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CIA-Mafia Effort?

Two Plots to Kill Castro

By Norman Kempster
Washington Star Staff Writer

A former high-ranking CIA official says there were at least two separate CIA-Mafia plots to kill Cuban Premier Fidel Castro, one of them beginning in 1960 and ending in 1961 and the second beginning in 1962 and continuing at least until 1963.

Lawrence R. Houston, who was CIA general counsel for 26 years prior to his retirement in 1973, said he informed former Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy of the scheme in the spring of 1962 at a time when he thought it had been "aborted."

Houston said Kennedy, who apparently was hearing of the plot for the first time, angrily issued orders to "break contact" with the Mafia group that included Sam Giancana and John Roselli.

BUT DESPITE Kennedy's order, Houston said the plot was resumed later in 1962 with a different CIA "case officer" but the same group of mobsters.

Houston's account, told to a group of reporters yesterday, filled in a few of the blanks in what is known about the plan to kill Castro. But it left unanswered the most intriguing question — was the plot authorized by former Presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy, or did the CIA act on its own?

This is the chronology that Houston outlined:

- In 1960, the final year of the Eisenhower administration, Sheffield Edwards, former head of the CIA's office of security, contacted Giancana and Roselli. Edwards was introduced to the mobsters by Robert Maheu, a former FBI agent and then an aide to billionaire Howard Hughes.
- Edwards worked out a plan to kill Castro with the mobsters. Of course, this and subsequent plots were unsuccessful
- Sometime in late 1961, the plot was aborted. Houston said he does not know who turned it off.
- In the spring of 1962 — Houston said he thought it was in April — Houston and Edwards described the plan to Robert Kennedy who had been assigned by his brother, the President, to ride herd on the CIA following the Bay of Pigs debacle.
- Kennedy reacted angrily to the news that the CIA had dealt with the Mafia. Kennedy was pushing strong measures against organized crime and Houston said he was concerned that any government dealings with organized crime might compromise prosecutions.
- Sometime later in 1962, probably in August or September, the Mafia link was re-established. This time the "case officer" was William Harvey. Houston said Harvey asked Edwards for an introduction to Roselli but Edwards refused because of Kennedy's admonition to avoid dealing with the underworld. Houston said he has no way of knowing who reinstated the plan. Houston said his only direct connection with the plot was to accompany Edwards, who died recently, while he reported on the matter first to Asst. Atty. Gen. Herbert J. Miller and later to Kennedy.

Houston said Kennedy was angry about the use of the Mafia, although "he didn't seem very perturbed" at the prospect of killing Castro.

The former CIA official said Kennedy admonished: "If you are going to have anything to do with the Mafia again, come to me first.

Houston said he informed Gen. Marshall S. Carter, then CIA deputy director, of the substance of the report to the attorney general. He said he does not recall why that report went to Carter instead of CIA Director John A. McCone, but he assumes it was because McCone was out of town.

MCCONE HAS said recently that he knew nothing of the Mafia connection at the time, although he learned of it later.

Retired Maj. Gen. Edward Lansdale, a counterinsurgency expert with strong ties to the CIA, said in an interview with The Washington Star earlier this month that Robert Kennedy directed him in 1962 to prepare contingency plans to "get rid of" Castro. He said he passed the instructions along to Harvey.

Lansdale recanted his account the next day. He said Kennedy never ordered him to plan to kill anyone and that assassination "is not my bag." In a subsequent interview, Lansdale said he could not recall if he had dealt with Harvey.

Lansdale's original story did not explain how he could have launched the Mafia plot, which had begun two years earlier. However, Houston's version explains that Harvey did not become involved until 1962.

Harvey and Roselli have both testified in secret before the Senate select intelligence committee. Chairman Frank Church, D-Idaho, said the testimony of Harvey and Roselli did not depart significantly from published accounts of the Mafia plot.

Rep. Don Edwards Quits CIA Probe Unit

Rep. Don Edwards has resigned from the newly reconstituted House committee investigating the CIA and other intelligence-gathering federal agencies.

Named to replace him on the 13-member panel was Rep. William Lehman, D-Fla. House Speaker Carl Albert appointed Lehman to the vacancy yesterday.

Edwards, D-Calif., cited other responsibilities in connection with his chairmanship of a Judiciary subcommittee on civil and constitutional rights for leaving the CIA committee.

Edwards was one of the most liberal members of the intelligence committee, but took no public role in the recent dispute that led last week to a reorganization of the panel.

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