

THE KILLING MACHINE

Sunday is a good day to read something that would appear to be science fiction.

It was announced that the CIA would be declassifying hundreds of pages on illegal actions that included plans to eliminate the leaders of foreign governments. Suddenly the publication is halted and it is delayed one day. No coherent explanation was given. Perhaps someone in the White House looked over the material.

The first package of declassified documents goes by the name of "The Family Jewels"; it consists of 702 pages on illegal CIA actions between 1959 and 1973. About 100 pages of this part have been deleted. It deals with actions that were not authorized by any law, plots to assassinate other leaders, experiments with drugs on human beings to control their minds, spying on civil activists and journalists, among other similar activities that were expressly prohibited.

The documents began to be gathered together 14 years after the first of the events took place, when then CIA director, James Schlesinger became alarmed about what the press was writing, especially all the articles by Robert Woodward and Carl Bernstein published in The Washington Post, already mentioned in the "Manifesto to the People of Cuba". The agency was being accused of promoting spying in the Watergate Hotel with the participation of its former agents Howard Hunt and James McCord.

In May 1973, the Director of the CIA was demanding that "all the main operative officials of this agency must immediately inform me on any ongoing or past activity that might be outside of the constituting charter of this agency". Schlesinger, later appointed Head of the Pentagon, had been replaced by William Colby. Colby was referring to the documents as "skeletons hiding in a closet". New press revelations forced Colby to admit the existence of the reports to interim President Gerald Ford in 1975. The New York Times was denouncing agency penetration of antiwar groups. The law that created the CIA prevented it from spying inside the United States.

That "was just the tip of the iceberg", said then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Kissinger himself warned that "blood would flow" if other actions were known, and he immediately added: "For example, that Robert Kennedy personally controlled the operation for the assassination of Fidel Castro". The President's brother was then Attorney General of the United States. He was later murdered as he was running for President in the 1968 elections, which facilitated Nixon's election for lack of a strong candidate. The most dramatic thing about the case is that apparently he had reached the conviction that John Kennedy had been victim of a conspiracy. Thorough investigators, after analyzing the wounds, the caliber of the shots and other circumstances surrounding the death of the President, reached the conclusion that there had been at least three shooters. Solitary Oswald, used as an instrument, could not have been the only shooter. I found that rather striking. Excuse me for saying this but fate turned me into a shooting instructor with a telescopic sight for all the Granma expeditionaries. I spent months practicing and teaching, every day; even though the target is a stationary one it disappears from view with each shot and so you need to look for it all over again in fractions of a second.

Oswald wanted to come through Cuba on his trip to the USSR. He had already been there before. Someone sent him to ask for a visa in our country's embassy in Mexico but nobody knew him there so he wasn't authorized. They wanted to get us implicated in the conspiracy. Later, Jack Ruby, --a man openly linked to the Mafia-- unable to deal with so much pain and sadness, as he said, assassinated him, of all places, in a precinct full police agents.

Subsequently, in international functions or on visits to Cuba, on more than one occasion I met with the aggrieved Kennedy relatives, who would greet me respectfully. The former president's son, who was a very small child when his father was killed, visited Cuba 34 years later. We met and I invited him to dinner.

The young man, in the prime of his life, and well brought up, tragically died in an airplane accident on a stormy night as he was flying to Martha's Vineyard with his wife. I never touched on the thorny issue with any of those relatives. In contrast, I pointed out that if the president-elect had then been Nixon instead of Kennedy, after the Bay of Pigs disaster we would have been attacked by the land and sea forces escorting the mercenary expedition, and both countries would have paid a high toll in human lives. Nixon would not have limited himself to saying that victory has many fathers and defeat is an orphan. For the record, Kennedy was never too enthusiastic about the Bay of Pigs adventure; he was led there by Eisenhower's military reputation and the recklessness of his ambitious vice-president.

I remember that, exactly on the day and minute he was assassinated, I was speaking in a peaceful spot outside of the capital with French journalist Jean Daniel. He told me that he was bringing a message from President Kennedy. He said to me that in essence he had told him: "You are going to see Castro. I would like to know what he thinks about the terrible danger we just experienced of a thermonuclear war. I want to see you again as soon as you get back." "Kennedy was very active; he seemed to be a political machine", he added, and we were not able to continue talking as someone rushed in with the news of what had just happened. We turned on the radio. What Kennedy thought was now pointless.

Certainly I lived with that danger. Cuba was both the weakest part and the one that would take the first strike, but we did not agree with the concessions that were made to the United States. I have already spoken of this before.

Kennedy had emerged from the crisis with greater authority. He came to recognize the enormous sacrifices of human lives and material wealth made by the Soviet people in the struggle against fascism. The worst of the relations between the United States and Cuba had not yet occurred by April 1961. When he hadn't resigned himself to the outcome of the Bay of Pigs, along came the Missile Crisis. The blockade, economic asphyxiation, pirate attacks and assassination plots multiplied. But the assassination plots and other bloody occurrences began under the administration of Eisenhower and Nixon.

After the Missile Crisis we would have not refused to talk with Kennedy, nor would we have ceased being revolutionaries and radical in our struggle for socialism. Cuba would have never severed relations with the USSR as it had been asked to do. Perhaps if the American leaders had been aware of what a war could be using weapons of mass destruction they would have ended the Cold War earlier and differently. At least that's how we felt then, when there was still no talk of global warming, broken imbalances, the enormous consumption of hydrocarbons and the sophisticated weaponry created by technology, as I have already said to the youth of Cuba. We would have had much more time to reach, through science and conscience, what we are today forced to realize in haste.

President Ford decided to appoint a Commission to investigate the Central Intelligence Agency. "We do not want to destroy the CIA but to preserve it", he said.

As a result of the Commission's investigations that were led by Senator Frank Church, President Ford signed an executive order which expressly prohibited the participation of American officials in the assassinations of foreign leaders.

The documents published now disclose information about the CIA-Mafia links for my assassination.

Details are also revealed about Operation Chaos, carrying on from 1969 for at least seven years, for which the CIA created a special squadron with the mission to infiltrate pacifist groups and to investigate

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“the international activities of radicals and black militants”. The Agency compiled more than 300,000 names of American citizens and organizations and extensive files on 7,200 persons.

According to The New York Times, President Johnson was convinced that the American anti-War movement was controlled and funded by Communist governments and he ordered the CIA to produce evidence.

The documents recognize, furthermore, that the CIA spied on various journalists like Jack Anderson, performers such as Jane Fonda and John Lennon, and the student movements at Columbia University. It also searched homes and carried out tests on American citizens to determine the reactions of human beings to certain drugs.

In a memorandum sent to Colby in 1973, Walter Elder who had been executive assistant to John McCone, CIA Director in the early 1970s, gives information about discussions in the CIA headquarters that were taped and transcribed: “I know that whoever worked in the offices of the director were worried about the fact that these conversations in the office and on the phone were transcribed. During the McCone years there were microphones in his regular offices, the inner office, the dining room, the office in the East building, and in the study of his home on White Haven Street. I don’t know if anyone is ready to talk about this, but the information tends to be leaked, and certainly the Agency is vulnerable in this case”.

The secret transcripts of the CIA directors could contain a great number of “jewels”. The National Security Archive is already requesting these transcripts.

A memo clarifies that the CIA had a project called OFTEN which would collect “information about dangerous drugs in American companies”, until the program was terminated in the fall of 1972. In another memo there are reports that manufacturers of commercial drugs “had passed” drugs to the CIA which had been “refused due to adverse secondary effects”.

As part of the MKULTRA program, the CIA had given LSD and other psycho-active drugs to people without their knowledge. According to another document in the archive, Sydney Gottlieb, a psychiatrist and head of chemistry of the Agency Mind Control Program, is supposedly the person responsible for having made available the poison that was going to be used in the assassination attempt on Patrice Lumumba.

CIA employees assigned to MHCHAOS –the operation that carried out surveillance on American opposition to the war in Vietnam and other political dissidents –expressed “a high level of resentment” for having been ordered to carry out such missions.

Nonetheless, there is a series of interesting matters revealed in these documents, such as the high level at which the decisions for actions against our country were taken.

The technique used today by the CIA to avoid giving any details is not the unpleasant crossed out bits but the blank spaces, coming from the use of computers.

For The New York Times, large censored sections reveal that the CIA still cannot expose all the skeletons in its closets, and many activities developed in operations abroad, checked over years ago by journalists, congressional investigators and a presidential commission, are not in the documents.

Howard Osborn, then CIA Director of Security, makes a summary of the “jewels” compiled by his office. He lists eight cases –including the recruiting of the gangster Johnny Roselli for the coup against Fidel Castro –but they crossed out the document that is in the number 1 place on Osborn’s initial list: two and a half pages.

“The No. 1 Jewel of the CIA Security Offices must be very good, especially since the second one is the

list for the program concerning the assassination of Castro by Roselli,” said Thomas Blanton, director of the National Security Archive who requested the declassification of “The Family Jewels” 15 years ago under the Freedom of Information Act.

It is notable that the administration which has declassified the least information in the history of the United States, and which has even started a process of reclassifying information that was previously declassified, now makes the decision to make these revelations.

I believe that such an action could be an attempt to present an image of transparency when the government is at an all time low rate of acceptance and popularity, and to show that those methods belong to another era and are no longer in use. When he announced the decision, General Hayden, current CIA Director, said: “The documents offer a look at very different times and at a very different Agency.”

Needless to say that everything described here is still being done, only in a more brutal manner and all around the planet, including a growing number of illegal actions within the very United States.

The New York Times wrote that intelligence experts consulted expressed that the revelation of the documents is an attempt to distract attention from recent controversies and scandals plaguing the CIA and an Administration that is living through some of its worst moments of unpopularity.

The declassification could also be an attempt at showing, in the early stages of the electoral process that the Democratic administrations were as bad, or worse, than Mr. Bush's.

In pages 11 to 15 of the Memo for the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, we can read:

“In August 1960, Mr. Richard M. Bissell approached Colonel Sheffield Edwards with the objective of determining whether the Security Office had agents who could help in a confidential mission that required gangster-style action. The target of the mission was Fidel Castro.

“Given the extreme confidentiality of the mission, the project was known only to a small group of people. The Director of the Central Intelligence Agency was informed and he gave it his approval. Colonel J. C. King, Head of the Western Hemisphere Division, was also informed, but all the details were deliberately concealed from officials of Operation JMWAVE. Even though some officials of Communications (Commo) and the Technical Services Division (TSD) took part in initial planning phases, they were not aware of the mission's purpose.

“Robert A. Maheu was contacted, he was informed in general terms about the project, and he was asked to evaluate whether he could get access to gangster-type elements as a first step for achieving the desired goal.

“Mr. Maheu informed that he had met with a certain Johnny Roselli on several occasions while he was visiting Las Vegas. He had only met him informally through clients, but he had been told that he was a member of the upper echelons of the 'syndicate' and that he was controlling all the ice machines on the Strip. In Maheu's opinion, if Roselli was in effect a member of the Clan, he undoubtedly had connections that would lead to the gambling racket in Cuba.

“Maheu was asked to get close to Roselli, who knew that Maheu was a public relations executive looking after national and foreign accounts, and tell him that recently he had been contracted by a client who represented several international business companies, which were suffering enormous financial losses in Cuba due to Castro. They were convinced that the elimination of Castro would be a solution to their problem and they were ready to pay \$ 150,000 for a successful outcome. Roselli had to be made perfectly aware of the fact that the U.S. government knew nothing, nor could it know anything, about this operation.

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"This was presented to Roselli on September 14, 1960 in the Hilton Plaza Hotel of New York City. His initial reaction was to avoid getting involved but after Maheu's persuasive efforts he agreed to present the idea to a friend, Sam Gold, who knew "some Cubans". Roselli made it clear that he didn't want any money for his part in all this, and he believed that Sam would do likewise. Neither of these people was ever paid with Agency money.

"During the week of September 25, Maheu was introduced to Sam who was living at the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach. It was not until several weeks after meeting Sam and Joe -who was introduced as courier operating between Havana and Miami -that he saw photos of these two individuals in the Sunday section of Parade. They were identified as Momo Salvatore Giancana and Santos Trafficante, respectively. Both were on the Attorney General's list of the ten most wanted. The former was described as the boss of the Cosa Nostra in Chicago and Al Capone's heir, and the latter was the boss of Cuban operations of the Cosa Nostra. Maheu immediately called this office upon learning this information.

"After analyzing the possible methods to carry out this mission, Sam suggested that they not resort to firearms but that, if they could get hold of some kind of deadly pill, something to be put into Castro's food or drink, this would be a much more effective operation. Sam indicated that he had a possible candidate in the person of Juan Orta, a Cuban official who had been receiving bribery payments in the gambling racket, and who still had access to Castro and was in a financial bind.

"The TSD (Technical Services Division) was requested to produce 6 highly lethal pills.

"Joe delivered the pills to Orta. After several weeks of attempts, Orta appears to have chickened out and he asked to be taken off the mission. He suggested another candidate who made several unsuccessful."

Everything that was said in the numerous paragraphs above is in quotes. Observe well, dear readers, the methods that were already being used by the United States to rule the world.

I remember that during the early years of the Revolution, in the offices of the National Institute for Agrarian Reform, there was a man working there with me whose name was Orta, who had been linked to the anti-Batista political forces. He was a respectful and serious man. But, it could only be him. The decades have gone by and I see his name once more in the CIA report. I can't lay my hands on information to immediately prove what happened to him. Accept my apologies if I involuntarily have offended a relative or a descendent, whether the person I have mentioned is guilty or not.

The empire has created a veritable killing machine that is made up not only of the CIA and its methods. Bush has established powerful and expensive intelligence and security super-structures, and he has transformed all the air, sea and land forces into instruments of world power that take war, injustice, hunger and death to any part of the globe, in order to educate its inhabitants in the exercise of democracy and freedom. The American people are gradually waking up to this reality.

"You cannot fool all of the people all of the time", said Lincoln.

Fidel Castro Ruz

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