his account is not shared by anyone else connected with the plan nor is his relationship with Roselli, Giancana, or Trafficante appear as "cozy" as he would lead one to believe.

It is also apparent that Shimon was a source for Jack Anderson's column of January 19, 1971, which fixed the date of the passage of the poison at the Fountainbleau by Roselli as March 13, 1961, and contained the report that Castro became ill a few weeks later.

The real problem with Shimon's story is that the pills were returned to the CIA for a few weeks because Orta could or would not attempt the poisoning; a fact apparently unknown to Shimon before his "leak" to Anderson and his Senate testimony.) *Also, Castro was reported ill by the media in early 1961, (not 1960)*

(Comment: One additional fact concerning Orta's inability to carry out the mission ties in with the final thesis of this report. Orta "lost his position in Castro's office on 26 January 1961, while planning for the operation was still going on in Miami and Washington"...It would seem though that the gangsters did know that Orta had already lost his access to Castro. (1967 I.G. Report, p. 27)

With the failure of Orta to produce the desired results, the project was at a standstill until, once again, Santo Trafficante assumed command. Roselli told O'Connell that "Trafficante believed a certain leading figure in the Cuban exile movement might be able to accomplish the assassination. (1967 I.G. Report, p. 29; Interim Report, p. 80)

(Comment: The exile leader was, of course, Tony de Varona, who was the subject of speculation in an FBI memorandum of 18 January 1961 associating him with receiving financial aid from American gangsters for anti-Castro activities which pre-dated the CIA operation.

At the time of his introduction into the CIA-mob plots, de Varona was already being funded by the Agency through the Revolutionary Front and was heavily involved in CIA planning for the Bay of Pigs invasion which was imminent.

Interest in de Varona was also being expressed in 1960-61 by Mike McLaney whose advertising agency was engaged in promoting Varona's image in collaboration with McLaney's friend "Chirri" or "Chilli" Mendoza (Mendoza is described in Trafficante's FBI files as a close Cuban associate.))

Completing the picture of support for Varona is the promotional efforts of Dino and Eddie Cellini, McLaney and Lansky business associates, who were reportedly working through a Washington, D. C. public relations firm, Edward K. Moss and Associates. Moss had previous CIA associations and was supposedly acting as a conduit for funds supplied by the Cellini benefactors with the understanding that this group would have "privileged treatment 'in the Cuba of the future.' Attempts to verify these reports were unsuccessful." (1967 I.G. Report, p. 30)

