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A Trip to Mexico: CIA Involvement in the JFK Assassination

The term “conspiracy” is often used to discredit or cast doubt on a certain point of view, especially one that challenges established beliefs. The word seems to have acquired a negative connotation, such that it implies speculation and bias on the part of those promoting the rival hypothesis. In the case of John F. Kennedy’s assassination, the official story is that a “lone gunman” by the name of Lee Harvey Oswald shot the President on November 22, 1963, without the aid of any other persons or groups. This stance was put forward in *The Warren Commission Report (WCR)*, which was published in 1964, after a government inquiry into the murder. On the topic of conspiracy, The Warren Commission (WC) reached the following conclusion: “In its entire investigation the Commission has found no evidence of conspiracy, subversion, or disloyalty to the U.S. Government by any Federal, State, or local official” (22). However, in light of certain details regarding the conduct of U.S. military intelligence – the CIA – which have emerged over the years since the tragedy, there is reason to believe that Oswald was not alone in his involvement in the JFK assassination plot. Not only did the CIA have clear motives to remove the President from power, but there is evidence that suggests some members of the organization had tried to frame Oswald for the murder *before* he had even committed it. By definition, this would constitute a conspiracy – one that is supported by facts, rather than mere conjecture, as the connotation of the word implies.

In his acclaimed book, *Plausible Denial*, published in 1991, Mark Lane examines the

relationship that President Kennedy had with the Central Intelligence Agency, so as to evaluate the likelihood that the Agency took part in the assassination. What he discovers is tremendous tension between JFK and the CIA, such that at one point the President intended to eliminate the organization altogether. As Lane puts it: “He clearly was not suggesting a modest legislative proposal or executive order to modify or reform the organization. The total destruction of the Agency was his apparent objective” (93). The strained relations between the President and the CIA only worsened after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, which ended in the defeat of U.S. soldiers and the deaths of the underground leaders whose identities were disclosed by traitors in the Cuban Revolutionary Council (Morrow, 305-307). The CIA had felt that Kennedy was too weak and that he did not adequately support the mission, which was demonstrated by his refusal to provide the much needed air support for the attack. Publicly, the President took responsibility for the disaster, but privately he blamed the CIA for its erroneous judgment and what he perceived as disobedience (Dorsch). As a result, he fired Director Allen Dulles, which led to further distrust and hatred of the President by many members of the Agency, such that some even thought he deliberately betrayed the Cuban patriots and allowed them to be killed and captured by Castro’s forces (Lane, 95).

Moreover, Kennedy had intensified his efforts to limit the CIA’s power through several National Security Action Memoranda. Lane describes them as follows: “These documents, in theory, eliminated the ability of the CIA to wage war. The CIA would not be permitted to initiate any operation requiring greater firepower than that generated by handguns” (99-100). However, the Agency responded by ignoring orders to halt anti-Cuban operations from U.S. soil and by continuing to fund and to equip Cuban exiles, who would then be sent on military raids. At the same time, the CIA monitored the President’s every move and used his psychological profile to

try to anticipate his behaviour (Lane, 100). There was also the matter of Vietnam – Kennedy announced his plans to withdraw 1,000 U.S. troops from the Southeast Asian country. Regardless of whether he intended to go through with this initiative, his stance on the issue “alarmed the leaders of the Kennedy Watch at the CIA, an Agency devoted to the continuance and escalation of the war – developments that transpired almost immediately after his [the President’s] death” (Lane, 103-104). What was even more alarming to the CIA was JFK’s attempt to make a deal with Fidel Castro, since this severely undermined their dream of a “free Cuba”, which they believed could not be realized while Castro was still in power. Kennedy even went as far as to accept responsibility for the ill-treatment of Cuba by the United States and to acknowledge the role that America played in the economic and social decline of Cuba (Lane, 105). In fact, it seemed as if Castro was also willing to take steps towards peace between the two nations, when Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 and replaced by Lyndon B. Johnson, who immediately abandoned all talk of coexistence and resumed military operations against Vietnam and Cuba. The outcome, as Lane describes it, was the following:

The CIA had been preserved and soon was to be strengthened. The echoes of “Operation Mongoose,” with new code names, began to reverberate. The fanatic survivors of the brigade that invaded Cuba were recruited by the CIA. The commando raids against Cuba were resumed. The CIA prevailed; it did not suffer ignominious abolition at the hand of an independent president. Instead it was the president who died (108).

After the murder of JFK, Allen Dulles – the former Director of the CIA who was fired by Kennedy – was appointed to the Warren Commission by President Johnson. This seems to be a questionable decision on the part of LBJ, given Dulles’ obvious bias and past affiliation with the

Agency and with JFK, which raises doubts about the impartiality of both men. Furthermore, based on the circumstances surrounding John F. Kennedy's death and his struggle against the CIA during his time in office, it is reasonable to conclude that there were elements of the Agency that would have benefited from the removal of JFK from power. It follows, then, that the President had enemies within his own ranks who were capable of murder and who had enough reason and motivation to conspire against him in a coup d'état.

So the next question to answer is whether there exists any evidence to suggest that members of the CIA had turned motive into action and had taken part in a plot to assassinate their country's leader. Regrettably, the facts that have emerged over the last four decades point to a link between Oswald and U.S. intelligence *prior* to the tragic events of November 22, 1963. John Newman, an authority on the CIA involvement in the JFK assassination, comments on this issue: "Arguably, the most startling information so far brought to light by the release of these intelligence records is the CIA cover-up relating to Oswald's visit to Mexico City". The cover-up he is referring to has been researched and confirmed by many scholars, such that it has become a major challenge to those who deny the existence of a conspiracy. Mark Lane summarizes the matter at hand in the following passage:

One month and twenty-two days *before* President Kennedy was assassinated, the CIA had set into motion a series of events apparently designed to prevent any American institution from ever daring to learn the truth about the assassination, an assassination *that had not yet taken place*. More than seven weeks *before* President Kennedy was murdered, the CIA was dramatically and falsely establishing a link between Lee Harvey Oswald and a Soviet diplomat, whom the CIA would later designate as the KGB authority on

assassinations in the United States (64).

There is proof that the CIA had produced false information about the actions of Oswald in Mexico City in an attempt to establish a connection between him and a known KGB assassin – Valery Kostikov – with the ultimate goal of implicating LHO in the murder of JFK (Newman). These lies were presented to the Warren Commission, whose members seemed to have accepted everything that was told to them without question, and thus were heavily predisposed to believe in Oswald's lone guilt.

The first bogus claim that the CIA had made about Oswald's trip to Mexico was that he visited the Cuban Embassy while he was there. This assertion rested on the testimony of Silvia Duran – an employee of the Embassy – who had allegedly seen LHO. However, as Mark Lane explains, she was arrested by the Mexican police and forced to issue a signed statement that identified Oswald as the visitor to the Embassy (59). She had never actually seen him, but she lied so that she would be released from captivity. She was then ordered never to speak of the subject again. What is even more alarming is that all of this was orchestrated by the CIA, who had considerable influence over the Mexican authorities and sent them detailed instructions about how they should proceed. Moreover, when the Warren Commission was presented with the statement from Duran, there was no further investigation into the matter – no contact of any kind with the key witness (Lane, 60). So, as Lane puts it, it appears that “there was no evidence, except that manufactured by the CIA, which even indicated that Oswald had been in the Cuban Embassy. Thus the story about Oswald's planned escape route, through Cuba to the Soviet Union, which was used as “proof” that Oswald had assassinated President Kennedy, is revealed to have been entirely a CIA fabrication” (60).

The second piece of evidence that was falsified by the CIA and put forward as “fact” was

a photograph of Oswald entering the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City. In this case, the matter was more serious, since the photo was meant to convince the Warren Commission that Oswald had met with KGB agent Kostikov – no doubt to discuss the murder of JFK. However, the basic truth was that the man in the picture was not Lee Harvey Oswald, as determined by seven FBI agents who examined the photograph after the assassination (Lane, 62). The CIA has once again lied to the WC and simply made sure that the Commission never saw the actual photo or heard the testimony of the FBI agents.

Similarly, another bogus piece of evidence that was meant to link Oswald to the Soviets was a tape recording of LHO, made by the CIA. Even if this tape was genuine, there was hardly anything on it that implicated Oswald in any way. He identified himself and then asked if there were any messages for him, inquiring about “Comrade Kostin”. This does not establish Lee Oswald’s presence at the Soviet Embassy. However, what is perhaps even more disturbing is that the voice on the recording was not Oswald’s! The FBI agents who interrogated LHO for two days after the murder of JFK had gained possession of the tape and listened to it. Once they had examined it carefully, they firmly concluded that the individual speaking on it was *not* Oswald (Lane, 64). This, of course, was not a problem for the Warren Commission – members of the WC were never even allowed to hear the recording, deciding instead to take the CIA’s word for it, just as they had done previously on so many occasions.

Finally, the last attempt of the CIA to produce counterfeit evidence culminated in the finding of a Spanish-language magazine and the Mexico bus ticket stubs from Oswald’s alleged trip, which have been sought after by the Warren Commission for quite some time. It was perplexing, to say the least, that the CIA had claimed LHO traveled to Mexico by bus, but failed to provide any evidence to support that statement. Moreover, Oswald’s wife Marina, who refused

to believe the charges that were levelled against her husband, was especially incredulous at the idea that Oswald could have gone to Mexico for a week without her knowing about it. The CIA's response to her concerns was predictable – she was illegally apprehended and held in custody for months. As Lane describes the situation: “Marina was surrounded by FBI agents and Secret Service agents and through them, and only through them, she was given information about the assassination and the presumed role of her husband” (65). Although the FBI had searched everywhere for proof that LHO had been to Mexico, they failed to find what they were looking for. However, just days before the Warren Commission was going to publish their report, a miraculous discovery was made by Marina Oswald – she found the ticket stubs in a Spanish-language magazine that she picked up and had started to look through. An accompanying journalist by the name of Priscilla Johnson immediately explained the significance of the stubs to Marina and the evidence was taken to the Commission (Lane, 67). Though it is still unclear how the FBI failed to locate this magazine during their searches, and why Priscilla Johnson was allowed to communicate with Marina Oswald so freely, while contact with anyone else was routinely denied, the Warren Commission did not bother to examine any of these oddities and was content to accept the finding and proceed to publish their famous report, which places the blame on Lee Harvey Oswald as the lone assassin of President Kennedy.

So far, the conduct of the CIA has been regrettable, but understandable, given the Agency's desire to frame Oswald for the murder of JFK. However, what followed after the events of November 22, 1963, was slightly harder to comprehend. Newman recounts what happened:

After President Kennedy's assassination, documents show that the Agency created two more false stories in connection with Oswald's Mexico City visit. The first cover story

was that the CIA's tapes of the phone calls had been erased before the assassination. The second cover story was that the CIA did not realize Oswald had visited the Cuban consulate until they looked into the matter after the assassination.

Having gone through so much trouble to manufacture false evidence that links Lee Harvey Oswald to the Soviets and the Cubans, why did the CIA then decide to conceal all their efforts, as if they had no records of Oswald prior to the assassination? In fact, Rex Bradford points out the problems with this endeavour: “The CIA has maintained to this day that the tapes were routinely recycled prior to the assassination, and no tapes were ever sent. But the evidence that the tapes did exist and were listened to is now overwhelming”. There are many documents – such as FBI memos and tape recordings – which mention the existence of the “facts” that were presented to the Warren Commission by the CIA in order to frame Oswald. Therefore, any denial on the part of the CIA looks highly suspicious. So why, then, did the Agency put forward the two “cover stories” so fervently?

Once more, Bradford offers an acute observation regarding the issue at hand: “The calls from the Oswald impersonator made it appear that Oswald was a hired killer, hired by the Soviet Union no less. This was a prescription for World War III”. If the Warren Commission was to have concluded that the murder of JFK was the product of a foreign conspiracy, then the result would likely have been a conflict with the Soviet Union, which could have led to war and the loss of millions of American lives. So now it becomes clear why all traces of conspiracy were systematically purged and why the WC was so intent on implicating Oswald as the “lone gunman” – the Commission had no other choice. The CIA had managed to influence the WC with the false intelligence it had provided, thus assuring that the Warren Commission Report

would have no mention of conspiracy, which means no mention of the CIA and their involvement in the assassination, whatever it was. Peter Scott has reached the same conclusions in his writings on “deep politics”. He summarizes the actions of the CIA in the following passage:

Phase One put forward the phantom of an international plot, linking Oswald to the USSR, to Cuba, or to both countries together. This phantom was used to invoke the danger of a possible nuclear confrontation, which induced Chief Justice Earl Warren and other political notables to accept Phase Two, the equally false (but less dangerous) hypothesis that Oswald killed the President all by himself.

While the details of the CIA’s involvement in the assassination of President Kennedy remain a mystery – and perhaps will forever be a secret – there is no doubt that the Agency did not play the role of the observer in this incident. The evidence suggests that the CIA was an active participant in the crime – it may not be clear *how* the murder was committed, but the motive has been established and attempts to conceal the act have been made, indicating guilt. Those who have nothing to hide do not need to make up lies. The Central Intelligence Agency has told many lies in regards to the murder of John F. Kennedy. Thus, it is highly unlikely that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone, which means that in this case, conspiracy may not be such an implausible term after all.

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