

## THE ENDS OF POWER

me to tell you this entire affair may be connected to the Bay of Pigs, and if it opens up, the Bay of Pigs may be blown. . . ."

Turmoil in the room, Helms gripping the arms of his chair leaning forward and shouting, "The Bay of Pigs had nothing to do with this. I have no concern about the Bay of Pigs."

Silence. I just sat there. I was absolutely shocked by Helms' violent reaction. Again I wondered, *what was such dynamite* in the Bay of Pigs story? Finally, I said, "I'm just following my instructions, Dick. This is what the President told me to relay to you."

Helms was settling back. "All right," he said.

But the atmosphere had changed. Now surprisingly, the two CIA officials expressed no concern about the request that Walters go to see Gray. And Walters later testified that when he and Helms went downstairs they talked briefly and Helms said, "You must remind Mr. Gray of the agreement between the FBI and the CIA that if they run into or expose one another's 'assets' [a CIA term for 'agents'] they will not interfere with each other." Meaning: "FBI, stop the investigation." Just what Nixon wanted.

I went back to see the President and told him his strategy had worked. I had told Helms that the Watergate investigation "tracks back to the Bay of Pigs. So at that point . . . he said we'll be very happy to be helpful."

And so the "smoking gun" conversations were created . . . to rest, stored on a reel, in a closet gathering dust until August, 1974.

Years later, former CBS correspondent Dan Schorr called me. He was seeking information concerning the FBI investigation Nixon had mounted against him in August, 1971.

Schorr later sent me his fascinating book *Clearing the Air*. In it I was interested to find that evidence he had gleaned while investigating the CIA finally cleared up for me the mystery of the Bay of Pigs connection in those dealings between Nixon and Helms.

It's intriguing when I put Schorr's facts together with mine.

## This Side of the "Smoking Gun"

It seems that in all of those Nixon references to the Bay of Pigs, he was actually referring to the Kennedy assassination.

(Interestingly, an investigation of the Kennedy assassination was a project I suggested when I first entered the White House. I had always been intrigued with the conflicting theories of the assassination. Now I felt we would be in a position to get all the facts. But Nixon turned me down.)

According to Schorr, as an outgrowth of the Bay of Pigs, the CIA made several attempts on Fidel Castro's life. The Deputy Director of Plans at the CIA at the time was a man named Richard Helms.

Unfortunately, Castro knew of the assassination attempts all the time. On September 7, 1963, a few months before John Kennedy was assassinated, Castro made a speech in which he was quoted, "Let Kennedy and his brother Robert take care of themselves, since they, too, can be the victims of an attempt which will cause their death."

After Kennedy was killed, the CIA launched a fantastic cover-up. Many of the facts about Oswald unavoidably pointed to a Cuban connection.

1. Oswald had been arrested in New Orleans in August, 1963, while distributing pro-Castro pamphlets.

2. On a New Orleans radio program he extolled Cuba and defended Castro.

3. Less than two months before the assassination Oswald visited the Cuban consulate in Mexico City and tried to obtain a visa.

In a chilling parallel to their cover-up at Watergate, the CIA literally erased any connection between Kennedy's assassination and the CIA. No mention of the Castro assassination attempt was made to the Warren Commission by CIA representatives. In fact, Counter-intelligence Chief James Angleton of the CIA called Bill Sullivan of the FBI and rehearsed the questions and answers they would give to the Warren Commission investigators, such as these samples:

Q. Was Oswald an agent of the CIA?

A. No.

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Q. Does the CIA have any evidence showing that a conspiracy existed to assassinate Kennedy?

A. No.

And here's what I find most interesting: Bill Sullivan, the FBI man that the CIA called at the time, was Nixon's highest-ranking loyal friend at the FBI (in the Watergate crisis, he would risk J. Edgar Hoover's anger by taking the 1969 FBI wiretap transcripts ordered by Nixon and delivering them to Robert Mardian, a Mitchell crony, for safekeeping).

It's possible that Nixon learned from Sullivan something about the earlier CIA cover-up by Helms. And when Nixon said, "It's likely to blow the whole Bay of Pigs" he might have been reminding Helms, not so gently, of the cover-up of the CIA assassination attempts on the hero of the Bay of Pigs, Fidel Castro—a CIA operation that may have triggered the Kennedy tragedy and which Helms desperately wanted to hide.

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But Friday, June 23, wasn't over. That day ended on a note of high irony that no one has ever mentioned.

The "smoking gun" conversations would one day be greeted with cries of outrage by the press and Congress—not only because of the order to use the CIA to impede an FBI investigation, but because of extraneous conversation on the tape of which the most famous is Nixon's remark when I told him the Italians were devaluating their currency: "I don't give a shit about the lira."

This is the President? cried the critics. The man in charge of our economic policy?

The ironic aftermath of the "smoking gun" conversations is that as I left the Oval Office the doors opened and a motion picture camera crew entered. This was the day they chose to show Nixon functioning at his finest as President. It was a film