Death of a President

(U) DCI John McCone and the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy

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(U) *In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on 22 November 1963,* Studies in Intelligence *reprints the below, which originally appeared as a chapter in Chief Historian David Robarge's book* John McCone as Director of Central Intelligence, 1961–1965, *published by the Center for the Study of Intelligence in 2005.*

(U) Misconceptions abound regarding CIA's connection to the assassination and its role in subsequent investigations, contributing to the fact that, according to a recent poll taken by the History Channel, 71 percent of the American public still believes that Kennedy's death resulted from a conspiracy.

(U) Robarge tells a very different story about CIA's immediate response to the assassination, its interaction with the FBI and Warren Commission, the surprise appearance of KGB defector Yuri Nosenko with troubling information about Lee Harvey Oswald, and DCI McCone's involvement with later inquiries about Kennedy's murder. Nothing in the numerous books and articles about the assassination that have appeared since the publication of McCone has materially changed any of Robarge's conclusions.

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> **"(U) Walter Elder dashed in and cried out, 'The president's been shot!'"**

(S) John McCone and Lyman Kirkpatrick, the Agency's Executive Director-Comptroller, met with President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB) through the morning of 22 November 1963. The main topic of discussion was CIA's image problem, which McCone attributed to hostile journalists. The DCI planned to fly to California that afternoon for the Thanksgiving holiday and, before leaving, over lunch, wanted to talk about the PFIAB meeting with his senior deputies. They were eating in the French Room, a small space next to the director's office, when McCone's executive assistant, Walter Elder, dashed in and cried out, "The president's been shot!" ▪

(U) McCone turned on the television, watched the news bulletins,

▪ (U) Source notes for this article can be found in the original published versions of the book on line in CIALink and Intelink.

(b)(3)

(U) The immediate reaction at Langley, as elsewhere in the US government, was to suspect that a foreign, probably communist-directed, effort to destabilize the United States might be underway.

phoned the attorney general at his nearby home, and said, "I'm going to Hickory Hill to be with Bobby."[a] The DCI made his call before the overloaded Washington-area telephone system went down 30 minutes after the first news from Dallas. He remembered wondering on the short drive to the Kennedy house "who could be responsible for a thing like this. Was it the result of bigotry and hatred that was expressed in certain areas of the country, of which Dallas was one? Was this an international plot?"

(S) While McCone was with Robert and Ethel Kennedy in their second floor library, the attorney general answered the phone, listened briefly, and then said, "He's dead." McCone recalled feeling shock, disbelief, profound sadness, and great concern for the country. A few minutes later, he and Robert left the house and walked around the lawn, speaking privately.

(S) One of the numerous phone calls to interrupt them was from Vice President Lyndon Johnson in Dallas. After expressing his condolences, Johnson told Robert that the assassination might be part of a worldwide plot and indicated that he probably should be sworn in right away. The attorney general was initially taken aback but then agreed, found out the appropriate procedure from the Department of Justice, and informed the presidential entourage in Dallas.

(U) Kennedy wanted to fly there right away, but McCone said that would take too long and suggested instead that the slain president's body be brought to Washington as soon as possible. Air Force One landed at Andrews Air Force Base that evening, and John Kennedy's body was taken to Bethesda Naval Medical Center for an autopsy. Meanwhile, the controversy over who had killed him, and why, had already begun.

(U) Initial Fears of a Conspiracy

(U) McCone returned to Headquarters at around 1530, summoned the CIA Executive Committee, asked the Intelligence Community's Watch Committee to convene at the Pentagon, issued orders for all stations and bases to report any signs of a conspiracy and to watch all Soviet personnel, especially intelligence officers, for indications that the Soviet Union was trying to take advantage of the disarray in Washington.

(U) The immediate reaction at Langley, as elsewhere in the US government, was to suspect that a foreign, probably communist-directed, effort to destabilize the United States might be underway. Richard Helms recalled that "[w]e all went to battle stations over the possibility that this might be a plot—and who was pulling the strings. We were very busy sending messages all over the world to pick up anything that might indicate that a conspiracy had been formed to kill the President of the United States—and then what was to come next." One of the first cables was the following message Helms sent to all CIA stations overseas:

(U) Lee Harvey Oswald
Photo: UPI/Bettman

> *Tragic death of President Kennedy requires all of us to look sharp for any unusual intelligence developments. Although we have no reason to expect anything of a particular military nature, all hands should be on the quick alert at least for the next few days while new president takes over reins.*

(S) In addition, McCone directed that a special cable channel be established so that all traffic related to Lee Harvey Oswald—arrested in Dallas soon after the shooting—went to a central repository, and he sent a [redacted] (b)(1)

[a] (U) Robert Kennedy was holding a luncheon meeting on organized crime with two Department of Justice officials when FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover called to tell him that the president had been shot.

(b)(1) to Parkland Hospital, where John Kennedy had been taken for emergency treatment, to coordinate activities with the Secret Service and the FBI. After the Secret Service obtained a graphic film of the assassination taken by an amateur photographer named Abraham Zapruder, McCone had the National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC) officers analyze the footage (particularly the time between shots) and prepare briefing boards for the service.[a]

(S) For some time after the assassination, and particularly following Oswald's murder on the 24th, Agency leaders would not rule out a domestic or foreign conspiracy.

(U) Some senior CIA officers looked into possible KGB involvement. The chief of the Soviet-Russia (SR) Division of the Deputy Directorate for Plans (DDP), David Murphy, framed the essential question the day after: "[W]as Oswald, wittingly or unwittingly, part of a plot to murder President Kennedy in Dallas as an attempt to further exacerbate sectional strife and render the US government less capable of dealing with Soviet initiatives over the next year?" Also on the 23rd, Mexico City station reported that less than two months earlier, Oswald had met with a KGB officer possibly from the Thirteenth Directorate—responsible for assassination and sabotage—at the Soviet embassy in Mexico City. Headquarters officers speculated on 24 November that "[a]lthough it appears that he [Oswald] was then thinking only about a peaceful change of residence to the Soviet Union, it is also possible that he was getting documented to make a quick escape after assassinating the President."[b]

(S) The Agency's inability to locate Nikita Khrushchev right after the assassination especially alarmed McCone and his deputies. The Soviet premier's apparent absence from Moscow could have meant that he was in a secret command center, either hunkering down for an American reprisal, or possibly preparing to strike at the United States. "We were very high in tension about any indicators which would support such a theme," Helms said. "It became manifest within 24 or 48 hours, however, that this was not the case."

(b)(1)

news of the assassination deeply shocked their leaders and made them fear US retaliation.[c]

(S) For some time after the assassination, and particularly following Oswald's murder on the 24th, Agency leaders would not rule out a domestic or foreign conspiracy—the latter possibly involving the Soviet Union or Cuba. A Headquarters cable on the 28th stated that "[w]e have by no means excluded the possibility that other as yet unknown persons may have been involved or even that other powers may have played a role." On 1 December, the station in Mexico City, where Oswald had visited the Soviet and Cuban consulates a few weeks before the assassination, was told to "continue to follow all leads and tips. The question of whether Oswald acted solely on his own has still not been finally resolved." Two weeks later, Headquarters told the station to "continue to watch for…evidence of their [Soviet or Cuban] complicity…"

(S) McCone suggested two possible culprits if Oswald had not acted

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[a] (S) NPIC had difficulty computing the exact time of exposure of the frames on Zapruder's film because the camera he used was spring-wound, which caused the timing of the frames to vary slightly from the standard of 18 per second. The cable slug used for Oswald-related traffic was GPFLOOR. CIA had opened counterintelligence and security files on Oswald in early November 1959 after it was notified of his defection to the Soviet Union. Oswald's 201 file was opened in December 1960 to contain cables, news clippings, and other material accumulated in response to an inquiry from the Department of State about a list of 12 American defectors in Soviet Bloc countries; Oswald's name was on the list. (b)(1)

[b] (S) CIA did not establish that the Soviet with whom Oswald met, Valeriy Kostikov, was from the KGB's "wet affairs" department. According to transcripts of their telephone conversations they only discussed Oswald's request for a visa. By early 1964, the Agency had concluded that Oswald's contact with the KGB in Mexico City "was nothing more than a grim coincidence...." Oleg Nechiporenko, one of the KGB officers in Mexico City during Oswald's trip there, has recounted the Soviets' dealings with him in *Passport to Assassination*.

(U) One of the Agency's star Soviet defectors, Peter Deriabin, wrote a lengthy memorandum a few days after the assassination arguing that Oswald was a KGB agent who either was dispatched to kill Kennedy or was sent to the United States on another mission and then committed the murder on his own. Deriabin contended that the Kremlin would have accomplished several objectives by eliminating Kennedy. Among them were removing the West's preeminent Cold Warrior from the scene; constraining US covert actions against Cuba, which would be stigmatized as acts of vengeance; and diverting the Soviet people's attention from domestic problems. Deriabin's conjectures did not find much of an audience at Headquarters.

(S) Besides determining whether an international crisis was imminent, Agency officers also tried to find out as much as they could about Oswald.

alone. "Castro's been so frightfully intemperate in some of his talks," he told a senior Pentagon official, and "it would be within his capability if he thought he could get away with it, I think. Khrushchev, no. On the other hand, I don't know how completely Khrushchev controls the KGB." If either theory proved credible, Helms remembered, "[w]e could have had a very nasty situation. What would be the retaliation? A startled America could do some extreme things...."

(S) Besides determining whether an international crisis was imminent, Agency officers also tried to find out as much as they could about Oswald. Mexico City station reported on the 22nd that he had been at the Soviet and Cuban embassies in the Mexican capital during late September-early October. Most of the assassination-related information about which McCone briefed President Johnson, McGeorge Bundy, and Dean Rusk during the next week concerned the Oswald-Cuba connection. On 23 November, McCone apprised the president and Bundy of the station's trace results. Later in the day, the station reported that the Mexican police had arrested a Mexican national working at the Cuban consulate who supposedly talked to Oswald in September.

(S) That evening, McCone told Rusk about all these developments. On the 25th, a Nicaraguan walk-in to the US embassy in Mexico City said that when he was in the Cuban consulate in mid-September, he heard Cubans talk about assassination and saw them give Oswald money.[b] Within a few days, however, this alarming report was shown to be a fabrication. McCone discussed the incident with the president and Bundy on 30 November and 1 December. Between 23 November and 5 December, the DCI briefed Johnson on assassination developments and other intelligence matters every day but two—in varying measures, to communicate news about the investigation, to demonstrate how CIA was involved in it, and to create a bond with the new president.[a]

(U) McCone also participated in two rituals surrounding John Kennedy's death. On Saturday the 23rd, he went to the White House to pay last respects to the fallen president, and on Monday the 25th, he attended

[a] (U) The Soviet Union immediately tried to dispel notions that it was behind the assassination. Less than 15 minutes after Kennedy's death was announced, the TASS news service issued a bulletin that rightwing extremists in the United States were responsible. Eastern European stations picked up and spread the story. According to former KGB officer Oleg Kalugin, who was stationed in New York at the time, "the Kremlin leadership was clearly rattled by Oswald's Soviet connection." KGB Headquarters sent "frantic cables...ordering us to do everything possible" to quell suspicions of Soviet involvement in Kennedy's death. "We were told to put forward the line that Oswald could have been involved in a conspiracy with American reactionaries displeased with the President's recent efforts to improve relations with Russia.... [T]he message we were to convey was clear: 'Inform the American public through every possible channel that we never trusted Oswald and were never in any way connected with him.'" Moscow tried to play down Oswald's tie to the Soviet Union by insinuating that he was a Trotskyite or a Marxist of some undetermined sort, and not a "real" communist. Walter Elder recalled thinking that the Soviets' denials were too scripted; "it was almost like they were reading from a manual." Reviewing the early Soviet "line" on the assassination a few months later, Agency analysts suggested that "the charge against the extreme right was perhaps a 'conditioned reflex'.... Hoodwinked by its own preconceptions and wishful thinking[,] the Kremlin almost inevitably concluded that President Kennedy had been struck down by his most radical right-wing opponents." Other Soviet publications further confused the picture by propagating assorted conspiracy theories. *Izvestia*, the government newspaper, and *Red Star*, the army periodical, speculated that organized crime was involved, while *Pravda*, the Communist Party organ, and *Nedelya*, a news magazine, proposed that Oswald was not the assassin. Media in satellite countries disseminated those notions also.

[b] (S) The bogus Nicaraguan walk-in was just one of many false sources that US intelligence services had to evaluate right after the assassination. As Headquarters officers noted in a cable to Mexico City station, "We and other agencies are being flooded by fabrications on the [Oswald] case from several continents, some originating with people on the fringes of the intelligence business. Such fabrications are not usually done for money, but out of sickly fancy and a desire to get into the intelligence game."

(U) Also on 23 November, the Office of Current Intelligence prepared a special edition of the *President's Intelligence Checklist*, dated the 22nd and bearing this dedication: "[I]n honor of President Kennedy[,] for whom the President's Intelligence Checklist was first written on 17 June 1961." These were the only contents of that memorial issue:

> *For this day, the Checklist Staff can find no words more fitting than a verse quoted by the President to a group of newspapermen the day he learned of the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba.*
> *Bullfight critics ranked in rows*
> *Crowd the enormous plaza full;*
> *But only one is there who knows*
> *And he's the man who fights the bull.*

the state funeral at St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington.

(S) That morning, CIA and the FBI received numerous reports that attempts would be made to assassinate foreign leaders invited to the funeral. McCone personally told one of the supposed targets, French President de Gaulle, about the threats against him. Fifty-eight CIA security officers joined the detail at the funeral, along the route of the procession, and at Arlington Cemetery. Later that day, the DCI went to a reception for visiting dignitaries hosted by President Johnson at the Department of State.

(U) Because of their relationship, McCone had frequent contact with Robert Kennedy during the painful days after the assassination. Their communication appears to have been verbal, informal, and, evidently in McCone's estimation, highly personal; no memoranda or transcripts exist or are known to have been made. The DCI no doubt passed on to the attorney general the same information about Oswald, the Soviet Union, and Cuba that he gave to Johnson and other senior administration officials.

(U) In addition, because Robert Kennedy had overseen the Agency's anti-Castro covert actions—including some of the assassination plans—his dealings with McCone about his brother's murder had a special gravity. Did Castro kill the president because the president had tried to kill Castro? Had the administration's obsession with Cuba inadvertently inspired a politicized sociopath to murder John Kennedy? In 1975, according to one of the Warren Commission's lawyers, McCone

> *said he felt there was something troubling Kennedy that he was not disclosing.... McCone said he now feels Kennedy may very well have thought that there was some connection between the assassination plans against Castro and the assassination of President Kennedy. He also added his personal belief that Robert Kennedy had personal feelings of guilt because he was directly or indirectly involved with the anti-Castro planning.*[a]

(U) As head of CIA when much of that planning took place, McCone also might have had such feelings. A distraught Kennedy even had McCone affirm that the Agency itself was not involved in the assassination. When New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison made that allegation in 1967, Kennedy was prompted to recall that soon after the assassination he had asked McCone "if they [the Agency] had killed my brother.... I asked him in a way he couldn't lie to me, and [he said] they hadn't."

(U) Managing CIA's Part in the Investigation

(U) The FBI took the lead in the federal investigation of President Kennedy's murder. CIA supported the Bureau by obtaining information from clandestine and liaison sources outside the United States and from foreign contacts inside, principally in the

(U) Raymond Rocca

Cuban refugee community in Florida. The Agency concentrated first on Oswald's activities in Mexico City in September and October 1963, and then on his residency in the Soviet Union during 1959–62 and his possible ties to Soviet intelligence. Within a week, Headquarters received [redacted] (b)(1) [redacted] about Oswald and forwarded them to the White House, the FBI, the Department of State, and the Secret Service. After 29 November, CIA also began assisting the Warren Commission's inquiry.

(S) As DCI, McCone's role between the assassination and the release of the commission's report 10 months later was, in his words, "to see that the investigation and the review of the CIA's relationship, if any, with Oswald were thoroughly studied and all relevant matters conveyed to the Warren Commission." According to Helms, McCone's function was "see[ing] to it that sufficient manpower and funds and other resources of the Agency were put to

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[redacted] Havana was mystified about Kennedy's killing. (b)(1)

(S) Helms—at James Angleton's request—shifted responsibility for Agency support for the FBI and the Warren Commission to the CI Staff.

work in support of the Warren Commission and the FBI." McCone "certainly…maintained a continuing and abiding interest in these proceedings" but turned over daily management of the Agency's assassination-related activities to Helms, who kept the DCI, the DDCI, and the executive director informed. McCone's calendars indicate that after a flurry of meetings and discussions during the two weeks following Kennedy's death, he settled back into a routine schedule with his usual concentration on Intelligence Community affairs and foreign policy issues.

(S) Helms, in turn, designated the chief of the Mexican branch in Western Hemisphere (WH) Division, John Whitten, to run CIA's initial collection and dissemination efforts, and an officer in the Counterintelligence (CI) Staff's Special Investigations Group, Birch O'Neal, to handle liaison with the FBI. After Whitten issued a report in December on Oswald's activities in Mexico City, Helms—at James Angleton's request, according to Whitten—shifted responsibility for Agency support for the FBI and the Warren Commission to the CI Staff. Helms did so for three reasons: Whitten's paper was not regarded as quality work; the assassination investigation had a counterintelligence element; and Angleton's shop provided a tightly controlled channel of communication.

(S) The CI Staff's chief analyst, Raymond Rocca, was the Agency's senior point of contact for day-to-day business related to the assassination. When needed, other Agency officers—notably Helms and the top managers in the SR and WH divisions (David Murphy and J.C. King, respectively)—dealt directly with the commission and the FBI. According to Rocca, the CI Staff concentrated on Soviet leads while WH worked the Cuban angle. McCone evidently had no problem with this bureaucratic arrangement or with any other part of Helms's management of CIA's role. "[I]f he had been dissatisfied," Helms observed later, "he would have made his dissatisfaction clear[,] and I wouldn't have forgotten it."[a] (S)

(S) The shift of responsibility to the CI Staff also had the potential benefit of improving CIA coordination with the FBI, which had long dealt with Angleton's unit. Agency-Bureau relations had grown tense after the assassination because of jurisdictional disputes. Early on, McCone tried to assure J. Edgar Hoover that the FBI was in charge of the investigation and that CIA would be as helpful as it could be. In a short telephone conversation on 26 November, the DCI took almost every available opportunity to conciliate the Bureau chief:

> *I just want to be sure that you are satisfied that this Agency is giving you all the help that we possibly can in connection with your investigation of the situation in Dallas. I know the importance the President places on this investigation you are making. He asked me personally whether CIA was giving you full support. I said that they were, but I just wanted to be sure from you that you felt so....* [Y]*ou can call on us for anything we have.... I think it is an exceedingly important investigation and report[,] and I am delighted that the President has called on you to make it.*

(U) Despite McCone's ingratiating diplomacy and the CI Staff's liaison role, relations between the two agencies worsened during the postassassination period. The Bureau's four-volume report, issued in early December, did not mention CIA, referred to just two pieces of information that the Agency had provided, and contained much material that CIA officers had not seen before but that was germane to their own inquiries, such as extensive information on Oswald's stay in the Soviet Union. In mid-December, Hoover voiced suspicions that McCone had questioned the Bureau's investigative abilities and might have leaked derogatory information to the press. The FBI director concurred with a deputy's recommendation that a "firm and forthright confrontation" be held with the DCI for "attack[ing] the Bureau in a vicious and underhanded manner characterized with sheer dishonesty."

[a] (S) The Agency's assassination inquiry was a major test of its data retrieval capabilities—particularly the computerized name-trace system developed for it by IBM and known as WALNUT, which combined punch cards and microfilm. In his appearance before the Warren Commission, McCone encouraged federal agencies to computerize their records to facilitate investigations.

(U) Sam Papich, the FBI liaison to CIA, met with McCone on 23 December to discuss a private allegation that the Agency was claiming it had uncovered evidence that Oswald was part of a conspiracy—specifically, that he had received money in Mexico City in September as prepayment for killing Kennedy. McCone then "had endeavored to leave the impression with certain people that CIA had developed information not known to the Bureau and, in essence, made the Bureau look ridiculous." According to Papich, the DCI became "very visibly incensed and left the impression that he might at any moment ask [me] to leave." McCone then denied that he had talked to any journalist about the assassination and had not been critical of the FBI's handling of the investigation, but that he had told President Johnson about the original report on Oswald in Mexico City. The encounter with Papich "left [McCone] in an angry mood."

(S) That dispute soon was superseded by recurrent problems over information sharing between the Agency and the Bureau. Not only did "a certain amount of pride of ownership" inhibit CIA-FBI communication, according to McCone, but senior Agency officials took issue with the Bureau's uncoordinated disclosures of information to the public and to the Warren Commission, which became the premier entity investigating the Kennedy assassination.

(U) Meanwhile, McCone and CIA had to work out a modus vivendi with the Warren Commission.

(S) In December, they were particularly concerned that release of the FBI report on the assassination would compromise sensitive CIA surveillance operations against the Soviet embassy in Mexico City by revealing that the Agency knew about Oswald's visit there. In mid-January 1964, Helms asked Hoover to direct his officers not to pass CIA-originated information to the commission without first obtaining clearance and coordination from Langley. Further animosity arose when the two organizations reached opposite conclusions about the bona fides of a KGB defector, Yuri Nosenko, who claimed to have seen Oswald's KGB file compiled while the American was in the Soviet Union. A disagreement over CIA's plan to ask defectors it handled to review FBI information was resolved when the Bureau agreed to allow such vetting as long as its own sources were protected and the Agency did not retain any original reports.[a]

(U) Dealing with the Warren Commission

(U) Meanwhile, McCone and CIA had to work out a *modus vivendi* with the Warren Commission. Lyndon Johnson at first opposed creation of a presidential panel to examine the killing. He preferred to let the FBI and Texas law enforcement authorities quietly handle the matter. With rumors already swirling that some sort of communist, rightwing, or underworld plot was involved, he did not want a lengthy, public inquiry that might produce explosive "revelations" and create pressure on him to act precipitously. At most, he thought, a Texas-based, Texan-run investigative board should be convened.[b]

(U) The president changed his mind as the idea of a blue-ribbon committee caught on with pundits and politicians after Jack Ruby shot Oswald in Dallas police headquarters and inspired fears of a broad conspiracy and questions about the competence of Texas authorities. Now that Oswald would never be brought to trial, Johnson calculated that a presidentially appointed panel of distinguished citizens stood the best chance of preempting potentially demagogic state and congressional probes that might highlight Oswald's links to the Soviets and Cubans, feed other conspiracy theories, or reach contradictory conclusions. "This is a question that has a good many more ramifications than on the surface," the president said, "and we've got to take this

(b)(1)

[b] (U) Johnson displayed his anxiety over conspiracy rumors on the night after the assassination. While watching NBC's television news broadcast, he started talking back to anchormen Chet Huntley and David Brinkley: "Keep talking like that and you'll bring on a revolution just as sure as I'm sitting here." Senior American diplomats were working to instill calm in both the United States and the Soviet Union. The US ambassador in Moscow, Foy Kohler, warned American leaders about "political repercussions which may develop if undue emphasis is placed on the alleged 'Marxism' of Oswald.... I would hope, if facts permit, we could deal with the assassin as 'madman' with [a] long record of acts reflecting mental unbalance rather than dwell on his professed political convictions." At the same time, Ambassador-at-Large Llewelyn Thompson urged Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Anastas Mikoyan to tone down Soviet rhetoric about reactionary capitalists.

(U) Under McCone's and Helms's direction, CIA supported the Warren Commission in a way that may best be described as passive, reactive, and selective.

out of the arena where they're testifying that Khrushchev and Castro did this and did that and chuck us into a war that can kill 40,000,000 Americans in an hour." The public sentiment that troubled Johnson was reflected in a Gallup poll taken only a week after the assassination; just 29 percent of those surveyed believed Oswald had acted alone.

(U) Accordingly, in Executive Order 11130, issued on 29 November, Johnson announced the formation of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy. It was a seven-member, bipartisan board comprising the chief justice of the United States, Earl Warren; two members each from the Senate and the House of Representatives, Richard Russell, John Sherman Cooper, Hale Boggs, and Gerald Ford; and two prominent former government officials, banker-diplomat John McCloy and former DCI Allen Dulles.

(U) The president later called them "men who were known to be beyond pressure and above suspicion." The panel was empowered to conduct a full and independent inquiry and enjoyed a broad national mandate. Its members saw their function as bringing their collective experience and reputations to calm the shaken populace—or, in McCloy's words, to "lay the dust…[and] show the world that America is not a banana republic, where a government can be changed by conspiracy." Other state and federal investigations quickly left the scene.

(U) During the next several months, the commission went about what the chief justice called "a very sad and solemn duty," reviewing reports, requesting information from state and federal agencies, staging reconstructions, receiving testimony, and preparing its findings. In September 1964, it released an 888-page report; two months later it followed up with 26 volumes of supporting transcripts and exhibits. It concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin and found no evidence that he or his killer, Jack Ruby, were part of a domestic or foreign conspiracy. The report—described by the *New York Times* as "comprehensive and convincing," with its facts "exhaustively gathered, independently checked out, and cogently set forth"—had the reassuring effect the White House and the commission had sought. After its release, 87 percent of the respondents to a Gallup poll believed Oswald alone had shot Kennedy.

(U) Under McCone's and Helms's direction, CIA supported the Warren Commission in a way that may best be described as passive, reactive, and selective. In early 1965, McCone told the Department of Justice that he had instructed Agency officers "to cooperate fully with the President's Commission and to withhold nothing from its scrutiny," and, through October 1964, CIA provided it with 77 documents and prepared 38 reports of varying lengths in response to its taskings.

(U) That cooperation, however, was narrower than those numbers might suggest. CIA produced information only in response to commission requests—most of which concerned the Soviet Union or Oswald's activities while he was outside the United States—and did not volunteer material even if potentially relevant—for example, about Agency plans to assassinate Castro. Helms told the House of Representatives' Select Committee on Assassinations in 1978 that he "was instructed to reply to inquiries from the Warren Commission for information from the Agency. I was not asked to initiate any particular thing." When queried, "[I]n other words, if you weren't asked for it you didn't give it?," Helms replied, "That's right."

(U) Examining the assassination in a different political climate, the Senate's Church Committee concluded in 1976 that the Agency's inquiry was "deficient" in examining Oswald's contacts with pro-Castro and anti-Castro groups before the assassination, and that senior CIA officials "should have realized" that the Agency's Cuban operations "needed to be considered" by the commission. In 1979, the House assassinations committee levied a similar criticism: "The CIA acted in an exemplary manner in dealing with the Warren Commission regarding its narrow requests for information. In another area, that of Cuban involvement and operations, the CIA's actions might well be described as reluctant."

(S) Transactions between the Agency and the commission were channeled through Helms but were conducted between the CI Staff—mainly by Angleton, Rocca, Arthur Dooley, and Thomas Hall—and the commission's counsel or staff. SR Chief Murphy and his counterintelli-

gence deputies, Tennent Bagley and Lee Wigren, also worked with the commission. Requests for information were rarely raised to the DDP or DCI level. Helms met with commission personnel only five times between January and June 1964. This limited degree of high-level communication resulted largely because most of the commissioners, with whom McCone would have dealt for protocol reasons, did not participate much in the investigation and left most of the work to staffers.

(S) No documentary evidence indicates whether McCone ordered the circumscribed approach on his own or at the White House's behest, but DDCI Marshall Carter recalled that McCone said he would "handle the whole [commission] business myself, directly"—including, presumably, establishing, or at least ratifying, the chain of command and degree of responsiveness. Moreover, the DCI shared the administration's interest in avoiding disclosures about covert actions that would circumstantially implicate CIA in conspiracy theories, and possibly lead to calls for a tough US response against the perpetrators of the assassination. If the commission did not know to ask about covert operations against Cuba, he was not going to give them any suggestions about where to look.

(S) McCone himself had few personal dealings with commission members or staffers before he testified to the panel in mid-May 1964. In December 1963, he discussed with Sen. Russell the Nicaraguan walk-in to the US embassy in Mexico City who proved to be a fabricator. In January 1964, at McCloy's request, he wrote to President Johnson and suggested he encourage Chief Justice Warren to speed up the commission's pace. In April, he gave some commission members and staffers a tour of the facilities at Headquarters where assassination-related information was retrieved, stored, and microfilmed, and he demonstrated the procedures the Agency followed in responding to commission requests.

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(S) The DCI later said the chief justice seemed "quite satisfied" with what he saw. In May, McCone discussed with Warren and McCloy the need for the commission to refute conspiracy theories even if doing so gave them unwarranted publicity. "If your report doesn't dispose of it [the "second gunman" scenario] point by point, your report is a whitewash," he warned McCloy. Also in May, the DCI discussed his upcoming testimony before the commission with its general counsel, J. Lee Rankin. Rankin told him the subjects he would be asked about—mainly "your knowledge about Oswald being an agent or informer…[and] your knowledge of any conspiracy, either domestic or foreign."

(U) One reason for all this attention to conspiratorialists was that the ideas of one of the earliest of them, Thomas Buchanan, were circulating widely by the time McCone testified to the commission. Buchanan, an expatriate American communist and former reporter for the Washington *Evening Star*, had published articles in the French periodical *l'Express* and produced a book, *Who Killed Kennedy?*, based on them in May 1964. The book's thesis, which anticipated many criticisms of the commission's findings, contended that a second gunman had fired on Kennedy from the Grassy Knoll because the windshield of the presidential car had a small hole in it. Only that scenario, Buchanan argued, would explain the anomalies regarding the bullets' paths, the timing and locations of the wounds on Kennedy and Texas Governor John Connally, and the contradictions between the emergency staff at Parkland Hospital in Dallas and the doctors who performed the autopsy on the president's body at Bethesda Naval Medical Center.

(S) United States Information Agency and the Department of State worried about the wide circulation Buchanan's assertions had received in the foreign press. A mutual friend of the DCI and the chief justice, Fleur Cowles Montague-Meyers, lived in England and had warned McCone that Buchanan was effectively making his case for a rightwing conspiracy on British radio and television shows. McCone arranged for Warren to talk to her so the chief justice could best position the commission to respond to Buchanan's charges.[a]

(S) McCone does not appear to have had any explicit, special understanding with Allen Dulles—the commission member who worked closest with CIA—that aided the former DCI in steering the inquiry away from controversial Agency operations. McCone later denied that Dulles was the Intelligence Community's protector on the commission, and the latter declined a suggestion from the panel's head lawyer that he "serve as CIA file reviewer" for the

(U) The Warren Commission presents its report to President Johnson.
Photo: Bettmann/CORBIS

commission. Dulles did, however, advise Agency officers of the questions his fellow commissioners most likely would ask. As the only commission member who knew about the Agency's "executive action" operations, Dulles seems to have taken on this proprietary responsibility himself. (It is not known if he told any commissioners in private about CIA's plots to kill Castro.) He worked through Helms, Rocca, Murphy, and other Agency officers and, as was the case with other commissioners and staffers, did not need to deal with McCone directly.[a]

(S) The DCI's calendars and logs of meetings and telephone conversations for the period the commission existed do not show any contacts with Dulles, and McCone recalled talking to Dulles "very infrequently" during that time—perhaps mainly at social functions of the capital elite that they frequently attended. The two men "were not on the best of terms" then, according to Angleton. Their personal relations notwithstanding, McCone and Dulles both wanted to draw the commission's attention away from CIA and encourage endorsement of the FBI's conclusion soon after the assassination that a lone gunman, uninvolved in a conspiracy, had killed John Kennedy. The DCI could rest assured that his predecessor would keep a dutiful watch over Agency equities and work to keep the commission from pursuing provocative lines of investigation, such as lethal anti-Castro covert actions.

(U) McCone and Helms spent about two hours before the commission on 14 May 1964. They answered questions about the Agency's information on Oswald and evidence of a conspiracy behind the assassination, including Soviet or Cuban involvement. The DCI testified that

> [w]*e had knowledge of him* [Oswald], *of course, because of his having gone to the Soviet Union...putting him in a situation where his name would appear in our name file. However...Lee Harvey Oswald was not an agent, employee, or informant of the Central Intelligence Agency. The Agency never contacted him, interviewed him, talked with him, or received or solicited any reports or information from him, or communicated with him directly or in any other manner. The Agency never furnished him with any funds or money or compensated him directly or indirectly in any*

[a] (S) The KGB did not subsidize Buchanan's book, as it did two others that expounded conspiracy theories: Joachim Joesten's *Oswald: Assassin or Fall-Guy?* (1964) and Mark Lane's *Rush to Judgment* (1966) (the former was the first of many works to accuse CIA of complicity in the assassination). In addition, the Soviet publication *New Times* hyped published critiques of the Warren Commission report and recycled the speculations of sundry conspiracists that appeared in Western media. No available information indicates that McCone ever thought there were two gunmen. Most of the best-selling conspiracy books appeared after McCone left CIA, so he did not have to answer their charges officially.

[a] (S) Dulles had several contacts with the Agency soon after the commission was set up. By mid-December 1963, he had asked for a summary of world reaction to the assassination, requested an Agency secretary, sought advice from General Counsel Lawrence Houston on the selection of the commission's lawyers, and spoken to the Office of Medical Services about Oswald's psychological condition. In January 1964, Dulles—apparently provoked by press criticism that the commission had been slow to get started, according to Angleton—asked CIA to suggest questions to be included in an official letter to the Soviet government.

fashion, and Lee Harvey Oswald was never associated or connected directly or indirectly in any way whatsoever with the Agency.

(U) Before the DCI testified to the commission, Agency and Bureau officers reviewed J. Edgar Hoover's testimony and possible statements by McCone to ensure that there were no conflicts between the two directors' positions. CIA officers also prepared a briefing paper for McCone. The paper included guidance on assuring the commission that the Agency had disclosed all information it had on Oswald, and that allegations of CIA ties to Oswald probably were Soviet-sponsored disinformation.

(U) The DCI also was advised that, to protect sources and methods, he should not answer on-the-record questions about Oswald's activities in Mexico. The commission's chief counsel and a few staffers already had received such information "on a highly restricted basis." By the time he testified, McCone had already had one interview about the assassination—in mid-April with author William Manchester, whom Jacqueline Kennedy had retained to write an account of her husband's death. In February, following accusations from Marguerite Oswald that CIA had "set up [her son] to take the blame" for the assassination, McCone stated publicly that Oswald "was never directly or indirectly connected with CIA."

(S) Although literally true, McCone's statement was incomplete. A former CIA employee, who worked in the Foreign Documents Division of the Soviet component of the Directorate of Intelligence, told the House assassinations committee in 1978 that in 1962 he reviewed a report on the Minsk electronics plant where Oswald worked while in the Soviet Union. The report, according to the officer, came from CIA's [redacted] field office and was sourced to a former Marine who had defected and was employed at the plant. The record does not indicate if McCone knew of this report and its sourcing chain and chose not to tell the Warren Commission (presumably to conceal an embarrassing but, in the context of the assassination itself, irrelevant link between the Agency and Oswald); if witting CIA officers did not tell him about it (possibly for the same reasons); or if it was forgotten, not located, or not connected to Oswald.[a]

(U) In addition, the Agency had acquired information "from" Oswald without his knowledge through the CI Staff's mail-cover and mail-opening program, codenamed HTLINGUAL. McCone may not have been aware of that project before the assassination, but insofar as Oswald had been on the target list (because of his former defector status), it would be surprising if the DCI were not told about the program after 22 November. If not, his subordinates deceived him; if he did know about HTLINGUAL reporting on Oswald, he was not being forthright with the commission—presumably to protect an operation that was highly compartmented and, if disclosed, sure to arouse much controversy. Moreover, no information in Oswald's correspondence suggested he was a threat to the president, so the commission had no "need to know" about it.

(U) On a possible Soviet or Cuban role in the assassination, McCone told the commission: (b)(1)

I have no information...that would lead me to believe or conclude that a conspiracy existed.... We made an investigation of all developments after the assassination which came to our attention which might possibly have indicated a conspiracy, and we determined after these investigations, which were made promptly and immediately, that we had no evidence to support such an assumption.

(U) McCone said the Agency had investigated Oswald's trip to Mexico City but found no evidence he had a relationship with Soviet intelligence or the Cuban government, or that his travel was related to the assassination. The DCI's statements about Oswald and the KGB were based in part on SR Division's conclusion in December 1963 that Oswald was not a Soviet assassin. That report stated that although there were "several rather fascinating inconsistencies,

[a] (S) The supposed "Oswald intelligence report" has not been found in Agency records in several searches. Assassination scholar Edward Jay Epstein has presented a slightly different account of the "report." He writes that a source of the Dallas office of the Domestic Contacts Division—a Russian émigré and geologist named George de Mohrenschildt, who befriended Oswald and often turned up on the shadowy fringes of the assassination story in subsequent years—provided information on the operations of an electronics factory in Minsk. According to Epstein, Mohrenschildt's subsource must have been Oswald, who worked in the plant after he defected.

(U) McCone judged that he should defer to the DDP's assessment that the plots to kill Castro had no bearing on the Kennedy assassination,

loose ends, and unanswered questions about Oswald," his extensive pro-Castro activity and contact with the Soviet embassy in Mexico City violated a longstanding KGB prohibition on its overseas agents having contact with domestic communist parties or Soviet legations. Furthermore, there was no evidence that the KGB had selected and specially trained Oswald for an "executive action" mission, as was its standard practice.

(U) The DCI also testified that the Agency had no information that Jack Ruby was connected to pro- or anti-Castro Cubans. Soon after the commission released its report, two American journalists who often wrote "investigative" articles on intelligence affairs, Robert S. Allen and Paul Scott, accused CIA of deception for not turning over to the commission a "national intelligence estimate warning that it is Kremlin policy to remove from public office by assassination Western officials who actively oppose Soviet policies." Allen and Scott were both right and wrong.

(U) The "estimate" actually was an interim study called "Soviet Strategic Executive Action" produced in October 1961. The Agency did not give it to the commission and instead provided a more detailed and more current product, "Soviet Use of Assassination and Kidnapping," dated February 1964. The Office of Security investigated the leak to Allen and Scott and reported to McCone that although the news story was "a serious compromise of a highly sensitive document…damage to clandestine sources and methods would be nominal." In response to an Agency query, a Warren Commission lawyer said "no one [there] was excited about the Allen-Scott piece and to forget it."

(S) After the full extent of CIA's regime-change operations in Cuba was revealed during the 1970s, congressional and journalistic attention focused more on what McCone and the Agency had *not* told the Warren Commission—particularly about the plots to kill Castro. To many observers, and some CIA officers as well, these activities clearly seemed relevant to the Kennedy assassination and to the commission's investigation, yet in 1964 Agency officials concluded that they were not. When the House committee asked McCone in 1978 if CIA had withheld from the commission information about the Agency's plots to kill Castro to avoid embarrassment or an international crisis, McCone replied: "I cannot answer that since they (CIA employees knowledgeable of the continuance of such plots) withheld the information from me. I cannot answer that question. I have never been satisfied as to why they withheld the information from me." He said he assumed Dulles, who was DCI when the plots originated, would have told the commission about them. When asked if the Agency had provided the commission with information about covert action, McCone replied in the negative, stating that a "public commission" could not receive such material.

(U) McCone's answer was neither frank nor accurate. By the time he testified to the commission in May 1964, he had known about the Mafia plots to kill Castro for nine months, but he chose not to mention them. Moreover, McCone's reference to the commission about "an investigation of all developments *after the assassination* which came to our attention which might possibly have indicated a conspiracy" (emphasis added) precluded providing details about *earlier* covert actions that might have seemed pertinent. (U)

(U) McCone judged that he should defer to the DDP's assessment that the plots to kill Castro had no bearing on the Kennedy assassination, and—consistent with the Agency policy of only giving information on request and the "need to know" principle—did not tell the commission about them. In his mind, the evidence showed Oswald was guilty, and the national interest would not be served by fascinating but fruitless examinations of unrelated covert activities. Principles of plausible deniability and compartmentation would be violated; ongoing operations would be compromised; and sensitive sources and methods would be revealed. Publicity about the US government's regime-change efforts in Cuba would give the communists an unprecedented propaganda windfall that they could exploit for years and probably would have evoked strong condemnation from the international community. By withholding information on "executive action," the DCI could preserve Agency equities and avoid leading the Warren Commission toward a false conclusion about Oswald and Cuba.[8]

(U) McCone's reasoning fit into the consensus that had quickly developed in the highest levels of the US government after the assassination that the public needed to be convinced that Oswald was the lone gunman and that an international or extremist conspiracy had not killed a US president. As Deputy Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach wrote to presidential assistant Bill Moyers on 26 November:

> *The public must be satisfied that Oswald was the assassin; that he did not have confederates who are still at large.... Speculation about Oswald's motivation ought to be cut off, and we should have some basis for rebutting the thought that this was a Communist conspiracy or (as the Iron Curtain press is saying) a right-wing conspiracy to blame it on the Communists.... We need something to head off public speculation or Congressional hearings of the wrong sort.*[a]

(U) McCone was convinced that neither the Cubans nor the Soviets had sought revenge against John Kennedy, largely because SIGINT had disclosed the stunned reactions of Cuban and Soviet leaders to Kennedy's death. ("They were frightened, and we knew that," a commission staffer remarked afterward.) Once he concluded that Oswald had no current connection with Moscow or Havana—and he did not believe the commission needed to know *how* that determination was made—McCone presumably saw no reason to raise what he regarded as peripheral, distracting, and unsettling subjects like plots to kill Castro.

(U) However defensible the DCI's rationale might have seemed in 1964, it came under harsh criticism later. In 1976, the Church Committee concluded that "concern with public reputation...possible bureaucratic failure and embarrassment...the extreme compartmentation of knowledge of sensitive operations...[and] conscious decisions [by senior CIA officials] not to disclose potentially important information" kept the commission from knowing all it should have. According to the House assassinations committee in 1978, the commission "failed to investigate adequately the possibility of a conspiracy to assassinate the President," in part because of the limited way the Agency cooperated with it.[b]

(U) In the long term, the decision of McCone and Agency leaders in 1964 not to disclose information about CIA's anti-Castro schemes might have done more to undermine the credibility of the commission than anything else that happened while it was conducting its investigation. At the time, however, McCone felt the need for clarity and closure all the more acutely because while the commission was going about its business, CIA and the FBI were feuding over a sensational counterintelligence case whose outcome could have destroyed the consoling sense of finality that the DCI and other US leaders were working so hard to fashion.

(U) Yuri Nosenko

(U) *The Nosenko Incubus*

(U) No counterintelligence matter of McCone's tenure was so fraught with potential for conflict as the defection of KGB officer Yuri Nosenko in early 1964 and the ensuing controversy over his bona fides. By claiming to know about the KGB's dealings with Oswald, and by extension a Soviet role in the Kennedy assassination, Nosenko became potentially the most important defec-

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[a] (U) Angleton, however, told the House assassinations committee in 1978 that the Intelligence Community "did not have the capabilities" during 1963–64—such as "a code break or a defector"—to determine whether or not Cuba was involved.

[a] (U) Critics of the Warren Commission often have cited Katzenbach's memorandum as proof of a high-level effort, in assassination scholar Max Holland's words, to "put the machinery of government into gear to make the lone-deranged assassin story a convincing one" and reach "a pre-cooked verdict." More plausibly, however, Katzenbach—who has acknowledged that his language was less than artful—"advocated a process that would put rumor and speculation to rest, because [after Oswald's death] a purgative trial had been rendered impossible."

[b] (U) For its part, the commission was deferential and trusting of CIA. Staffers later said that their impressions of the Agency in 1964 predisposed them to believe it was telling the whole truth.

(S) Nosenko's contention that Soviet intelligence had had no operational interest in Oswald seemed implausible.

tor in history. The conclusions of several senior operations officers that Nosenko was a disinformation agent led McCone to approve Nosenko's detention and hostile interrogation, beginning a protracted, much-debated, and ultimately futile three-and-a-half-year effort to "break" him.

(U) The harsh treatment of the seemingly valuable intelligence source is only explainable by CIA suspicions that Nosenko was lying when he said the Soviets were not involved in killing Kennedy. "That made the Nosenko case so extraordinary and so different from all the others," Richard Helms has said. "Otherwise, we wouldn't have done all the things we ended up doing." Moreover, McCone's relationship with Robert Kennedy assured that the DCI would be responsive to the attorney general's urging that the Agency learn the truth about Nosenko and Oswald, and perhaps rendered him even more inclined than usual to let the professionals in the DDP do what they thought was necessary to answer the crucial question: Did Moscow order the murder of the president? An affirmative answer could have been a *casus belli* for the United States.

(S) When he first contacted CIA in Geneva in June 1962 during a disarmament conference, Nosenko was a mid-level officer in the KGB's Second Chief Directorate, which was responsible for counterintelligence and security. He was the Agency's first source on the structure and personnel of the directorate to have actually worked in it. He provided useful leads about Soviet agent and technical operations against US and British targets inside and outside the Soviet Union, agreed to work as an agent in place, and said he would reestablish contact the next time he was in the West.

(S) In late January 1964, Nosenko returned to Geneva and met with CIA officers. When asked if he knew about any Soviet role in the assassination, he claimed to have been the KGB officer assigned to Oswald's case when the American defected to the USSR in 1959. According to Nosenko, the KGB had decided Oswald was unstable and unintelligent and declined to have anything to do with him. Furthermore, Nosenko said, he had participated in Oswald's application for a visa to return to Russia in 1963, and he had been assigned to review Oswald's file after the assassination.

(S) If Nosenko was telling the truth, his information would dispel suspicions that Moscow had some part in President Kennedy's murder. Nosenko also told his Agency contacts that he wanted to defect. In early February 1964, after he said he had been recalled to Moscow, he was exfiltrated to West Germany. A week after his arrival, McCone ordered Nosenko brought to Washington as soon as possible because the Soviets were publicizing the case. At the time, Nosenko was the highest-ranking KGB officer to fall into CIA's hands.

(S) Between Nosenko's two encounters with CIA, however, serious doubts about his bona fides had arisen in SR Division and the CI Staff, and extensive questioning following his defection seemed to support those suspicions. Some of Nosenko's leads could be regarded as "giveaways" or "feed material" because CIA and the FBI already knew about them or because the cases were inactive or low-grade; Nosenko gave inconsistent or inaccurate descriptions of his personal history; anomalies in his information about the KGB were identified; he provided what seemed to be "pat" information on subjects he had no reason to know about, while claiming to be unfamiliar with topics he should have known about; and he did not show what was regarded as a defector's "normal" concern for his family and his future.•

(S) Nosenko's contention that Soviet intelligence had had no operational interest in Oswald seemed implausible, considering the American had been stationed at an airbase in Japan involved in U-2 missions. Oswald's comfortable living conditions in Minsk, his marriage to the niece of a Soviet army intelligence officer, and the circumstances of his return to the United States could be interpreted as suggesting that he had ties to the KGB.

• (U) Statistically, at least, the value of Nosenko's information appeared questionable at first. A tally of the leads he provided, compiled in the spring of 1964, showed that out of 157 cases (63 concerning US citizens and 94 involving foreigners), 104 (52 in each category) were already known or suspected, unproductive or not yet active, lacked access to classified information, or could not be investigated because Nosenko's knowledge was vague or ambiguous.

(S) None of Nosenko's information about Oswald and the KGB could be confirmed independently; nor would Nosenko, a counterintelligence officer, necessarily be able to say without reservation whether the KGB's foreign intelligence component had or had not recruited a particular individual. Also, it appeared too serendipitous that of all the thousands of KGB officers in the world, one who had had direct contact with the Oswald case three separate times would seek to defect so soon after the assassination with information exonerating Moscow.

(S) Perhaps the most important factor in the Agency's thinking was the claim of an earlier defector, Anatoliy Golitsyn, that Moscow would send provocateurs to discredit him and divert attention from the search for moles inside CIA and other Western services. Golitsyn had labeled Nosenko as a disinformation agent in 1962, and James Angleton, David Murphy, and Nosenko's case officer, Tennent Bagley—who at first thought Nosenko was genuine—agreed. Nosenko's reappearance 19 months later had potentially monumental consequences. With the United States still suffering from a national trauma, the Warren Commission inquiry underway, and the Cuban missile crisis barely a year old, the Agency had to determine whether the KGB had dispatched a false defector to hide the fact that Oswald was a Soviet-sponsored killer. As Helms testified in 1978, "[i]f it were shown that Oswald was…acting as a Soviet agent when he shot President Kennedy, the consequences to the United States…and…to the world, would have been staggering."

(S) McCone and CIA felt pressure from the Warren Commission after Hoover unilaterally revealed to the commission what the defector had said about Oswald—which supported the Bureau's conclusion that he was a deranged killer acting alone.

(S) McCone's deputies kept him apprised of the Nosenko case from the day in early February 1964 when the KGB officer said he had been recalled to Moscow.[a] The DCI, in turn, passed on news of developments to the White House—especially to Robert Kennedy, who, according to Helms, was the driving force outside the Agency behind the decisions to extract the truth from Nosenko.

(S) From the first, McCone received essentially all evaluations of Nosenko's bona fides from skeptics, including ADDP Thomas Karamessines, Angleton, Murphy, and Golitsyn, but he appears initially to have tried to keep an open mind. Possibly he took early warnings about Nosenko as a standard caveat about any defector. In mid-February, he told Rusk he was inclined to believe Nosenko. After hearing about the results of further questioning, however, the DCI told the president that "the Soviet's performance and action were so different from any other defector case that our suspicions had been aroused."

(S) The breadth of Golitsyn's information about Soviet intelligence activities and CIA officers' faith in it added to Nosenko's difficulty in establishing his veracity. McCone, Helms, Angleton, and SR Division managers thought the balance weighed heavily in Golitsyn's favor. Even without his information about Oswald, Nosenko would have had a hard time proving himself. Contributing to McCone's uncertainty was Hoover's conclusion—based largely on a trusted KGB source (codenamed FEDORA) the FBI had at the United Nations and the Bureau's own interviews with Nosenko—by early March that Nosenko's information was "valid and valuable" and that he was a genuine defector. Angleton, however, thought FEDORA was a plant because he corroborated supposedly inaccurate information from Nosenko and therefore must be part of the same deception.

(S) At about the same time, in early March, McCone and CIA felt pressure from the Warren Commission after Hoover unilaterally revealed to the commission what the defector had said about Oswald—which supported the Bureau's conclusion that he was a deranged killer acting alone. With the DCI's permission, Helms told the commission that the Agency had serious reservations about Nosenko and asked it to "await further developments."

(S) To resolve the uncertainty about Nosenko, McCone in early April 1964 accepted the recommendations of Helms, Angleton, and Murphy that the defector be confined and interro-

[a] (S) McCone had no role in authorizing any operational or compensation arrangements for Nosenko after the Russian's first contact with CIA in 1962. Otherwise, the record does not indicate what, if anything, McCone knew about the case before 1964.

(S) One important concern the Agency had was the embarrassment that would result if the commission's report included material from a source later shown to be a controlled Soviet agent.

gated until broken. (Agency officers had suspended informational debriefings of Nosenko a month before.) CIA detained Nosenko under the terms of an "exclusion and parole" agreement with the Department of Justice executed in 1955. The agreement gave the Agency authority to exercise over defectors "control of a kind and degree it believes consistent with the internal security needs of the United States."

(S) The documentary record does not indicate what McCone knew about the austere conditions of Nosenko's year-long detention at an Agency safehouse [redacted] (Twelve of the 16 months of the Russian's confinement there were during McCone's tenure.) Helms does not recall that McCone ever asked for details of the inquiry, and the DCI does not appear to have been fully aware of much of the dubious logic and inappropriate [redacted] procedures upon which the case against Nosenko rested. Assured by his senior operations and legal officers that the Agency was handling Nosenko lawfully and in ways they believed stood the best chance of revealing the truth, McCone let the hostile interrogation run its course.

(S) There is no reason to doubt that he would have accepted then the argument Helms made to congressional investigators a decade-and-a-half later to justify the severe treatment of Nosenko:

> [T]*his became one of the most difficult issues...that the Agency had ever faced. Here a President of the United States had been murdered and a man had come from the Soviet Union, an acknowledged Soviet intelligence officer, and said his intelligence service had never been in touch with this man* [Oswald] *and knew nothing about him. This strained credulity at the time. It strains it to this day.... You are damned if you hold a fellow too long and treat him badly...and you are damned the other way if you have not dug his teeth out to find out what he knows about Oswald.*

(S) McCone soon received further impressions about Nosenko from the FBI and Golitsyn that reinforced his approval for having the defector interrogated. In May 1964, the FBI's liaison officer to the Agency, Sam Papich, told McCone that some Bureau officials "are very much concerned and recognize that [Nosenko] could be a plant." "[H]is story has held up—but the cases are peanuts—no real significance. The other leads that he gave us—many of them were known to us.... [The Soviets] have not suffered at all by what he's given us." McCone told Papich that CIA would not decide on Nosenko one way or the other unless the Bureau agreed with its judgment. In June, Golitsyn—after reading files on Nosenko and listening to tapes of his debriefings—reaffirmed his prior assessment that Nosenko was a false defector.[a] In July, Golitsyn told the DCI that he disputed Nosenko's explanation of GRU asset Pyotr Popov's arrest in 1959. Nosenko said KGB security caught a CIA officer mailing a letter to Popov. Golitsyn insisted, however, that Nosenko's account was intended to divert the Agency from the penetration agent who had tipped off the Soviets.[b]

(b)(1)

(S) The Warren Commission's patience with the Agency over Nosenko had worn thin by mid-June, when it asked McCone for a definitive assessment of Nosenko's credibility. McCone had Helms tell Chief Justice Warren that CIA thought Nosenko might be a dispatched agent and to advise the commission that his information should be suppressed.

(b)(3)

[a] (S) Golitsyn heard of Nosenko's defection from Angleton just after it occurred, and on 11 February told McCone that he could help evaluate the new arrival if he read the files. McCone concurred, and Nosenko's file was added to others that Golitsyn had started to read the previous November. Golitsyn could protect himself by debunking Nosenko, but it is not evident in the record how much McCone, Helms, Angleton, and others factored that self-interest into their evaluations of the two defectors.

[b] (S) The chronology of Popov's compromise is complicated, but it is fair to say that information from Soviet penetrations in Austria and the United Kingdom first cast suspicion on Popov, who was later found to be carrying the CIA letter. Mishandled FBI surveillance of Soviet operatives whom Popov had reported, Popov's own poor security practices, and reporting from the KGB's assets in the Vienna police and its agent in MI-6, George Blake, contributed to his compromise.

(U) In late September 1964, President Johnson appointed McCone to a four-man committee to advise on implementing the Warren Commission's recommendations for improving presidential security.

(S) One important concern the Agency had was the embarrassment that would result if the commission's report included material from a source later shown to be a controlled Soviet agent. Warren later told McCone that the commission had accepted CIA's advice. In addition, at least three times in July, Agency officers (including Helms, Murphy, and Bagley) told the commission that Nosenko might be a KGB plant. Those sessions settled the question; the FBI's debriefings of Nosenko remained closed in the commission's files and did not contribute to its conclusions.

(S) During the last 12 months of McCone's directorship, CIA officers subjected Nosenko to at least 160 hours of hostile interrogation and an untallied amount of what was termed "neutral" questioning. According to Helms, the DCI did not follow the case closely at this stage but expected to be informed of major developments. Otherwise, once the Warren Commission formally concluded that Oswald had acted alone, McCone showed no further interest in pursuing the Nosenko aspect of the assassination.

(S) Meanwhile, the case remained unbroken. In January 1965, CIA determined that Nosenko—who had not changed his story about Oswald and the KGB—was being deceptive but still could not ascertain why. When McCone left Langley, the Office of Security had nearly completed preparations for placing Nosenko in a specially built detention facility (b)(1) The US Intelligence Board Executive Committee approved this phase of the Agency's handling of Nosenko, although it was not given details of the defector's treatment. There is no record that McCone knew or asked about the mechanics of this much more grueling (and ultimately fruitless) phase of the investigation.[*]

(U) As journalist David Wise pointed out in the late 1970s, there were several permutations to the question of Nosenko's authenticity, most of which were not considered by McCone or any senior Agency officer after the Kennedy assassination. First, as conventional wisdom at CIA ran until the late 1960s, Nosenko could have been a false defector with a false story about Oswald and the KGB. Second, Nosenko might have been a real defector who had made up a story about Oswald to make himself a "bigger catch." The inaccuracies and exaggerations in his story were reevaluated later as consistent with the penchant of defectors to embellish their biographies, access, and knowledge.

(U) Third, Nosenko could have been a genuine defector with accurate information. The FBI believed Nosenko in 1964, and CIA concluded a few years later that his information about Oswald was accurate. Lastly, Nosenko might have been a controlled agent sent to the United States to report truthfully that the Soviets had nothing to do with Oswald or the assassination. Moscow miscalculated, however, in thinking the US government would find that story more believable if it came through clandestine channels from a "defector" with an attractive resumé.

(S) As DCI, McCone never freed himself from the "zero sum" paradigm to which SR Division and the CI Staff were wedded: Golitsyn was good, so Nosenko must be bad. The empirically-minded McCone judged that enough facts existed to support that deceptively simple conclusion. As in other counterintelligence matters—an area in which he did not display much intellectual creativity—he deferred to trusted deputies. In 1978, McCone told the House assassinations committee that he thought Nosenko was bona fide after all. He did not say what led him to that conclusion, but he may have been reflecting the Agency's revised view of Nosenko. Reliable KGB information shows that both defec-

[*] (S) Nosenko was held from August 1965 until October 1967, when, at DDCI Rufus Taylor's direction, the Office of Security (OS) took over his case. OS officer Bruce Solie handled the "clean slate" investigation. Using an analytical methodology that tended to explain away inconsistencies and inaccuracies in Nosenko's story—the converse of the approach that SR Division and the CI Staff had taken—Solie concluded that Nosenko's detractors had not proven their argument. ("[I]t is not considered that based on all available information a conclusion that Nosenko is or is not a bona fide defector can be incontrovertibly substantiated at this time.") Nosenko was then released under supervision, resettled, compensated, and hired as a contractor. (b)(1)

(U) The members also encouraged the White House to seek legislation prohibiting shipments of firearms in interstate commerce except between federally licensed dealers or manufacturers.

tors were genuine—an apparently elementary conclusion that intellectual rigidity and bureaucratic obstinacy kept McCone and a significant number of senior Agency officers from reaching.[a]

(U) Loose Ends

(S) In late September 1964, President Johnson appointed McCone to a four-man committee to advise on implementing the Warren Commission's recommendations for improving presidential security. The commission had proposed that an assassination attempt, an assault against, or kidnapping of a president or vice president should constitute a federal crime; that a cabinet-level committee or the NSC assume the responsibility of reviewing and overseeing presidential protection programs; that the FBI and the Secret Service improve their investigative and intelligence capabilities; and that interagency cooperation and information sharing on security matters be promoted. Others on the presidential committee were C. Douglas Dillon, the secretary of the treasury, who served as chairman; Nicholas Katzenbach, the acting attorney general; and McGeorge Bundy, the president's national security advisor. Each member had an assistant from his agency to do the staff-level work; McCone's aide was DDP officer John Mertz.

(U) The Dillon Committee met seven times through the fall and winter and held discussions with J. Edgar Hoover, James Rowley, the chief of the Secret Service, and Kermit Gordon, head of the Bureau of the Budget. The DCI attended only four of the meetings but took an active part in the deliberations when he did. He suggested that a presidential assassination statute contain an "informer clause" similar to those in other federal criminal laws; he thought a high-level interdepartmental standing group should be established to periodically review presidential protection; and he regarded surveys of buildings at sites of scheduled presidential visits as "tremendously wasteful" uses of manpower.

(U) As when he testified before the Warren Commission, McCone again pressed for federal agencies to make greater use of what was then called "automated data processing" technology to collate information on presidential security. He brushed aside objections that returning Rowley to his previous job as head of the Secret Service's White House detail would cause personal and public relations difficulties. "The best approach would be to select the best available man as Chief of the Secret Service, after which Mr. Rowley would be required to 'fall into line' or otherwise become a casualty." McCone recommended Michael J. Murphy, Commissioner of the New York City Police Department, to either replace Rowley or assume a new White House position supervising the service.[b]

(U) The Dillon Committee reported to President Johnson in late January 1965 and released a version of its findings to the public in early February (as intended, it had completed its work in time for the next session of Congress to consider its recommendations). Contrary to the Warren Commission, McCone and his fellow members concluded that the Secret Service should retain primary responsibility for presidential protection and remain in the Department of the Treasury. Despite President Johnson's decision not to support any increase in the Secret Service budget—in keeping with his government-wide economy drive—the committee called for a 57-percent increase in service personnel, improved training, and augmented resources.

(U) The members also encouraged the White House to seek legislation prohibiting shipments of firearms in interstate commerce except between federally licensed dealers or manufacturers. In other areas, the committee echoed Warren Commission proposals, calling for a federal assassination and kidnapping statute (with

[a] (U) KGB archivist Vasili Mitrokhin's smuggled material includes damage assessments conducted after Golitsyn and Nosenko defected. Both men reportedly were put on a list of "particularly dangerous traitors" to be "liquidated." Oleg Kalugin claims that he was among the dozens of KGB officers stationed overseas who were ordered home after Nosenko defected.

[b] (U) President Johnson soon scotched the idea of removing Rowley or creating a presidential security overseer, but he did agree to promote the service's director from the General Schedule to the Executive Schedule as part of an overall "upgrade" of the agency.

an informer rewards provision) covering the president and vice president; expansion of Secret Service agents' investigative and arrest powers; establishment of a cabinet-level group to oversee presidential protection; and improved cooperation among federal agencies and with state and local law enforcement departments. Several of the recommendations that McCone and his fellow committeemen made were soon adopted.[a]

(U) Despite the prominence that many conspiratorialists have given to CIA in their speculations about who killed President Kennedy and who has concealed "the truth," they do not accuse McCone of participating in any murder plot or coverup.

(U) One of McCone's missions as DCI was to keep CIA out of operational controversies, so it is ironic that, as a private citizen, he later gave information to the House assassinations committee that rekindled charges that the Agency had hidden its supposed clandestine relationship with Oswald. In May 1977, columnist Jack Anderson (citing the committee's files) wrote that Antonio Veciana, in the 1960s a member of the anti-Castro commando group Alpha 66, had told congressional investigators that in Dallas in August 1963, he had met with Oswald and a CIA officer who used the name "Maurice Bishop." Anderson's story, which the Agency described in an internal report as "a mixture of some fact and a great deal of fiction," did not hold up. A review of CIA records found no reference to Maurice (or Morris) Bishop as a true name, pseudonym, or alias; the Agency never supported Alpha 66; and Veciana was registered as a contact of the US Army, not the Agency.[b]

(U) The House committee picked up the Bishop "lead" and questioned McCone about it in August 1978. McCone recalled a "Maurice Bishop" and believed the man was an Agency employee, but did not know where he worked or what his duties were. CIA management became concerned that the former DCI's statement, even though in context offhand and imprecise, would call the Agency's credibility into question. Scott Breckinridge of the Office of Legislative Counsel met with McCone in early October and brought along photographs of all past and present CIA employees with the surname of Bishop. After hearing that the Agency had no record of a Maurice or Morris Bishop, McCone declined to look at the photographs and said he must have been mistaken when he gave his deposition. He said that the name had come up along with a dozen or so others after five hours of questioning and that although Maurice Bishop "rang a bell" with him, he might have been thinking about someone else. Breckinridge informed the House committee's chief counsel, G. Robert Blakey, in mid-October that "Mr. McCone withdraws his statements on this point." Neither the identity, nor even the existence, of "Maurice Bishop" has ever been established.[c]

(U) A Conspiracy in the National Interest?

(U) Although criticism of the Warren Commission intensified and conspiracy theories proliferated through the 1960s and 1970s, McCone did not alter his view about Oswald's guilt over the years. He told the House assassinations committee in 1978 that he knew of no evidence that would tie Oswald to the KGB, Cuba, or CIA. Had a hostile country been involved, he said, it would have provided Kennedy's killer with an "escape hatch"—for example, a visa such as Oswald had tried to get from the Soviets and Cubans in September 1963.

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[a] (U) Later in 1965, Congress passed a law that made assassination or kidnapping of, assault on, or conspiracy to harm the president or vice president a federal crime. The Secret Service's budget for FY 1966 was increased 33 percent from three years before; its complement of agents was expanded 50 percent to 600; and its overall staffing was increased by over half to 920. Serving under the renamed director (the title "chief" was abandoned as archaic) were four new assistant directors, including one in charge of all protective security details, and another responsible for intelligence affairs. Servicing the latter was an overhauled, expanded, and automated research bureau that shared information with CIA, the FBI, and other government entities at all levels.

[b] (S) According to Gaeton Fonzi, the investigator for the House committee who has focused on this Oswald-Bishop-Veciana angle more than any other assassination writer, Bishop was "the secret supervisor and director of all [of] Veciana's anti-Castro activities…the man who had suggested the founding of Alpha 66 and guided its overall strategy. Bishop not only directed the assassination attempt on Castro in Cuba in October 1961, he also engineered the plan to kill Castro in Chile in 1971. Bishop had the connections to pull strings with the US government and get the financial support needed…. [He and Veciana] worked together for thirteen years." The only persons named either Morris or Maurice Bishop in CIA files were, respectively, [redacted] and the leader of a radical political party in the country of Grenada.

(b)(1)
(b)(6)

(U) The DCI was complicit in keeping incendiary and diversionary issues off the commission's agenda and focusing it on what the Agency believed at the time was the "best truth"

(U) When asked about Jack Ruby's possible role as an "eraser" sent to "rub out" Oswald, McCone replied that the circumstances surrounding that second murder "were so bizarre and unpredictable that it was impossible to detect a rational plot." Besides Nosenko's bona fides, the only matter on which McCone had changed his mind was concealing information about CIA's involvement in plots to kill Castro. With almost 15 years of hindsight, he said that the Agency should have told the Warren Commission about those schemes. He did not explain why he thought differently then. Possibly he believed that greater candor in 1964 could have helped attenuate the damage that the Agency's reputation suffered during the "time of troubles" in the 1970s.

(U) Despite the prominence that many conspiratorialists have given to CIA in their speculations about who killed President Kennedy and who has concealed "the truth," they do not accuse McCone of participating in any murder plot or coverup. Even the most fervent critics of the "lone gunman" and "single bullet" theories who posit Agency responsibility for the assassination blame rogue operatives below the senior executive echelon. At most, McCone has been accused of concealing inconvenient or embarrassing facts about CIA's clandestine activities or contacts that might lend credence to theories that Cuba or the Mafia were behind Kennedy's death, or that the Agency had a secret relationship with Oswald.

(U) McCone did have a place in a "benign cover-up," or what also has been termed "a process designed more to control information than to elicit and expose it." The protective response by McCone and other US government officials was inherent in the conflict between the Warren Commission's stated purpose—ascertaining the facts of the assassination—and implied in its mission—defending the nation's security by dispelling unfounded rumors that could lead to destructive international conflict.

(U) The DCI was complicit in keeping incendiary and diversionary issues off the commission's agenda and focusing it on what the Agency believed at the time was the "best truth": that Lee Harvey Oswald, for as yet undetermined motives, had acted alone in killing John Kennedy.[6] Max Holland, one of the most fair-minded scholars of these events, has concluded that "if the word 'conspiracy' must be uttered in the same breath as 'Kennedy assassination,' the only one that existed was the conspiracy to kill Castro and then keep that effort secret after November 22nd." In that sense—and that sense alone—McCone may be regarded as a "co-conspirator" in the JFK assassination "cover-up."

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(b)(1)

(b)(3)

(b)(3)

[c] (S) The House committee also questioned a retired WH Division officer, Balmes Hidalgo, about Maurice or Morris Bishop. Hidalgo said he recalled a colleague at Headquarters in the early or mid-1960s who went by that alias. When shown the same set of photographs that was prepared for McCone, however, he could not identify the officer. He suggested that the composite sketch that the committee showed him looked like a former chief of his, [redacted] However, [redacted] retired in 1962, and his final posting [redacted] did not bring him into contact with Alpha 66. J. Walton Moore of the Domestic Contact Division and David Atlee Phillips of WH Division also were mentioned as possibly being the real-life "Bishop"—Gaeton Fonzi asserts unequivocally that Phillips was—but no positive identification has ever been made. The House committee concluded that "it appears reasonable that an association similar to the alleged Maurice Bishop story actually existed…[b]ut whether Veciana's contact was really named Maurice Bishop, or if he was, whether he did all of the things Veciana claims, and if so, with which US intelligence agency he was associated, could not be determined." The Bishop business was resurrected on NBC's television news magazine program, *Inside Edition*, on 5 February 1992, which divulged some of the contents of the House committee's theretofore secret files—including McCone's statements.

[d] (U) Such reasoning might explain McCone's request to the Department of Justice in January 1965 that it not exempt the 77 documents the Agency provided to the Warren Commission from the 75-year disclosure period mandated for investigative agencies. He argued that "national security outweighs any other consideration" and that the documents should be withheld for the full period.