

Blackmail in the Deep State:

From the Bay of Pigs and JFK Assassination to Watergate

Jonathan Marshall

Note: this article is excerpted from an unpublished book titled *Watergate, the American Deep State, and the Legacy of Secret Government* by Jonathan Marshall.

The Watergate affair of 1972-74, though widely regarded as one of the the gravest political and constitutional crises in U.S. history, began not with a bang but a whimper – or as President Nixon’s press secretary dismissed it, a ‘third-rate burglary attempt’.¹ Despite myriad government probes, lawsuits, news stories, and scholarly analyses, no one knows for sure what motivated the historic break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters during the 1972 presidential campaign.² Another unresolved puzzle is why President Nixon, who was apparently ignorant of plans for the burglary, did not simply fire those involved and cut his losses. What cost him the presidency was not the original crime, but his illegal attempt to cover it up.

I argue in the book from which this article is excerpted that the initial burglary was set in motion by White House insiders to uncover information they could use against the Democratic Party’s chairman, Larry O’Brien. A major goal was to prevent him from releasing politically damaging secrets

¹ Quoted in Karlyn Barker and Walter Pincus, ‘Watergate Revisited; 20 Years After the Break-in, the Story Continues to Unfold’, *Washington Post*, 14 June 1992.

² There were at least two break-ins; police arrested the burglars on 17 June 1972. Several dozen theories are noted in Edward Epstein and John Berendt, ‘Did There Come a Point in Time When There Were 43 Different Theories of How Watergate Happened?’ *Esquire*, November 1973.

about cash payoffs from billionaire industrialist Howard Hughes to Nixon in 1969 and 1970. Exposure of a previous bribe by Hughes in 1956 had helped cost Nixon the 1960 presidential election and the 1962 gubernatorial race in California; Nixon loyalists were committed to preventing another career-ending exposé. What mattered to them was not O'Brien's knowledge of Democratic campaign plans in 1972, but what he had learned about the Nixon payoffs while he was employed as the Hughes organization's top Washington representative following the 1968 election.³

Second, I argue that Nixon was forced to cover-up the Watergate burglary because two of its planners had engaged in a previous felony break-in, ordered by the White House, to discredit Daniel Ellsberg, leaker of the Pentagon Papers. They were members of a secret 'Special Investigations Unit', created at Nixon's orders to engage in burglaries, forgery and other crimes to discredit his enemies and protect his most sensitive secrets. Perhaps the most explosive of his own hidden misdeeds was his treasonous intervention with South Vietnam during the 1968 campaign to prevent a bombing halt that might have swung the election to Vice President Hubert Humphrey.⁴ In other words, Nixon could not simply let the investigation of the Watergate burglary run its course lest it expose his other crimes.

Both the Watergate burglary and Nixon's cover-up, then, were broadly motivated by his fear of public exposure – including his determination to blackmail opponents into remaining silent about what they knew. The deed that proved fatal to his career, the so-called 'smoking gun', was a taped Oval Office conversation in which Nixon ordered his aides to get the CIA to help quash the Watergate investigation by telling the FBI that it was intruding on a sensitive intelligence operation. To enlist the CIA's cooperation, Nixon proposed blackmailing the Agency by warning that the FBI probe could

³ For an early argument along these lines, see J. Anthony Lukas, *Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years* (New York: Viking, 1976).

⁴ For the latest revelations about this story, see Peter Baker, 'Nixon Tried to Spoil Johnson's Vietnam Peace Talks in '68, Notes Show', *New York Times*, 2 January 2017.

unravel 'the whole Bay of Pigs thing', damaging both the CIA and American foreign policy. Just what the 'Bay of Pigs' had to do with Watergate has been a matter of considerable speculation, and is the central focus of this article. I argue that Nixon's cover-up strategy reflected his knowledge of deep political intrigues dating back to the 1950s and early 1960s – above all a secret the CIA would go to almost any lengths to protect: its involvement with notorious gangsters in plots to assassinate a foreign head of state, Fidel Castro, and its *possible* indirect involvement in the murder of President Kennedy.

This article frames Nixon's invocation of 'the Bay of Pigs thing' in the context of a multi-year cover-up by powerful forces in the U.S. 'deep state' of secret crimes committed by senior intelligence officials and organized crime leaders in the name of fighting Communism. Key players included CIA directors Allen Dulles and Richard Helms; Mafia killers Sam Giancana, Santos Trafficante and John Roselli;* Teamsters Union boss and Mafia ally Jimmy Hoffa; billionaire industrialist Howard Hughes; reporters Drew Pearson, Jack Anderson and Hank Greenspun; and super-lawyers Edward Bennett Williams and Edward P. Morgan. Their secret political pressure campaigns and institutional blackmail inspired Nixon's cover-up. Further, their hidden alliances, forged years earlier, reemerged in the early 1970s to undercut Nixon's power base, first through leaks of the Hughes payoffs, and later by ensuring a vigorous investigation of Nixon's role in Watergate.

Robert Maheu and Edward Bennett Williams: denizens of the Deep State

Let's start this survey by tracing the remarkable career of Robert Maheu, who for a decade oversaw most of Howard Hughes's operations, including Nevada casinos, hotels, airports, ranches, and other businesses.⁵ He also managed

* Roselli or Rosselli? Both are used. I have gone with Roselli, except in the title of one of the books cited.

⁵ Robert Maheu and Richard Hack, *Next to Hughes: Behind the Power and Tragic Downfall of Howard Hughes by His Closest Adviser* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 3

Hughes's political affairs, including the secret delivery of \$100,000 in cash to Nixon's *confidante* and personal banker, Charles 'Bebe' Rebozo, after the 1968 election. It was also Maheu who recruited Democratic Party campaign chief Larry O'Brien as Hughes's top political adviser in Washington at the same time, giving Nixon cause to fear that O'Brien might destroy his 1972 re-election campaign by exposing the truth about those bribes.

Maheu was no ordinary business executive. Hughes didn't hire a bean counter or a manager to run his empire; in fact, Maheu had no particular business skills or financial acumen.⁶ He was, instead, an expert in covert operations.

Robert Maheu started his career by joining the FBI in 1940 at the age of 23. After hunting Nazi spies during World War II, he tried launching a small business, which failed disastrously. Eventually he earned enough money from a private craps game to open his own investigative and public relations firm in 1954.⁷ Maheu used his relationship with other former federal agents to land his first regular client: the CIA's Office of Security. That branch handled many of the Agency's most sensitive and illegal operations, including drug testing and mind-control experiments; domestic surveillance of antiwar activists; and even covert investigations of national columnist Jack Anderson. Most controversially, as we will soon see, it also oversaw plots to kill foreign heads of state. One of the key Watergate burglars, James McCord, had recently retired from a senior position in the Office of Security.⁸

For \$500 a month, the CIA gave Maheu 'cut-out' assignments – 'jobs in which the agency could not officially be

⁶ Donald L. Bartlett and James B. Steele, *Empire: The Life, Legend, and Madness of Howard Hughes* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), pp. 435-436.

⁷ Maheu and Hack, *Next to Hughes*, pp. 22-40. Nixon similarly got his first professional stake from playing poker in World War II.

⁸ Maheu and Hack, *Next to Hughes*, p. 71; Jim Hougan, *Spooks: The Haunting of America – The Private Use of Secret Agents* (New York: William Morrow, 1978); James Rosen, 'Watergate – 40 years later, questions endure about CIA's role in the break-in', Fox News, 15 June 2012, at <<http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2012/06/15/watergate-40-years-later-questions-endure-about-cia-role-in-break-in.html>>.

involved', as he put it.⁹ For his first such job, in 1954, Maheu helped foil a plot by Greek ship-owner Aristotle Onassis to get a lock on the Middle East oil market through an exclusive oil shipping contract with Saudi Arabia. Although Maheu's paying client was a rival ship-owner, the CIA provided technical assistance and Maheu personally briefed Vice President Nixon and the National Security Council on his progress.¹⁰

Maheu also procured prostitutes for the CIA, both to service and to compromise foreign officials. In 1957, at the CIA's behest, Maheu tried to smear the reputation of the non-aligned leader of Indonesia, President Sukarno, by producing a fake surveillance video that appeared to show him bedding a beautiful blond Soviet spy. Maheu also tried to arrange a tryst between Sukarno and a beautiful woman agent, to no avail.¹¹

Maheu continued doing secret jobs for the CIA until

⁹ CIA memo for Director of Central Intelligence, 1 January 75, re 'Robert A. Maheu', National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA) document 104-10122-10141.

Maheu was recruited by Robert H. Cunningham, chief, Special Security Division, who had known Maheu in the FBI. On Maheu's recruitment and earliest days with the CIA, see also Maheu's testimony before the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities (Church Committee), 30 July 1975, NARA 157-10011-10048; *Washington Post*, 6 August 2008; 'Confidant and Aide to Howard Hughes', *Los Angeles Times*, 6 August 2008; 'Former Howard Hughes Confidant Dies at 90', *Las Vegas Sun*, 5 August 1998.

¹⁰ Maheu's testimony before the Church Committee, 30 July 1975, NARA 157-10011-10048; Maheu and Hack, *Next to Hughes* pp. 42-53; Peter Evans, *Ari: The Life and Times of Aristotle Socrates Onassis* (New York: Summit Books, 1986), pp. 124-138; Hougan, *Spooks* pp. 287-306; Anthony Summers, *The Arrogance of Power: The Secret World of Richard Nixon* (New York: Viking, 2000), pp. 153-154, 195-196; Robert Pack, *Edward Bennett Williams for the Defense* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), pp. 173-179; Charles Babcock, 'Maheu Admits '54 Anti-Onassis Drive', *Washington Post*, 2 August 2 1978. For confirmation of the CIA role, see J. S. Earman, CIA Inspector General, 'Report on Plots to Assassinate Fidel Castro', 23 May 1967, p. 14 (hereafter 'IG Report'), 72, NARA 1993.06.30.17:15:56:650140.

¹¹ CIA memo for Director of Central Intelligence, 1 January 75, re 'Robert A. Maheu', NARA 104-10122-10141, suggests that procuring women was a major role for Maheu during the 1950s. On Sukarno, see

Continues at the foot of the next page.

about 1970.¹² But he earned much more by handling investigations for Washington 'super-lawyer' Edward Bennett Williams, one of his closest friends from their days on the college debate team at Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts.¹³ In one of their earliest cases, Williams hired Maheu to investigate a politically charged murder case involving U.S. intelligence agents and communist partisans in World War II Italy, involving \$100 million in lost Allied gold. The case, which had major political implications in Italy, interested the CIA deeply. Williams and Maheu managed to demonstrate the innocence of an accused American agent while blaming the Communists for absconding with the gold – a small but important victory in Cold War politics.¹⁴

Maheu had found the right ally in Williams. The lawyer had powerful connections everywhere in Washington. He was on close terms with the CIA for his entire career.¹⁵ He was one of muckraking columnist Drew Pearson's best sources.¹⁶

Note 11 continued

also Maheu and Hack, *Next to Hughes* pp. 71-75; Joseph Burkholder Smith, *Portrait of a Cold Warrior* (G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1976), pp. 238-240, 248; 'Intelligence Agencies Held Unchecked', *New York Times*, 26 January 1976.

12 Memo from Robert W. Gambino, Director of Security, for CIA General Counsel, 27 August 1976, re 'Robert Maheu', NARA 1993.07.21.08:58:07:430620.

13 Maheu and Hack, *Next to Hughes* p. 19; Dan Moldea, *The Hoffa Wars: Teamsters, Rebels, Politicians and the Mob* (New York: Paddington Press, 1978) p. 129.

14 Warren Hinckle and William Turner, *The Fish is Red: The Story of the Secret War Against Castro* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 273; Evan Thomas, *The Man to See: Edward Bennett Williams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), pp. 86-91; Pack, *Edward Bennett Williams for the Defense* pp. 183-200.

15 Williams would defend CIA Director Richard Helms for lying to Congress about CIA efforts to sabotage the Chilean elections. He was offered the job of CIA Director by both Presidents Ford and Reagan. He also sat on the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board during the Ford and Reagan administrations. See Thomas, *The Man to See* pp. 340, 334, 472; Pack, *Edward Bennett Williams for the Defense* pp. 29-39; *San Francisco Examiner*, 14 August 1988; *New York Times*, 27 February 1987.

16 Thomas, *The Man to See* p. 86. In the early 1950s, Williams and Pearson were on the opposite sides of at least two libel suits, but soon thereafter they became friends, no doubt for mutual career benefits.

He would eventually become a key part of the Watergate story – as counsel to both the Democratic National Committee and the *Washington Post*, two of Nixon’s biggest enemies.

In the 1950s, Williams made a name for himself by pulling off remarkable acquittals for New York crime boss Frank Costello and corrupt Teamsters Union leader James Hoffa. Williams managed to spring Hoffa in a 1957 case involving bribery of a Senate staffer working for Robert Kennedy, chief counsel to the labor rackets committee.¹⁷ Williams also introduced Maheu to Hoffa, who hired the investigator in 1957 to ‘do electronics work’, a euphemism for sweeping his office of electronic bugs.¹⁸

Last but not least, Williams referred the mega-industrialist Howard Hughes to Maheu in the mid-1950s. It was the start of a business marriage that would last through 1970 before exploding in an acrimonious termination, mutual investigations, and lawsuits. Hughes hired Maheu for surveillance jobs on actress Ava Gardner and to discourage a couple of blackmailers.¹⁹ In 1956, Hughes engaged Maheu to help Vice President Nixon thwart a Republican rival who wanted to replace Nixon on the presidential ticket.²⁰ In 1957, Hughes asked Maheu to become the public face of most of his business operations. To cement their relationship, Maheu moved his family from the Washington, D. C. suburbs to Los Angeles in 1961.²¹

Joining the Maheu family for Thanksgiving dinner that year was a dapper Italian-American mobster named John

17 Pack, *Edward Bennett Williams for the Defense* pp. 203-241.

18 Charles Rappleye and Ed Becker, *All American Mafioso: The John Rosselli Story* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 184.

19 Hughes also hired Maheu to surveil a man who was dating Jean Peters, the actress Hughes would later marry. Elaine Davenport and Paul Eddy with Mark Hurwitz, *The Hughes Papers* (London: Sphere Books, 1977), p. 45; *Los Angeles Times*, 11 May 1974.

20 Summers, *The Arrogance of Power* p. 154.

21 Maheu and Hack, *Next to Hughes* pp. 55-67, 89, 135; Davenport and Eddy, *The Hughes Papers* p. 56. On Hughes’s behalf, Maheu also conducted employee loyalty investigations and swept company offices for bugs. See Ben Best, ‘Schemers in the Web: A Covert History of the 1960’s Era’ at <<http://web.archive.org/web/20110422040403/http://benbest.com/history/schemers.html#refs>>.

Roselli. Born Filippo Sacco, Roselli was the Chicago mob's trusted representative in its two biggest Western markets: Los Angeles and Las Vegas. His credentials included a prison record for labor racketeering and extortion of the movie industry. When singer Frank Sinatra wanted to break into the movies with a leading role in the World War II blockbuster *From Here to Eternity*, Roselli intervened with studio boss Harry Cohn to get him the part.²² Roselli also claimed to have helped make Marilyn Monroe a star.²³ In 1957 he pulled together a consortium of major underworld investors from Chicago, New York, and Louisiana to build the luxurious Tropicana hotel and casino on the strip in Vegas. Through Jimmy Hoffa he also arranged Teamster financing for other mob casinos in Las Vegas, and 'dominated the booking of high-priced entertainment that the hotels used to attract gamblers', according to his biographers.²⁴

The CIA, the Mob, and Maheu plot to kill Castro

Maheu and Roselli were introduced to each other in Las Vegas in the late 1950s by Mafia lawyer Edward Bennett Williams. As their friendship blossomed, Maheu's children started calling the mobster 'Uncle Johnny'.²⁵ By 1961, Maheu

²² Gus Russo, *The Outfit: The Role of Chicago's Underworld in the Shaping of Modern America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2001), p. 282. Sinatra was a client of lawyer Edward Bennett Williams. See Pack, *Edward Bennett Williams for the Defense* p. viii.

²³ Maureen Hughes, *The Countess and the Mob* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2010), p. 49.

²⁴ Charles Rappleye and Ed Becker, *All American Mafioso: The John Rosselli Story* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 163, 169. The Teamster Central States Pension Fund – whose trustees answered to Hoffa – was the largest source of financing for casino operators in Las Vegas in the late 1950s and 1960s. See Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris, *The Green Felt Jungle* (New York: Pocket Books, 1963), pp. 83, 91; Gene Blake and Jack Tobin, 'Gamblers Given Teamster Loans', *Los Angeles Times*, 11 May 1962; 'Teamster Funds Help Spur Vegas', *Los Angeles Times*, 13 May 1962.

²⁵ Maheu and Hack, *Next to Hughes* pp. 109-111; Moldea, *The Hoffa Wars* p. 129; Rappleye and Becker, *All American Mafioso* pp. 184-185; memo by FBI SA Edward J. Dunn, Jr., Miami, 22 March 1977, re 'Roskil' [Roselli killing], NARA 124-10289-10035. Maheu told the FBI he met Roselli in 1958 or 1959 at the El Rancho Vegas Hotel through an introduction from Williams.

and Roselli were joined at the hip in what was perhaps the most sensitive operation in the CIA's history: the plot to assassinate Fidel Castro.

After Castro took power in 1959, Vice President Nixon chaired a high-level policy committee that reviewed and recommended covert operations against the new Cuban regime, which Nixon suspected of Communist leanings. In Nixon's own words, he was 'the strongest and most persistent advocate for setting up and supporting' a CIA program to train Cuban exiles to wage war against Castro.²⁶ That program would be implemented by the new Kennedy administration in April 1961 with the disastrous invasion at the Bay of Pigs.

A key but hidden part of that plan was 'the elimination of Fidel Castro', which the CIA's Western Hemisphere division chief first officially advocated in December 1959.²⁷ Also proposing assassination was the CIA's chief political action officer for the Cuba invasion, Howard Hunt.²⁸ CIA Director Allen Dulles almost certainly approved – but never told President Eisenhower or President Kennedy.²⁹ Nor, for that matter, did

26 Lamar Waldron, *Watergate: The Hidden History* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012), pp. 76-77, 83-84, 90-96; Richard Nixon, 'Cuba, Castro, and John F. Kennedy', *Reader's Digest*, November 1964, p. 288. As Waldron points out, the CIA radically ramped up the scale of its invasion plan after the 1960 election; President Kennedy was unaware that the plan presented to him was not the one Eisenhower had approved. Nor was he aware that CIA advisers had told members of the exile army to go ahead and invade Cuba even if Kennedy got cold feet and called the mission off – on the assumption that Kennedy would be forced to come to their rescue.

27 Memo for DCI from J. C. King, 11 December 1959, cited in U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Official History of the Bay of Pigs Operation. Volume III: Evolution of CIA's Anti-Castro Policies, 1959-January 1961* (1979, released 1998), p. 29.

28 Hunt's April 1960 memorandum to Richard Bissell declared, 'first and foremost, all efforts should be made to assassinate Castro before or coincident with the invasion...' His memorandum has not surfaced in CIA files. E. Howard Hunt, with Greg Aunapu, *American Spy: My Secret History in the CIA, Watergate & Beyond* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), p. 117.

29 Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities (Church Committee), interim report, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders, 94/1* (US Government Printing Office, 1975) (hereafter Interim Report), pp. 91-
Continues at the foot of the next page.

Dulles brief his successor at the CIA, John McCone.³⁰ Some matters were simply too sensitive to share. Agency insiders gave their bosses in the White House 'deniability', whether they wanted it or not.

After several attempts to kill Castro failed in 1959, the CIA's covert operations chief, Deputy Director for Plans Richard Bissell, asked the Agency's Office of Security in August 1960 to recruit Mafia bosses with gambling interests in Cuba to carry out the job. An internal history of the operation years later would speculate that the Agency was being steered by hidden hands, 'piggybacking on the [national crime] syndicate and . . . supplying an aura of official sanction' to what was originally a Mafia initiative.³¹ Mob superstar Meyer Lansky, the king of Las Vegas and Cuban gambling, reputedly put out the first contract on Castro – worth a million dollars – when he booted the Mafia out of Cuba.

If ever an assignment called for using a private 'cut-out' to prevent implicating the government, this was it. The Office of Security knew just who could put them in contact with the right high-level Mafia bosses: their contract agent Robert Maheu.³² Maheu called up his friend John Roselli to offer him

Note 29 continued

99, 110-115, 117-125. President Eisenhower had rejected the idea of assassinating Castro out of concern that his brother Raul was 'worse'. See Waldron, *Watergate*, p. 105.

30 Interim Report, 92, pp. 99-105.

31 IG Report p. 14; 1977 CIA Task Force Report quoted at House of Representatives, Select Committee on Assassinations, staff report, *The Evolution and Implications of the CIA-Sponsored Assassination Conspiracies Against Fidel Castro*, March 1979 (hereafter 'HSCA Report'), in v. 10, pp. 157, 172 (piggybacking); Rappleye and Becker, *All American Mafioso* p. 180; Moldea, *Hoffa Wars* p. 126; Scott Breckenridge, *The CIA and the Cold War: A Memoir* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1973), p. 113. According to one government informant, Hoffa was the original liaison between the CIA and the Mafia. But if so, his participation yielded no lasting results. Moldea, *Hoffa Wars* p. 131.

32 IG Report p. 15. Actually, the Office of Security first considered using 'another former FBI man, Guy Banister, the ex-FBI Chief of Chicago, now working as a private investigator in New Orleans', but Banister was assigned instead to another Cuban operation. Banister had been an office mate of Maheu and Carmine Bellino in 1954. He later became a key figure in the JFK assassination *milieu*. Waldron,

Continues at the foot of the next page.

an opportunity to serve his country. In September 1960, over a meal in Beverly Hills, Maheu offered Roselli \$150,000 to assassinate Castro. Roselli accepted the job but patriotically declined the cash. Flying together to Miami, they stayed at a luxury hotel, went shopping and attended a world heavyweight title fight.³³ There Roselli introduced Maheu to two colleagues with deep ties to Cuba who would have to approve the Castro hit. One was Roselli's powerful boss in Chicago, Sam Giancana, who was also a client of attorney Edward Bennett Williams. The other was Santo Trafficante, the Mafia king of Florida, who that same month was conspiring with several other mobsters and Jimmy Hoffa to deliver \$1 million in cash bribes to presidential candidate Richard Nixon.³⁴ As a major owner of casinos in pre-revolutionary Havana, Trafficante had dozens of Cuban exiles on his payroll, active in everything from numbers rackets to narcotics trafficking. Many were being trained by the CIA in commando tactics ahead of the Bay of Pigs invasion.³⁵

Note 32 continued

Watergate p. 104.

Maheu later told his friend Pierre Salinger, Kennedy's former Hoffa investigator and press secretary, 'that the CIA had been in touch with Nixon, who had asked them to go forward with this project. . . It was Nixon who had [Maheu] do a deal with the Mafia in Florida to kill Castro.' However, this remains unproven. See Summers, *Arrogance of Power* pp. 196-197.

33 Before flying to Miami, Maheu and Roselli met with a senior official from the Office of Security, James O'Connell, at the Hilton Plaza Hotel in New York City. O'Connell was Roselli's CIA contact until May 1962, when he was replaced by William Harvey. See CIA memo, 'The Johnny Roselli Matter', NARA 1993.07.26.17:44:39:000590. Maheu had previously introduced Roselli to several top CIA and Air Force intelligence officers at a party at his home in Virginia, in total violation of good security procedures. See Maheu and Hack, *Next to Hughes* p. 114.

34 Moldea, *The Hoffa Wars* pp. 108-109. Note that Trafficante used a Teamster local in Miami as his office.

35 This group's main contact for arranging the assassination was the Meyer Lansky-funded Cuban politician Manuel Antonio de Varona, whose CIA paymaster was future Watergate burglar E. Howard Hunt. However, Hunt testified that he was unaware of Varona's involvement in the assassination plots. See IG Report pp. 29-30, 64; Summers, *Arrogance of Power* p. 194; Rappleye and Becker, *All American Mafioso* pp. 192-193.

On the downside, both Giancana and Trafficante had been subpoenaed by Chief Counsel Robert Kennedy along with Jimmy Hoffa to testify before the Senate labor rackets committee in the late 1950s. Through its choice of surrogates, the CIA was thus directly flouting the war on organized crime declared by Bobby and Jack Kennedy and increasingly pursued, albeit reluctantly, by J. Edgar Hoover. It was also sustaining the Mafia's hopes of 'securing gambling, prostitution, and dope monopolies in Cuba in the event Castro is overthrown', to quote a memo by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to CIA Director Allen Dulles in December 1960.³⁶

For all their wealth and power, these Mafia bosses proved unable to pierce Castro's layers of security. They ruled out shooting the Cuban leader as too dangerous. Their repeated attempts to poison him fell victim to bad luck and logistical snafus. In all, Castro would survive more than a hundred assassination attempts by many enemies over more than two decades.

But the dark secret of the CIA-Mafia plots was not safe. Roselli and his Mafia partners quickly realized this was a CIA operation. Before long, so did Howard Hughes. For months starting in the fall of 1960, Maheu shuttled between his Los Angeles base and Miami, the headquarters of all CIA operations against Cuba.³⁷ He was gone so much that Hughes, Maheu's top client, complained of his absence and demanded that he return. Rather than lose his business, Maheu sought – and amazingly received – permission from the CIA to tell Hughes that he was working on a top-secret assignment that 'included plans to dispose of Mr. Castro in connection with a pending invasion'. As one account notes: 'It was a piece of information that had not even been given to the president of the United States, John F. Kennedy.'³⁸

36 21 December 1960 memorandum, re 'Manuel Antonio Varona', NARA 124-90055-10230; summarized in IG Report pp. 29-30.

37 Maheu found time before the 1960 election to convince a reporter from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* to kill a potentially negative breaking story on the 1956 Hughes 'loan' to Donald Nixon. Maheu succeeded – but Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson then went public with the full, damaging account. See Summers, *Arrogance of Power* pp. 215-216.

38 Bartlett and Steele, *Empire*, p. 284.

The incident strongly suggests – and other evidence supports – that Hughes already had an extensive covert relationship with the CIA.³⁹ The Agency's Domestic Contacts Division (DCD) acknowledged in a secret 1974 memo that it 'had close and continuing relationships with the Hughes Tool Company and the Hughes Aircraft Company since 1948. . . In the case of Hughes Aircraft, DCD has contacted over 250 individuals in the company since the start of our association and about 100 in Hughes Tool over the same period. . . In addition, there is some evidence in DCD files that both companies may have had contractual relationships with the Agency.'⁴⁰ Indeed, over the years, that relationship would generate billions of dollars' worth of CIA contracts for Hughes Aircraft alone.⁴¹

39 Hughes allowed the CIA to use a Bahamian island that he leased, named Cay Sal, for intelligence operations and raids against Cuba, including the Bay of Pigs invasion. See Hinckle and Turner, *The Fish is Red*, pp. 279-280; Dick Russell, 'An Ex-CIA Man's Stunning Revelations on "The Company", JFK's Murder, and the Plot to Kill Richard Nixon', *Argosy*, April 1976; 'Oz Moody: A Florida Treasure Looks Back', *Florida Monthly*, December 2001, pp. 36-38. Edward Morgan testified to the Church Committee that Hank Greenspun 'knew that Hughes was extremely close to the CIA'. See testimony of Edward P. Morgan, March 19, 1975, 34, NARA 157-10011-10040.

40 CIA memorandum by Carroll Delaney, executive officer, Domestic Collection Division, for Inspector General, 24 April 1974, re 'DCD Response to the Agency-Watergate File Review', NARA 104-10062-10072.

41 One published estimate put the value of CIA contracts at \$6 billion from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. See 'The Hughes Legacy: Scramble for Billions', *Time*, 19 April 1976, p. 23. In 1966, Albert D. Wheelon resigned as Deputy Director of the CIA in charge of its science and technology division – including development of spy satellites – to become President of Hughes Aircraft Co., where he built its satellite-manufacturing business into the largest in the world. See Stephen Miller, 'Rocket Scientist Albert Wheelon Led CIA Spy-Satellite Program', *Wall Street Journal*, 1 October 2013. Hughes biographers Bartlett and Steele note, 'The Hughes payroll was studded with former intelligence operatives, government agents, and retired army, navy, and air force officers. The Hughes Aircraft Company was deeply involved in the intelligence community's spy-satellite program.' In addition, the CIA chose Hughes Tool Company as its contractor and cover in 1970 for Project Jennifer, a quarter billion dollar scheme to raise a sunken Soviet submarine from the floor of the Pacific Ocean.

Continues at the foot of the next page.

Eventually J. Edgar Hoover got wind of the secret too. It leaked to the FBI when the jealous Chicago boss Giancana, much like Hughes a few years earlier, asked Maheu to spy on one of his lovers, the hit singer Phyllis McGuire. She was consorting with 'Laugh-In' comedian Dan Rowan behind Giancana's back in Las Vegas. As a favor for Giancana's help in Cuba, Maheu agreed to 'bug' Rowan's Las Vegas hotel room. Remarkably, the CIA gave him \$1,000 to do it.⁴² The operation was worthy of the Keystone Kops – or the Watergate bunglers. Maheu farmed the job out to a Florida private eye, who left all his monitoring equipment in plain view in his hotel room. A maid spotted it and called security. Wiretapping was a federal offense, so police called in the FBI. The detective gave up Maheu's name. Questioned by the Feds, Maheu offered the implausible-sounding explanation that he had arranged to surveil a TV comedian 'on behalf of the CIA relative to anti-Castro activities'. The FBI didn't let go, and after more than a

Note 41 continued:

See Bartlett and Steele, *Empire*, p. 458. They also note that the CIA signed at least 32 contracts totaling \$6.6 billion from June 1968 to March 1975, not including the Glomar Explorer vessel used in Project Jennifer, or many other classified contracts (Donald Barlett and James Steele, 'CIA Has "Many Contracts" with Hughes Organizations', *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 December 1975). Maheu recalled one phone conversation with Hughes in early 1969 in which the billionaire 'suggested that I try to work out some kind of arrangement with the CIA whereby either he or the Hughes Tool Company become a front for this intelligence agency. I told Mr. Hughes that I could not understand why he would have such a desire and he pointed out to me that if he ever became involved in any problem with the government, either with a regulatory body or with an investigative arm of the government, that he thought it would be very beneficial to him [if we were] a front of some sort through one of his businesses for the CIA.' See Davenport and Eddy, *The Hughes Papers*, pp. 244-245.

42 IG Report, pp. 57-58; Sheffield Edwards (CIA's Office of Security), memorandum for the record, 14 May 1962, re 'Arthur James Balletti et al – Unauthorized Publication or Use of Communications', and Howard Osborn, CIA Office of Security, memorandum for Director of Central Intelligence, June 24, 1966, re 'Johnny Roselli', NARA 1993.07.21.08:58:07:430620. The timing was either late 1961 or very early 1962. For intimations of a more complicated back story, including CIA suspicions that Giancana was talking to associates about the assassination plots, see Interim Report, pp. 78-79, and HSCA Report, pp. 174-175.

year of arm-twisting the head of the CIA's Office of Security finally gave FBI Director Hoover a classified briefing about the assassination plots. Hoover in turn informed Attorney General Robert Kennedy that the CIA was now secretly protecting two of the nation's leading criminals, Giancana and Trafficante. As the CIA's Director of the Office of Security later noted, 'Both were on the Attorney General's [list of] ten most-wanted men.'⁴³

Not until 1962, at the FBI's instigation, did CIA officials finally brief Bobby Kennedy about their assassination plots with the Mafia.⁴⁴ After hearing the news, the attorney general lamented that his war on organized crime had been fatally subverted: 'It would be very difficult to initiate any prosecution against Giancana, as Giancana could immediately bring out the fact that the U.S. Government had approached him to arrange for the assassination of Castro.' One of his CIA briefers later recalled: 'If you have seen Mr. Kennedy's eyes get steely and his jaw set and his voice get low and precise, you get a definite feeling of unhappiness.'⁴⁵

CIA officials reassured the Attorney General that they had cut the Mafia loose. That was a blatant lie; they continued to work with gangsters without his knowledge.⁴⁶ They also engaged in ongoing assassination plots. Indeed, on November

43 IG Report, pp. 59-62; Rappleye and Becker, *All American Mafioso*, pp. 213-214; Bartlett and Steele, *Empire*, pp. 283-284; Maheu and Hack, *Next to Hughes*, pp. 121-122; Howard Osborn, Director of Security, memorandum for Director of Central Intelligence, re 'Roselli, Johnny', 19 November 1970, NARA 1993.07.26.17:44:39:000590.

44 IG Report, p. 62a; HSCA Report, p. 153; Rappleye and Becker, *All American Mafioso*, pp. 216-217.

45 Interim Report, pp. 132-133; cf. IG Report, pp. 62a.

46 Interim Report, pp. 133-134; IG Report, pp. 64-65. In 1963, following publication of an article in the *Chicago Sun-Times* revealing that Giancana had worked for the CIA, Richard Helms told CIA Director John McCone that the plots had ended in May 1962. See Waldron *Watergate*, pp. 247-248. I suspect that the article was an FBI leak. Articles suggesting a CIA link to Giancana appeared in the *Chicago Sun-Times* on 16 August 1963 ('CIA Sought Giancana Help for Cuba Spying') and *Chicago Daily News* on 20 August 1963 ('The Truth About Cosa Nostra Chief and the CIA'). See Howard Osborn, CIA Office of Security, memorandum for Director of Central Intelligence, June 24, 1966, re 'Johnny Roselli', NARA 1993.07.21.08:58:07:430620; IG Report, pp. 67-69.

22, 1963, even as President Kennedy was beginning his motorcade through the streets of Dallas, a senior CIA officer was holding a clandestine rendezvous in Paris with an apparently disloyal Cuban official. The CIA officer, masquerading as a personal emissary of Attorney General Kennedy, assured the Cuban that the White House was serious about overthrowing the Castro regime. He handed over a poison injector disguised as a simple pen and promised to smuggle into Cuba a sniper rifle with telescopic sight. But the only leader who got killed that day was President Kennedy.

Historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. noted: 'The CIA was reviving the assassination plots at the very time President Kennedy was considering the possibility of normalization of relations with Cuba – an extraordinary action. If it was not total incompetence – which in the case of the CIA cannot be excluded – it was a studied attempt to subvert national policy.'⁴⁷

The most dangerous question: who killed JFK?

The CIA could not know in 1963 – and likely still does not know today – whether its murder plots against Castro helped cause the slaying of JFK in Dallas. Some officials suspected that Castro had retaliated against Kennedy, tit for tat. Equally possible was that some of the CIA's own officers and agents, who hated President Kennedy for failing to back the Bay of Pigs invasion with American air and naval power, had killed the President. The reputed Dallas assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, had murky relationships with the CIA, FBI, Naval Intelligence and Cuban exile organizations. Oswald's killer, Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby, reportedly visited Cuba in 1959 to meet Trafficante. Such associations raised questions that must have disturbed CIA insiders. Thorough investigation of any of these leads might uncover a Dallas or New Orleans conspiracy involving CIA assets, which could destroy the agency. At minimum, any serious investigation would uncover the CIA's

⁴⁷ Quoted in Anthony Summers, *Conspiracy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), p. 426.

dirty alliance with the Mafia. The Agency, not surprisingly, went into full cover-up mode. It kept its own assassination plots secret from the Warren Commission and offered few details to the FBI. To this day, the CIA withholds from the public thousands of documents potentially relevant to the case.

The House Select Committee on Assassinations concluded in 1979 that Trafficante and another allied Mafia boss 'had the motive, means, and opportunity to assassinate President Kennedy'. Years later, Trafficante's attorney claimed that the mob boss admitted on his deathbed being part of a conspiracy to kill Kennedy, apparently at the behest of Jimmy Hoffa. That admission, like others made in the case, is still highly controversial.⁴⁸ But a respected Cuban exile leader did testify before Congress under oath about meeting with Trafficante one year before the JFK assassination to discuss a large Teamster pension fund loan. Trafficante told him, 'It is not right what they are doing to [Jimmy] Hoffa', who was then the target of a relentless investigation led by the President's brother. 'Mark my word, this man Kennedy is in trouble, and he will get what is coming to him.' When asked how that could be, given polls showing that Kennedy would likely win the next election, Trafficante allegedly replied, 'You don't understand me. Kennedy's not going to make it to the election. He is going to be hit.'⁴⁹

Blowback and blackmail

By its unwise choice of partners and projects, the CIA had left itself wide open to blackmail. If details of the anti-Castro plots came out, the agency could be destroyed. Unfortunately for the CIA, its co-conspirators thought nothing of breaking

⁴⁸ Frank Ragano with Selwyn Raab, *Mob Lawyer* (New York: Scribners, 1994), p. 348. G. Robert Blakey, who was chief counsel to the House Select Committee on Assassinations, said of Ragano's claim, 'This is the most plausible, most coherent (assassination) theory.' See Jeffrey Hart, 'Yes, the Mob Killed Jack Kennedy', *Herald-Journal* (Spartanburg, South Carolina), 25 January 1992. For a discussion of confessions by Trafficante, Roselli, Ragano, and Carlos Marcello, see Waldron, *Watergate*, pp. 206-209.

⁴⁹ Richard Mahoney, *Sons & Brothers: The Days of Jack and Bobby Kennedy* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999), pp. 196-197.

silence if it gave them leverage against the U.S. government. They started turning the screws in 1966, when Giancana's lawyer Edward Bennett Williams reportedly invoked his client's history of government service to spring the mob boss from jail in return for him not talking.⁵⁰

Robert Maheu likewise prevailed on the CIA to block an investigation by the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Administrative Practice and Procedure into his involvement in illegal wiretapping.⁵¹ The subcommittee was chaired by Senator Edward Long of Missouri, who was disturbed by recent revelations of extensive FBI electronic surveillance of the Mob owners of Las Vegas casinos. The illegal wiretaps had been brought to light by Edward Bennett Williams, attorney for several of those mobsters; his client Jimmy Hoffa suspected that he, too, had been a victim of illegal government eavesdropping.⁵² Ironically, FBI surveillance also showed that Senator Long was a close friend and client of Jimmy Hoffa's attorney Morris Shenker, who paid Long tens of thousands of dollars for unexplained services, possibly to use his probe of illegal wiretaps to keep Hoffa out of jail.⁵³ To put additional pressure on the federal government on Hoffa's behalf, Shenker also told Long about Maheu's role in the illegal wiretapping of Greek ship-owner Aristotle Onassis in 1954 and of Dan Rowen's Las Vegas hotel room on behalf of Sam Giancana. Learning of this leak, the director of the CIA's Office of Security warned CIA Director Richard Helms that exposure of Agency involvement with Giancana 'could be most

⁵⁰ Waldron, *Watergate*, p. 351. For a contemporary report on the mystery of Giancana's release, see Philip Warden, 'Celler to Ask Report on Giancana from Katzenbach', *Chicago Tribune*, 7 June 1966. For accounts questioning whether Giancana actually played the CIA card, see Evan Thomas, *The Man to See*, p. 198, and Nicholas Gage, '2 Mafiosi Linked to CIA Treated Leniently by U.S.', *New York Times*, 13 April 1976.

⁵¹ IG Report, pp. 72-74; Waldron, *Watergate*, pp. 352-353.

⁵² Thomas, *The Man to See*, pp. 200-202.

⁵³ Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: Norton, 1991), pp. 586-588; William Lambert, 'Strange Help-Hoffa Campaign of the U.S. Senator from Missouri', *Life*, 26 May 1967, p. 28; Walter Sheridan, *The Fall and Rise of Jimmy Hoffa* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1972) pp. 414-416.

embarrassing'. Fortunately for all concerned, Maheu's attorney, Edward P. Morgan, was a 'very close friend' of Shenker. Through Shenker, Morgan convinced Long in the summer of 1966 to drop his investigation of Maheu in the interests of national security.⁵⁴

As it happens Morgan was also Teamster President Jimmy Hoffa's Washington attorney, handling his appeal from a 1964 conviction for labor racketeering.⁵⁵ And Morgan, at the same time, was providing ammunition for Long's investigation by preparing a multi-million dollar lawsuit on behalf of a 'Washington lobbyist and Roselli intimate', charging that the FBI had bugged his apartment.⁵⁶ Insiders were pulling strings here on multiple levels that not even the CIA could fully fathom (see sidebar below).

Morgan was the ultimate 'deep state' insider, a ubiquitous player who left little public trace and no published biography. He served as a special agent with the FBI from 1940 to 1947.⁵⁷ In 1951, he was recruited by the CIA's clandestine service branch and received a covert security

⁵⁴ Memorandum in Edward P. Morgan's CIA file re 'Inquiry by the Senate Administrative Practices Subcommittee', no date; Howard Osborn, director of Security, memo to Director of Central Intelligence, re 'Pros and Cons of the Robert Maheu Case', 30 June 1966; James P. O'Connell, Assistant Deputy Director of Security, Memorandum for Director of Security, 31 May 1966, re 'Maheu, Robert A.', NARA 1993.07.26.17:44:39:000590. In the latter memo, O'Connell wrote, 'In considering the Sam [Giancana] incident, I feel it is imperative that it not be raised in this or any other Hearing.'

⁵⁵ Bartlett and Steele, *Empire*, pp. 286, 301, 323; Davenport and Eddy, *The Hughes Papers*, pp. 63-64; Hinckle and Turner, *The Fish is Red*, p. 267; Bishop to M. A. Jones, 13 May 1971, re 'Edward Pierpont Morgan', NARA 124-90133-10235.

⁵⁶ Morgan's client was Fred Black. Bishop to M. A. Jones, 13 May 1971, re 'Edward Pierpont Morgan', NARA 124-90133-10235; Mahoney, *Sons and Brothers*, pp. 333-334. Mahoney writes: 'Senator Edward Long of Missouri, a Hoffa loyalist, seized on the government's brief in the Black appeal and called for an investigation. . . . On December 10, Hoover let loose, charging that Kennedy had directly approved the electronic surveillance. . . .The charges and countercharges between Hoover and Kennedy went on for weeks in the press.' (p. 334)

⁵⁷ Memo from Callahan to H. N. Bassett, 3 July 1972, re 'Edward P. Morgan', NARA 124-90133-10251.

In 1950 he became Counsel to a Special Senate Committee

Continues at the foot of the next page.

clearance to handle legal work for a secret Agency contract with Johns Hopkins University.⁵⁸ In private practice as an attorney, Morgan represented his friend and fellow FBI agent, Robert Maheu, as soon as he opened his private eye office with CIA support.⁵⁹ Through Maheu, Morgan was one of only a tiny number of non-Agency individuals privy to the CIA-Mafia assassination plots from their earliest days.⁶⁰ He was also attorney to muckraking columnists Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson and to their mutual friend, *Las Vegas Sun* publisher Hank Greenspun.⁶¹ In 1973, Morgan would become Watergate counsel to the Democratic National Committee, which previously had been represented by another Hoffa

Note 57 continued

investigating charges by Sen. Joseph McCarthy against the State Department. The following year he became Director of Enforcement in Office of Price Stabilization, where he aroused the ire of J. Edgar Hoover by trying to recruit FBI agents for his team.

58 Sidney H. Beman, Acting Chief, WE-4, to Office of Security, 'Request for operational clearance for Edward P. Morgan', 21 November 1950, NARA 104-10071-10301. The security clearance was granted by Robert H. Cunningham, an officer in the CIA's Office of Security, who also arranged Maheu's employment by the CIA starting in 1953. James P. O'Connell, Assistant Deputy Director of Security, Memorandum for Director of Security, 31 May 1966, re 'Maheu, Robert A.', NARA 1993.07.26.17:44:39:000590.

59 See Edward P. Morgan's closed session testimony to Church Committee, 19 March 1976, NARA 157-10011-10040. Maheu testified that he hired Morgan to represent him in 1964, to prepare a will, but acknowledged being a friend of Morgan since about 1940, Maheu testimony, 23 September 1975, NARA 157-10011-10049.

60 CIA memo, April 1967, 'Robert A. Maheu', NARA 1993.07.26.17:44:39:000590; Rappleye and Becker, *All American Mafioso*, p. 220.

61 Morgan said he got to know Pearson very well over many years as a result of his role as counsel to several high-profile congressional investigations. He also said Greenspun was 'like a member of my own family.' See Edward P. Morgan's closed session testimony to the Church Committee, March 19, 1976, NARA 157-10011-10040. Greenspun told an FBI agent that he had known Morgan since 1954 and had used his legal services several times. See Special Agent in Charge, Las Vegas, to Director, FBI, 17 February 1961, NARA 124-10279-10181. Among other matters, Morgan defended Greenspun against charges of inciting the murder of Senator Joseph McCarthy (Memo from Callahan to H. N. Bassett, 3 July 1972, re Edward P. Morgan, NARA 124-90133-10251). Greenspun bailed Roselli out of jail

Continues at the foot of the next page

attorney, Edward Bennett Williams. In other words, Morgan connected with just about everyone in this story.

Morgan first met Roselli in the 1950s through Greenspun, who was convicted of running guns to Israel before launching his career in newspaper publishing.⁶² Starting in late 1966, Morgan worked with Maheu, Greenspun, Roselli and Hoffa to persuade the owners of a Teamster-financed Las Vegas hotel-casino – one of whose silent partners was Chicago's Sam Giancana – to sell out to Howard Hughes.⁶³ Morgan, Roselli and Greenspun would go on to reap large fees from Maheu by doing several more deals for Hughes with mob casino owners in Las Vegas.

Through Maheu, Morgan also got a \$100,000 annual retainer to handle legal business for the Hughes empire.⁶⁴

Life should have been good for Roselli, but the FBI was

Note 61 continued

after an arrest in Las Vegas on December 29, 1966 on misdemeanor charges of not registering as a felon. See Waldron, *Watergate*, p. 363. Greenspun was also friendly with Hoffa, who financed one of his investments, and Maheu, who bought one of his properties at a handsome price with Hughes's money.

62 CIA memo, April 1967, 'Robert A. Maheu', NARA 1993.07.26.17:44:39:000590.

63 Bartlett and Steele, *Empire*, ppp. 286-287, 291-295; Davenport and Eddy, *The Hughes Papers*, p. 67; memo by FBI SA Edward J. Dunn, Jr., Miami, 22 March 1977, re 'Roskil' [Roselli killing], NARA 124-10289-10035; FBI SAC Las Vegas, 14 February 1961. Before the purchase of the Desert Inn hotel and casino from the owners of record, including former Cleveland gambler and bootlegger Morris Dalitz, Hughes had moved into the hotel's upper floor. Dalitz had opposed the move, until Jimmy Hoffa put the arm on him. Maheu reached Hoffa through Edward Bennett Williams. See Maheu and Hack, *Next to Hughes*, p. 159.

64 CIA memo, April 1967, 'Robert A. Maheu', NARA 1993.07.26.17:44:39:000590; Rappleye and Becker, *All American Mafioso*, p. 220. As part of his legal representation, Morgan supported Maheu's campaign to get the Justice Department to drop an antitrust investigation into Hughes's purchase of hotels and casinos in Las Vegas. See Senate Watergate Report, pp. 986-987. This issue was flagged by the Senate Watergate Committee as one possible motivation for the \$100,000 in cash payoffs arranged by Maheu from Hughes to Nixon via Bebe Rebozo. The good times for Morgan ended when Hughes fired Maheu in late 1970, declaring that his long-time manager 'stole me blind'. See Eddy and Davenport, *The Hughes Papers*, p. 208.

following him around the clock by mid-1966. The Justice Department began threatening to deport him to Italy unless he became a federal informant. Not surprisingly, Roselli began drinking heavily.⁶⁵ Roselli called up his CIA contact in the Office of Security to complain about FBI harassment.⁶⁶ When his legal problems did not go away, Roselli saw to it that the CIA's problems didn't go away, either.

Like Maheu, Roselli knew the perfect agent to leverage his knowledge of national security secrets to ward off official investigators: Edward Morgan. In January 1967, on Roselli's behalf, Morgan leaked to his close friend and client Drew Pearson the explosive story about the Castro assassination plots.⁶⁷ Morgan knew that Pearson would in turn tell his close friend, Chief Justice Earl Warren, who had led the presidential commission that investigated the JFK assassination in 1964.⁶⁸ Indeed, Pearson personally briefed President Johnson and

65 Interim Report, p. 85 n4; Roselli testimony before Church Committee, 24 June 1975, NARA 157-10014-10001, pp. 66-71; memorandum from Samuel Papich to Director, FBI, 18 May 1966, 'Report of Meeting Between Colonel Sheffield Edwards and "Johnny" Roselli', NARA 104-10133-10090; CIA memo, April 1967, 'Robert A. Maheu', NARA 1993.07.26.17:44:39:000590, citing Maheu's reports on Roselli's erratic behavior.

66 In December 1966, the CIA resisted a request from the FBI to have Sheffield Edwards testify before a grand jury on his contacts with Roselli. See Waldron, *Watergate*, pp. 362-363.

67 A detailed study of this episode by the CIA's Inspector General in 1967 concluded that 'Roselli is the source, Morgan the channel, and [Jack] Anderson and Pearson the recipients' of leaks about the CIA-Mafia assassination plots against Castro (IG Report, p. 126). Maheu was also a source for Anderson. Based on Anderson's help in handling a hostile Senate hearing, 'Hughes was a friend who owed me a favor. Intermediaries persuaded Maheu to confide in me. He confirmed that the CIA had asked him to sound out the Mafia, strictly off the record, about a contract to hit Fidel Castro.' See Jack Anderson with Daryl Gibson, *Peace, War, and Politics: An Eyewitness Account* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1999), pp. 269 (introduction), 268 (Brewster hearing), 108 (Maheu confirmation).

68 See Edward P. Morgan's closed session testimony to the Church Committee, March 19, 1976, NARA 157-10011-10040. Roselli first leaked a version of the story to Hank Greenspun - another client of Morgan's - at the *Las Vegas Sun*. Greenspun's story caught the attention of both the FBI and CIA. Note that Jack Anderson already knew Maheu by this point, having been introduced by their mutual friends Greenspun and Morgan.

Chief Justice Earl Warren at length.⁶⁹

Morgan distorted key details to maximize Roselli's blackmail leverage. In his telling, it was the Kennedys, not the CIA, who spearheaded the plots. And to make the story red hot, he maintained that JFK had been murdered by Castro in retaliation.⁷⁰ As Pearson's partner, Jack Anderson, wrote on 3 March: 'President Johnson is sitting on a political H-bomb, an unconfirmed report that Sen. Robert Kennedy may have approved an assassination plot which then possibly backfired against his late brother.' Citing a source's claim that 'Bobby, eager to avenge the Bay of Pigs fiasco, played a key role in the planning', Anderson reported rumors that Castro became 'aware of an American plot upon his life and decided to retaliate against President Kennedy.'⁷¹

President Johnson was deeply shaken by the news, even sleepless.⁷² He had created the Warren Commission in 1964 to prevent just such a story from capturing the public's

69 Michael Beschloss, *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), p. 562; Waldron, *Watergate*, p. 367.

70 In later Senate testimony, Morgan was unable to identify who told him that Robert Kennedy was behind the plots: 'All I know is what I was told.' He named Maheu and Roselli as sources of the Castro retaliation theory, but admitted he had no evidence and added, 'No one that I recall told me specifically that Castro had hired Oswald to kill Kennedy. . . but in my honest judgment, there is no question but that that's the answer of how Kennedy happened to be assassinated.' See Edward P. Morgan's closed session testimony to the Church Committee, 19 March 1976, NARA 157-10011-10040, pp. 21, 27, 30-31, 66.

71 Jack Anderson, 'JFK Assassination Rumored to be Castro Counterplot,' 3 March 1967, available at <<http://tinyurl.com/hnhny9t>> (accessed 17 December 2015). The *Washington Post* waited until 7 March to publish the column.

Pearson had some doubts about the story of Castro using Oswald to retaliate. He wrote in his diary for 13 March 1967, 'I am not sure whether there is a clear-cut connection between Castro and Oswald.' And on 20 March he wrote, 'While I was away, Jack wrote part of the story. It was a poor story and violated a confidence. Finally, it reflected on Bobby Kennedy without actually pinning the goods on him. The *Washington Post* and the *New York Post* did not run it. I think they were right.' Drew Pearson, *Washington Merry-Go-Round: The Drew Pearson Diaries, 1960-1969* (Potomac Books, 2015), pp. 457-458, 470.

72 Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, p. 597.

attention; as he told his close friend and Commission member Senator Richard Russell, 'We've got to take [the assassination of President Kennedy] out of the arena where they're testifying that Khrushchev and Castro did this and did that and kicking us into a war that can kill forty million Americans in an hour.'⁷³ Now, faced with resurgent claims of Communist complicity in the murder of his predecessor, Johnson demanded a CIA briefing. CIA Director Richard Helms ordered his inspector general to prepare a report on agency-sponsored assassination plots, including those against Castro. The 'Secret Eyes Only' report, of which Helms destroyed all but one copy, flatly labeled as 'not true' the claim advanced in the Anderson columns that 'Robert Kennedy may have approved' the plots. The report also highlighted the danger of further revelations damaging the Agency, warning that none of the gangsters involved 'would have compunctions about dragging in his CIA connection when he was being pushed by law enforcement agencies. . . Roselli appears to be doing it in his conversations with Morgan.'⁷⁴ The FBI's liaison to the CIA, Sam Papich, observed bleakly that Roselli and Giancana now had the CIA 'over a barrel' and couldn't be touched by the FBI.⁷⁵

SIDEBAR: The Jimmy Hoffa Connection

Why did Morgan and Pearson/Anderson falsely blame Robert Kennedy for the Castro assassination plots? One reason may be that it served the interests of Jimmy Hoffa, who was desperately fighting 1964 convictions for loan fraud and jury tampering engineered by his mortal enemy, the Attorney General.

The leaker of the RFK assassination plot story, Morgan, was Hoffa's appeals attorney. We have seen that Morgan previously supplied ammunition to Senator Long's investigation of federal wiretapping to help Hoffa's case. Even before approaching Pearson, Morgan leaked portions of the

⁷³ Lamar Waldron with Thom Hartmann, *Ultimate Sacrifice* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2005), p. 772.

⁷⁴ IG Report, pp. 118, 129.

⁷⁵ HSCA Report, p. 178.

story to Hoffa's friend and pension fund beneficiary, Hank Greenspun, publisher of the *Las Vegas Sun*.⁷⁶ At about the same time, as we have seen, Morgan was teaming up with Hoffa, Greenspun, Maheu and Roselli to swing a hotel-casino deal for Hughes in Las Vegas.

Pearson had motives to blame RFK as well.⁷⁷ He was a staunch political defender of Lyndon Johnson, who despised Bobby as his political rival.⁷⁸ Pearson published the 'H-bomb' column just two days after his confidant, Chief Justice Earl Warren, voted to reconsider Hoffa's 1964 conviction for jury tampering. (A majority of the Supreme Court turned Hoffa down.)⁷⁹ Pearson's partner and the actual author of the assassination column, Jack Anderson, reportedly took large bribes from Hoffa's Washington fixer, I. Irving Davidson.⁸⁰ In 1968, Pearson invited Davidson and Allen Dorfman, the

⁷⁶ Anderson, *Peace, War, and Politics*, p. 108; John H. Davis, *Mafia Kingfish: Carlos Marcello and the Assassination of John F. Kennedy* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1989), p. 330. Greenspun received a loan of several million dollars from the Teamster pension fund to build his Paradise Valley Estates and Golf Course in Nevada, at a below-market interest rate (Ralph and Estelle James, *Hoffa and the Teamsters: A Study of Union Power* [Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1965], p. 235). An FBI informant explained that Hoffa's support for Israel 'is what brought [Hoffa lobbyist Irving] Davidson, Greenspun, and Hoffa together' (FBI report from Robert B. Herrington, to Director FBI, 5 August 1964, NARA 124-10289-10384). Drew Pearson noted in his diary that Greenspun was championing Hoffa's cause, explaining that 'Hank met Hoffa when he flew to Israel last fall, and was impressed by him.' Diary entry of 27 May 1958, in Tyler Abell, ed., *Drew Pearson Diaries, 1949-1959* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1974), p. 385.

⁷⁷ But see note 72 above, which raises questions as to whether Pearson had any responsibility for the contents or timing of the story. Pearson's diary is suspect on this matter, however, because the first entry pertaining to Morgan's revelations was dated 13 March 1968 – two months after the two men actually discussed the CIA plots.

⁷⁸ On this point, Peter Dale Scott notes that the Anderson column appeared one day after Robert Kennedy embarrassed President Johnson 'with a controversial proposal for the suspension of bombing against North Vietnam'. See Scott, *Oswald, Mexico, and Deep Politics* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013).

⁷⁹ Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, p. 597; Mahoney, *Sons and Brothers*, p. 334.

⁸⁰ Mark Feldstein, *Poisoning the Press: Richard Nixon, Jack Anderson and the Rise of Washington's Scandal Culture* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), p. 78.

Chicago mob's point man for Teamster pension fund loans, to a private dinner at which Sam Giancana's friend Frank Sinatra declared that Bobby Kennedy was not 'qualified to be President of the United States'.⁸¹

Even as the Pearson/Anderson columns were running in newspapers across the country in March 1967, Morgan, Roselli and Greenspun were meeting in Las Vegas with Jim Garrison, the controversial District Attorney of New Orleans who had recently opened a major investigation into the JFK assassination. The CIA was naturally worried that its role would come out in his probe.⁸² But Hoffa's interests tied into the case as well. In Las Vegas, Garrison's stay at the Sands hotel-casino was paid for by a trusted lieutenant of one of Hoffa's top underworld allies, Carlos Marcello, the Mafia boss of Louisiana.⁸³ Just 10 days after Anderson's column on the CIA plots ran in papers across the country, Hoffa's fixer Davidson – who had been working angles to win Hoffa a new trial on his 1964 conviction for jury tampering⁸⁴ – approached the FBI to whisper that 'Edward G. Partin, who was a witness in the Chattanooga, Tennessee trial of James R. Hoffa, . . . will be subpoenaed by a grand jury in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the near future in connection with his possible involvement in [the Kennedy assassination].' Davidson said he had 'heard there is a photograph available of Partin in the presence of Jack Ruby (deceased), convicted of killing Lee Harvey Oswald.'⁸⁵

Partin, a Louisiana Teamster official and Hoffa confidant, was not simply a witness, but the government's key witness against the union boss. Of great relevance to the JFK assassination, Partin passed a lie detector test regarding claims about Hoffa's interest in obtaining plastic explosives to

81 Sheridan, *The Fall and Rise of Jimmy Hoffa*, p. 443.

82 IG Report, pp. 120, 127, document 1993.06.30.17:15:56:650140.

83 Sandy Smith, 'Carlos Marcello, King Thug of Louisiana', *Life*, 8 September 1967, pp. 94-95.

84 Sheridan, *The Fall and Rise of Jimmy Hoffa*, pp. 190, 404; Gordon Chaplin, 'Behind the Schemes,' *Washington Post*, 2 August 1980.

85 FBI memo, 13 March 1967, 'Assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, November 22, 1963', FBI 62-109060 JFK HQ file, section 19.

kill Attorney General Robert Kennedy.⁸⁶ Hoffa and his personal attorney, Morris Shenker, reportedly amassed huge sums of money to bribe Partin into recanting his testimony.⁸⁷ When that failed, Garrison turned up the heat, letting a Baton Rouge radio station know that he was investigating Partin's possible role in the JFK murder. 'Sensibly, Partin was scared', writes Dan Moldea. 'Not only was he being pressured by Jimmy Hoffa and Carlos Marcello; now he was being implicated in the Kennedy assassination.' Partin himself said:

'Soon after that, [Hoffa's attorney] Frank Ragano called me and he said he could get Garrison off my back. In return, he wanted a signed affidavit saying that I lied in Hoffa's trial. Naturally I didn't sign. But later it came out that Ragano was in touch with both Trafficante and Marcello during that period.'⁸⁸

Hoffa failed to win his appeals, but was pardoned by President Richard Nixon, a long-time ally of the Teamsters Union, in 1971.

The Nixon White House takes note

Despite Morgan's pressure campaign on his behalf, Roselli's legal troubles continued to mount. In July 1967, federal agents caught him cheating members of an exclusive private club in Los Angeles of \$400,000 in a rigged gin rummy game. In a sinister development for the CIA hierarchy, William Harvey, former head of the CIA's assassination project, told the FBI's Papich that Morgan had told Roselli about the CIA's intervention to block Senator Long's investigation of Maheu. 'Johnny [Roselli] wondered why the "Agency" could not do as much for him as it did for Bob Maheu', Harvey said pointedly. That December, Harvey warned Papich that if push came to

⁸⁶ FBI memo from A. Rosen to Mr. DeLoach, 15 March 1967, FBI 62-109060 JFK HQ file, section 120. The Justice Department took Partin's assassination story seriously enough to be concerned about a trip to Washington on 1 March 1967 by Hoffa's enforcer, Puerto Rican Teamster boss Frank Chavez. See Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, p. 597.

⁸⁷ Sandy Smith, 'The Fix', *Life*, 1 September 1967, p. 22.

⁸⁸ Moldea, *The Hoffa Wars*, p. 180; cf. Sheridan, *The Fall and Rise of Jimmy Hoffa*, p. 423.

shove, Roselli's lawyers would subpoena top CIA officials. 'Harvey feels the Agency must exert influence to have the indictment "killed"', Papich reported to the head of the CIA's Office of Security.⁸⁹

The threat proved empty, at least for the time being. In December 1968, Roselli was convicted in the card cheating case. Two years later, he lost a petition before the Supreme Court to block his deportation.⁹⁰ To aid his defense, Morgan referred Roselli to Tom Wadden, a former partner of Edward Bennett Williams, who had defended Sam Giancana. Communicating with the CIA through Maheu, Roselli's lawyer threatened that 'if someone did not intercede on [Roselli]'s behalf, he would make a complete exposé of his activities with the Agency'. CIA Director Helms balked, so Roselli and his new attorney went back to Jack Anderson to turn up the heat.⁹¹

After confirming some key details with Maheu, Anderson published two new columns on CIA assassination plots in January 1971, naming Roselli, Maheu, and two senior CIA officers involved in six attempts on Castro's life.⁹² His second, more explosive column, suggested that the CIA had operated

89 Howard Osborne, Director of Security, memorandum for the record, re 'Meeting Between William K. Harvey and Mr. Sam Papich, FBI Liaison', 8 November 1967; Osborne memorandum for the record, 'Meetings Between William K. Harvey and John Roselli', 11 December 1967, NARA 1993.07.26.17:44:39:000590. Harvey replaced Maheu as Roselli's case officer in April 1962.

90 The decision was rendered on 9 November 1970, weeks before Maheu was fired from the Hughes empire. Roselli was also facing sentencing for his involvement in a card-cheating scandal at the Friar's Club in Los Angeles.

91 Howard Osborn, Director of Security, memorandum for Director of Central Intelligence, re 'Roselli, Johnny', 19 November 1970, NARA 1993.07.26.17:44:39:000590; cf. Rappleye and Becker, *All American Mafioso*, p. 296; Anderson and Gibson, *Peace, War and Politics*, p. 107; Ovid Demaris, *Captive City: Chicago in Chains* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1969), p. 14.

92 Maheu insisted that he was not the source for Anderson's 1971 stories, and Anderson told James O'Connell of the CIA's Office of Security that his sources were in the Justice Department. See James P. O'Connell memorandum for the record, 19 January 1971, re Robert A. Maheu', and O'Connell memorandum for the record, 18 January 1971, re 'Johnny Roselli'. NARA 1993.07.21.08:58:07:430620.

Continues at the foot of the next page.

behind President Kennedy's back. As he put it, the whole story could raise 'some ugly questions that high officials would rather keep buried', including whether the plots 'backfired against President Kennedy' in 1963.⁹³

Roselli's ploy worked. The CIA now intervened with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to prevent public disclosure of his past covert operational role with the CIA. The INS halted its deportation proceedings against the gangster, as government lawyers told a court only that Roselli had performed unspecified 'valuable services to the national security'.⁹⁴

But Roselli's blockbuster leak had unintended consequences as well. On the day Anderson's first column appeared, President Nixon's chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, asked White House Counsel John Dean to dig up what he could about Maheu, who had just been fired by Nixon's benefactor, Howard Hughes. The next day, as Anderson published his second column, Attorney General John Mitchell personally contacted Maheu. Nixon biographer Anthony

Note 92 continued

However, Anderson writes that Maheu 'confirmed that the CIA had asked him to sound out the Mafia, strictly off the record, about a contract to hit Fidel Castro.' See Anderson and Gibson, *Peace, War and Politics*, p. 108. Other sources were a retired detective with longstanding organized crime associations, Joseph Shimon, and William Harvey, a senior CIA officer who began directing the assassination program in 1962 (HSCA Report, pp. 169, 182).

93 Jack Anderson, 'Castro Death Plot Charged to CIA', *New Orleans States-Item*, 18 January 1971; Jack Anderson, 'Castro Plot Raises Ugly Questions', *Washington Post*, 19 January 1971.

For the record, the House Select Committee on Assassinations 'found no evidence that these operations provoked Premier Castro to assassinate President Kennedy in retaliation.' See HSCA Report, p. 181.

94 Howard Osborn, Director of Security, memorandum for CIA Executive Director-Comptroller, 15 February 1972 Doc ID 1451843, CIA 'Family Jewels' release, 25 June 2007; James P. O'Connell, Deputy Director of Security, Memorandum for the Record, 1 March 1971, re 'John Roselli', NARA 1993.07.21.08:58:07:430620; James O'Connell memorandum for the record, 31 January 1972, re 'John Roselli', NARA 1993.07.21.08:58:07:430620; Waldron, *Watergate*, p. 468; Hinckle and Turner, *The Fish is Red*, p. 286. The latter source incorrectly dates the intervention to 1969.

Summers notes:

'At the time Maheu was under pressure to appear before a grand jury in connection with a Las Vegas gambling prosecution. He had so far denied knowledge of the Castro plot story but . . . thought things might "very easily get out of hand" with the grand jury and the press. Maheu came to Washington and, in private, told Mitchell "the entire Castro story". Mitchell, he remembered, was "shaking" by the time he finished. The attorney general forthwith offered him a deal: instead of going before a grand jury on the Vegas matter, Maheu would merely be interviewed by senior Justice Department officials. In this formal session he did not expound on his work for the CIA. "I assured them", Maheu recalled, "I intend to keep my word and maintain the secrecy of the mission."

Meanwhile, Assistant Attorney General Will Wilson was quickly assigned to review whatever the Justice Department might hold on the CIA-Mafia contacts. The Nixon White House, he would later tell Watergate investigators, was hoping to turn up proof that the Kennedy brothers had tried to kill Castro, news that could damage the surviving Kennedy brother, Edward, should he run for the presidency in 1972.⁹⁵

After discussing 'the political implications of the information' with his aide, Attorney General Mitchell showed Nixon the secret Justice Department file on the Castro plots, according to a Senate Watergate Committee staff memorandum first published in 2012.⁹⁶ Nixon knew that questions might be raised about his own involvement in the CIA plots. After all, as Vice President, he had aggressively pushed the Eisenhower

⁹⁵ Summers, *Arrogance of Power*, p. 197; cf. Maheu and Hack, *Next to Hughes*, pp. 126-127. The gambling case involved hidden ownership at the Frontier hotel and casino, where Roselli had the gift shop lease under Richard Danner's management. Prior to the sale to Hughes, Roselli had facilitated a secret ownership interest by Anthony Zerilli, a leading Detroit mobster.

⁹⁶ Memorandum by Terry Lenzner and Marc Lackritz to Senator Ervin, re 'Relevant to S. Res. 60 of John Roselli's testimony about his CIA activities', reprinted in Waldron, *Watergate*, pp. 701, 731.

administration to overthrow Castro. Nixon may or may not have known at that time about the assassination plots, but they were planned by officials under his general supervision. As an investigator for White House Counsel John Dean warned, anything that would call attention to 'Maheu's controversial activities . . . might well shake loose Republican skeletons from the closet.'⁹⁷

Watergate: Maheu, Morgan and the Hughes connection

Among those skeletons was President Nixon's secret receipt of \$100,000 in cash from Howard Hughes in 1969-70, in return for millions of dollars in government favors. The payoffs had been arranged by Robert Maheu via Nixon's trusted confidant and personal banker, Charles 'Bebe' Rebozo. When Rebozo began negotiating on Nixon's behalf in 1968 for cash from Hughes, Maheu delegated the matter to none other than Edward Morgan, who was then on a handsome retainer to the Hughes empire. As a condition for approving the payoff, Morgan insisted on handing the money directly to the President, ostensibly so he could assure Hughes that his money got into the right hands.⁹⁸ Rebozo balked, knowing that Morgan represented the crusading columnist Drew Pearson. In 1960, Pearson had broken the story about a \$205,000 Hughes 'loan' to the Nixon family, which helped cost Nixon the election against Kennedy, and then his bid to become governor of California in 1962. Rebozo would later testify during the Watergate inquiry that he could recall the Hughes loan controversy 'vividly' and 'just did not want to be responsible, in any way, for anything that might create

⁹⁷ Caulfield to Dean, 1 February 1972, in U.S. Senate, Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities, *Executive Session Hearings*, 93/2 (1974), Book 21, 9755ff. Hereafter *SWH*. I do not share the view of John Davis (*Mafia Kingfish*, p. 366) and other authors that Nixon feared public exposure of his own involvement in the mob-linked assassination plots, which to this day has never been demonstrated. In particular, Nixon did not support paying hush money to E. Howard Hunt for that reason. Hunt had to be silenced because of his role in the illegal burglary of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist in September 1971.

⁹⁸ Lukas, *Nightmare*, p. 114.

embarrassment' by risking leaks to Pearson through Morgan.⁹⁹ So the Hughes payoffs were delayed until 1969, when Maheu gave the job to an old friend of Nixon and Rebozo who had just been hired by Maheu to run one of Hughes's casinos.

Unfortunately for the President, however, Maheu turned renegade when Hughes fired him in late 1970. An embittered Maheu began spilling what he knew about Hughes to his friends Jack Anderson and Hank Greenspun. In August 1971, Anderson published a low-key story alleging that Rebozo had received \$100,000 from one of Hughes's casinos on Nixon's behalf.¹⁰⁰ On January 24, 1972, as Nixon's re-election campaign was heating up, Anderson repeated his allegation about the Rebozo cash.¹⁰¹ 'This time', notes Anderson biographer Mark Feldstein,

'Anderson's story produced immediate alarm in the White House, where Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman closely guarded a file on Hughes that was marked "Top Secret – CONFIDENTIAL". Hours after Anderson's column was published, the President privately cursed "that goddamned Hughes thing". The next day, John Ehrlichman asked the White House counsel, John Dean, to "very discreetly" look into the matter.'¹⁰²

Dean learned with alarm that Jack Anderson was continuing to dig relentlessly into Hughes' connections to Nixon, along with other scandals that could hurt the administration.¹⁰³

99 *SWH*, Book 21, 9942-9943, 9986. Rebozo's political instincts were sound. Remarkably, Morgan would become counsel to the Democratic National Committee in March 1973 for its lawsuit against the Nixon team stemming from Watergate. See Waldron, *Watergate*, p. 678.

100. Through Maheu, Anderson had access to Hughes's private papers, which were still under court seal. Jack Anderson, 'Howard Hughes: Hidden Kingmaker', *Washington Post*, 6 August 1971; Anderson, *Peace, War, and Politics*, p. 272. To protect his source, Anderson included a quote from Maheu, refusing to comment.

101 Jack Anderson, 'Two Ghosts Haunt Nixon's Campaign', *Washington Post*, 24 January 1972.

102 Feldstein, *Poisoning the Press*, pp. 222-223.

103 In 1969, Pearson and Anderson had broken a story about Bebe Rebozo and Herbert Klein, Nixon's communications director, visiting

Continues at the foot of the next page.

Pounded by a steady stream of Anderson's embarrassing revelations in 1971 and 1972, White House Special Counsel Charles Colson allegedly ordered Hunt and Liddy to incapacitate or even murder the newsman. The two operatives met with a recently retired CIA physician, who in 1960 had supplied botulin-laced cigars to assassinate Castro – the very plots that Anderson had exposed. They discussed various ways to poison the columnist, but were told by superiors to stand down when their focus shifted to breaking into O'Brien's Watergate office instead.¹⁰⁴

Meanwhile, others in the White House sought less dramatic ways to discredit Anderson. To that end they called on investigators from the FBI, IRS and even a high-powered private eye service, Intertel, owned by the gambling firm Resorts International, which at the same time was investigating Maheu on behalf of the Hughes organization.¹⁰⁵

Note 103 continued

Nevada 'to smooth the feathers of Howard Hughes, the biggest owner of Nevada real estate, who has protested vigorously against previous underground nuclear tests.' See 26 June 1969 column at <<http://dspace.wrlc.org/doc/get/2041/54123/b21f06-0626ztext.txt>>.

In late January 1972, Dean learned that Anderson was once again snooping around the 1956 Hughes loan, including new information, which suggested that Hughes had received a hugely favorable IRS ruling shortly after Nixon received the loan. See Bruce Kehrli to Haldeman re Howard Hughes, 18 January 1972; John Dean to Haldeman and Ehrlichman re Hughes Loan to Don Nixon, 31 January 1972; and John Dean to Haldeman, 3 February 1972, reprinted in Bruce Oudes, ed., *From the President: Richard Nixon's Secret Files* (Harper & Row, 1989), pp. 357, 360, 364-365. Anderson was also anathema to the administration because of his coverage of the ITT scandal.

104 Feldstein, *Poisoning the Press*, pp. 281-286; G. Gordon Liddy, *Will* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), pp. 286-295; Bob Woodward, 'Hunt Told Associates of Orders to Kill Jack Anderson', *Washington Post*, 21 September 1975; Anderson and Gibson, *Peace, War, and Politics*, pp. 228-230; IG Report, pp. 21-22 (Dr. Edward Gunn, Chief, Operations Division, Office of Medical Services). Hunt considered using Frank Sturgis to help kill Anderson, but he turned out to be a friend of Anderson. Hunt later claimed that Colson ordered him only to incapacitate Anderson. See 'Hunt Tells of Plot to Drug Columnist', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 September 1975.

105 Feldstein, *Poisoning the Press*, pp. 278-279; Jack Anderson, 'Watergate Scandal Like an ITT Rerun', *Sumter Daily Item*, 1 March

Continues at the foot of the next page.

The CIA's Office of Security, which had ordered the Castro death plots, assigned 16 agents to surveil Anderson's every move, in blatant violation of its charter.¹⁰⁶ James McCord – recently retired from CIA's Office of Security and now the security director for the Nixon re-election campaign – assigned one of his own employees to infiltrate Anderson's office.¹⁰⁷ Among other things, McCord learned about Anderson's personal and business connections to Larry O'Brien, Hank Greenspun, the attorney Edward Morgan, and even to a Mafia-connected lobbyist for Jimmy Hoffa.¹⁰⁸ It was enough to prove that even a paranoid like Nixon really did have enemies.

As I noted at the outset, Nixon's fear that Maheu might have shared more details of the Hughes-Nixon relationship with his close friend Democratic Party Chairman Larry O'Brien, most likely motivated the fateful break-in at O'Brien's offices on 17 June 1972. Nixon's team wanted to know what O'Brien knew, and if he had any skeletons of his own that could be used to keep him quiet.¹⁰⁹

The crime was radically self-defeating. It delivered the White House into the hands of this anti-Nixon network, starting with attorney Edward Bennett Williams. Besides all of

Note 105 continued

1973; Anderson and Gibson, *Peace, War, and Politics*, pp. 230-233. For general background on Intertel, see Jim Hougan, *Spooks*; Tom Zito, 'Peloquin of Intertel: Intelligence Security, "Targets of Opportunity"', *Washington Post*, 20 February 1977.

106 Jim Hougan, *Secret Agenda*, pp. 85-95; Anderson and Gibson, *Peace, War, and Politics*, pp. 233-241.

107 Feldstein, *Poisoning the Press*, p. 280.

108 James McCord, 'Counter-Espionage Agent for the Republicans: The True Story of the Watergate Case', in House Armed Services, Special Subcommittee on Intelligence, *Inquiry into the Alleged Involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency in the Watergate and Ellsberg Matters*, hearings, 94/1 (1975), pp. 838-43.

109 Contrary to Lamar Waldron, I do not believe that a major motive for the break-in was to find a document allegedly sent by the Cuban government outlining the many attempts made against Fidel Castro's life. That claim originated with Frank Sturgis. The document may have been of interest but most of the information could have been gleaned from Cuban press accounts over the years, and none of the information would have been particularly credible to a U.S. audience. Therefore, it could not have been particularly useful to the Democrats, the Nixon campaign, the CIA, or any other relevant group.

his other associations, Williams represented both the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and *Washington Post*. At 5 a.m. on Saturday, 17 June, one of Williams's law partners was woken up with the news that five men had been arrested inside the DNC; he then quickly tipped off the managing editor at the *Washington Post*, a good friend, to get a reporter to cover the story. Williams then encouraged *Washington Post* Executive Editor Ben Bradlee – one of his very closest friends – to continue the newspaper's hard-hitting coverage of Watergate during the darkest days of the Nixon administration's counterattacks. A lawsuit filed by Williams's law firm on behalf of the DNC and O'Brien against the Republicans allowed the Democrats to depose senior administration officials and keep the case alive until Congress took it up.¹¹⁰ Williams was even godfather to a child of federal judge John Sirica, who tried the Watergate burglars and used the threat of lengthy sentences to force them to talk.¹¹¹ Not surprisingly, Williams ranked high on President Nixon's list of enemies. In a conversation with two top aides on 15 September 1972, Nixon said, 'I wouldn't want to be in Edward Bennett Williams' position after this election. . . . We're going after him. . . . I think we are going to fix the son of a bitch. Believe me. We are going to. We've got to, because he's a bad man.' Haldeman chimed in, 'That is a guy we've got to ruin.'¹¹²

Instead, of course, it was Nixon who was ruined, as

¹¹⁰ Thomas, *The Man to See*, pp. 58, 233-234, 275. On Joseph Califano's tip to Howard Simons at the *Post*, see also Ben Bradlee, *A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), pp. 324-325. In March 1973, Califano had to drop the DNC as a client when Judge Richey ruled he had a conflict of interest with his representation of the *Washington Post*. His replacement as counsel to the DNC lawsuit was Edward Morgan. See Waldron, *Watergate*, p. 678.

¹¹¹ Thomas, *The Man to See*, pp. 68, 277. Thomas does not claim that Williams influenced Sirica's approach to the Watergate trial, but Williams did get Sirica to go easy on Woodward and Bernstein after they improperly approached grand jurors on the case.

¹¹² Transcript of Nixon conversation with H. R. Haldeman and John Dean, 15 September 1972, at <<http://nixon.archives.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/watergate/wsp/779-002.pdf>>. Nixon added

Continues at the foot of the next page

Williams continued flying high.

Nixon's cover-up and 'the Bay of Pigs thing'

Nixon didn't go down without a fight. Borrowing directly from the tactics of Roselli, Williams and Morgan, Nixon used the Watergate burglars' links to the still-secret Castro assassination plots to blackmail the CIA into enforcing a cover-up of the break-in on national security grounds. He even got away with it – for a short time.

The Watergate burglars were no ordinary lot of ruffians. There was the suave Howard Hunt, a globetrotting CIA officer who was among the first Agency officials to recommend assassinating Castro to make way for a new, pro-American regime. His first Watergate recruit, Bernard Barker, had been Hunt's right-hand man on the Bay of Pigs operation and was a former member of pre-Castro Cuba's secret police. Barker stayed on the CIA's payroll until 1966, when the Agency dropped him for being beholden to 'gambling and criminal elements', a euphemism for Florida godfather Santos Trafficante's organization.¹¹³ Bay of Pigs veteran Rolando Martinez was still on the CIA's payroll when he broke into the Watergate offices of the DNC, and was involved in 1963 in a secret Mafia-CIA-backed raid on Cuba aimed at discrediting the Kennedy administration.¹¹⁴ Then there was soldier of fortune Frank Sturgis, who had personally engaged in several

Note 112 continued

the intriguing comment, 'He misbehaved very badly in the Hoffa matter. Our – some pretty bad conduct there, too, but go ahead.'

Later, Nixon targeted Williams for tax audits. See Nixon conversation with Charles Colson, 1 January 1973, in Stanley Kutler, *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes* (New York: The Free Press, 1997) p. 192. For whatever reason, the IRS audited Williams for three consecutive years during the Nixon administration. Stanley I. Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon* (NY: W. W. Norton, 1992), p. 105.

113 Waldron, *Watergate*, pp. 86, 111.

114 David Kaiser, *The Road to Dallas: The Assassination of John F. Kennedy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 160-165; Anthony Carrozza, *William D. Pawley: The Extraordinary Life of the Adventurer, Entrepreneur, and Diplomat Who Co-Founded the Flying Tigers* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2012), pp. 255-265.

plots to murder Castro as well as the 1963 raid.¹¹⁵ Finally, James McCord, who was in charge of planting bugs in the DNC, had spent his career as a senior member of the CIA's Office of Security, where the CIA-Mafia plots were hatched.

Nixon exploited these associations to coerce the CIA into participating in his cover-up. Less than a week after the break-in, Haldeman told Nixon he thought the key to stopping the investigation was to play on the suspicion of FBI agents working the case that it was some kind of CIA operation. 'The only way to do that is from White House instructions', Haldeman said. 'And it's got to be to [CIA Director Richard] Helms . . .'

Nixon then jumped in to suggest a script that his aides could use to persuade Helms to shut down the FBI: 'Of course, this . . . Hunt . . . that will uncover a lot of things. You open that scab there's a hell of a lot of things and . . . we just feel that it would be very detrimental to have this thing go any further.' A little later the President elaborated: 'When you . . . get these people in, say: . . . the President believes that it is going to open the whole Bay of Pigs thing up again. And . . . that they should call the FBI in and say that we wish for the country, don't go any further into this case, period!'¹¹⁶ A few hours later, Nixon reiterated to Haldeman, 'Tell them that if it gets out, it's going to make the CIA look bad, it's going to make Hunt look bad, and it's likely to blow the whole Bay of Pigs which we think would be very unfortunate for the CIA.'¹¹⁷

When Haldeman relayed this message to Helms, the CIA Director's reaction was striking. 'Turmoil in the room', Haldeman recalled, '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."' Yet the seemingly irrelevant historical reference did the job. For the next two weeks, Helms and his deputy asked the FBI to

¹¹⁵ Waldron, *Watergate*, p. 473.

¹¹⁶ White House conversation with H.R. Haldeman, 23 June 1973, at <<http://watergate.info/1972/06/23/the-smoking-gun-tape.html>>.

¹¹⁷ White House conversation with H.R. Haldeman, 23 June 1973, at <<http://nixon.archives.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/watergate/wspf/741-010.pdf>>; H. R. Haldeman with Joseph DiMona, *The Ends of Power* (New York: Times Books, 1978), p. 33.

'desist from expanding this investigation' lest it 'run afoul of [CIA] operations.'¹¹⁸

Just what was 'the Bay of Pigs thing' that so agitated Helms and prompted the CIA to cover-up? Haldeman later offered a most intriguing explanation: 'When Nixon said "It's likely to blow the whole Bay of Pigs thing" he might have been reminding Helms, not so gently, of the cover-up of the CIA assassination attempts on . . . Fidel Castro – a CIA operation that may have triggered the Kennedy tragedy and which Helms desperately wanted to hide.'¹¹⁹ That was the very hypothesis Anderson had planted in his 1971 columns, advancing the blackmail scheme hatched by Roselli and his attorney Edward Morgan.

The brief cover-up instigated by the White House proved to be a Pyrrhic victory. Nixon lost a vigorous legal battle to keep the conversation secret. When tapes of his 23 June meetings were made public on 5 August 1974, after a Supreme Court ruling against Nixon's claims of executive privilege, this so-called 'smoking gun' proved that Nixon had directed a cover-up. His remaining political supporters dropped him, making impeachment a foregone conclusion. President Nixon resigned four days later, on 9 August.

Thus the scandal we call Watergate was not one single conspiracy by Nixon, nor a simple conspiracy by his opponents to run him from office. Rather, it was the culmination of many smaller plots and pressure campaigns mounted over the years by deep state insiders, drawing on their knowledge of the country's darkest political and national security secrets. Watergate was like an eruption of pus from a sore on the body politic that had been festering for more than a decade.

Although Watergate investigators never pieced the whole story together, they had some glimmerings of how these covert networks played out in the Nixon scandals. Prosecutors secretly called in John Roselli for questioning, a fact only disclosed years later. According to the mobster's

¹¹⁸ Fred Emery, *Watergate* (New York: Touchstone, 1994), p. 193.

¹¹⁹ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, pp. 35, 38-40. It is important to emphasize that Nixon was manipulating the CIA's sensitivity over the assassination issue, not his own.

attorney, prosecutors were checking out a theory that the White House ordered the break-in

'...because Nixon or somebody in the Republican Party suspected that . . . a document existed showing Nixon was involved with or knew what was going on with the CIA and the assassination of Castro. . . They wanted to try to get this information that Nixon suspected [the Democrats] were going to try to use against him.'¹²⁰

Evidence for this particular theory is thin.¹²¹ But the fact that Watergate investigators took the time to interrogate Roselli shows that his secrets still had power. A couple of years later Roselli would testify again before Congress, this time on the JFK assassination. For his troubles, he ended up being assassinated himself – strangled, stuffed into a 55-gallon drum, and dumped into waters off Florida. Many researchers suspect that the hit was ordered by Santos Trafficante.¹²²

These political intrigues would have been impossible in a truly open society. The wielders of secret information and secret power – billionaires, CIA operatives, mobsters, super-lawyers, journalists, and lobbyists – are only rarely held accountable for their invisible deeds. So long as they continue to operate with no effective public scrutiny, America's political system will remain highly vulnerable to manipulation at great cost to our democracy.

*

¹²⁰ Rappleye and Becker, *All American Mafioso*, p. 307. As it happens, Frank Sturgis claimed that he and others on the burglary team were looking for a Cuban dossier on assassination plots against Castro. For a lengthy, but ultimately unpersuasive, treatment of this motive, see Waldron, *Watergate*.

¹²¹ There is little credible evidence implicating Nixon in the plots to murder Castro. See Evan Thomas, 'Whose Obsession Is It, Anyway? Oliver Stone Can't Resist Linking Nixon to JFK's Assassination, but He's Wrong,' *Newsweek*, 11 December 1995; Christopher Matthews, 'New Tapes Debunk Oliver Stone's "Nixon"', *San Francisco Examiner*, 1 January 1998. For a contrary view, see Summers, *Arrogance of Power*, p. 177ff.

¹²² Nicholas Gage, 'Roselli Called a Victim of Mafia Because of His Senate Testimony', *New York Times*, 25 February 1977. Sam Giancana was also the victim of a mob hit.

Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books, including *The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War, and the International Drug Traffic* (Stanford, 2012); *Cocaine Politics: Drugs, Armies, and the CIA in Central America* (University of California, 1998); and *The Iran-Contra Connection: Secret Teams and Covert Operations in the Reagan Era* (South End Press, 1987).

Bibliography

Note: This article is based on declassified FBI and CIA documents held in the National Archives (NARA) and mostly available online at <<http://www.maryferrell.org/>>. These documents, as well as congressional hearings and articles, are cited in the footnotes. Books cited are listed below.

Reports

HSCA Report: or House of Representatives, Select Committee on Assassinations, staff report, *The Evolution and Implications of the CIA-Sponsored Assassination Conspiracies Against Fidel Castro*, March 1979

IG Report: or CIA Inspector General, *Report on Plots to Assassinate Fidel Castro*, 23 May 1967

Interim Report: or Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities (Church Committee), interim report, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders*, 94/1 (US Government Printing Office, 1975)

SWH: or U.S. Senate, Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities, *Executive Session Hearings*, 93/2 (1974)

Books

Abell, Tyler, ed. *Drew Pearson Diaries, 1949-1959*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1974.

Anderson, Jack with Daryl Gibson. *Peace, War, and Politics: An Eyewitness Account*. New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1999.

Bartlett, Donald L. and James B. Steele. *Empire: The Life,*

Legend, and Madness of Howard Hughes. New York: W. W. Norton, 1979.

Beschloss, Michael. *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997.

Bradlee, Ben. *A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

Breckenridge, Scott. *The CIA and the Cold War: A Memoir*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1973.

Carrozza, Anthony. *William D. Pawley: The Extraordinary Life of the Adventurer, Entrepreneur, and Diplomat Who Co-Founded the Flying Tigers*. Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2012.

Davenport, Elaine and Eddy, Paul with Hurwitz, Mark. *The Hughes Papers* (London: Sphere Books, 1977).

Davis, John H. *Mafia Kingfish: Carlos Marcello and the Assassination of John F. Kennedy*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1989.

Demaris, Ovid. *Captive City: Chicago in Chains*. New York: Lyle Stuart, 1969.

Emery, Fred. *Watergate*. New York: Touchstone, 1994.

Evans, Peter. *Ari: The Life and Times of Aristotle Socrates Onassis*. New York: Summit Books, 1986.

Feldstein, Mark. *Poisoning the Press: Richard Nixon, Jack Anderson and the Rise of Washington's Scandal Culture*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.

Gentry, Curt. *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets*. New York: Norton, 1991.

Haldeman, H. R. with Joseph DiMona. *The Ends of Power*. New York: Times Books, 1978.

Hinckle, Warren and William Turner. *The Fish is Red: The Story of the Secret War Against Castro*. New York: Harper and Row, 1981.

Hougan, Jim. *Spooks: The Haunting of America—The Private Use of Secret Agents*. New York: William Morrow, 1978.

Hughes, Maureen. *The Countess and the Mob*. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2010.

Hunt, E. Howard, with Greg Aunapu, *American Spy: My Secret History in the CIA, Watergate & Beyond*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007.

James, Ralph and Estelle. *Hoffa and the Teamsters: A Study of Union Power*. Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1965.

Kaiser, David. *The Road to Dallas: The Assassination of John F. Kennedy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Kutler, Stanley. *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes*. New York: The Free Press, 1997.

Kutler, Stanley. *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1992.

Liddy, G. Gordon, *Will*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980.

Lukas, J. Anthony. *Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years*. New York: Viking, 1976.

Maheu, Robert and Richard Hack. *Next to Hughes: Behind the Power and Tragic Downfall of Howard Hughes by His Closest Adviser*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

Mahoney, Richard. *Sons & Brothers: The Days of Jack and Bobby Kennedy*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999.

Moldea, Dan. *The Hoffa Wars: Teamsters, Rebels, Politicians and the Mob*. New York: Paddington Press, 1978.

Oudes, Bruce, ed. *From the President: Richard Nixon's Secret Files*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.

Pack, Robert. *Edward Bennett Williams for the Defense*. New York: Harper & Row, 1983.

Pearson, Drew. *Washington Merry-Go-Round: The Drew Pearson Diaries, 1960-1969*. Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2015.

Ragano, Frank with Selwyn Raab. *Mob Lawyer*. New York: Scribners, 1994.

Rappleye, Charles and Ed Becker. *All American Mafioso: The John Rosselli Story*. New York: Doubleday, 1991.

Reid, Ed and Ovid Demaris. *The Green Felt Jungle*. New York: Pocket Books, 1963.

Russo, Gus. *The Outfit: The Role of Chicago's Underworld in the Shaping of Modern America*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2001.

Scott, Peter Dale. *Oswald, Mexico, and Deep Politics*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013.

Sheridan, Walter. *The Fall and Rise of Jimmy Hoffa*. New York: Saturday Review Press, 1972.

Smith, Joseph Burkholder. *Portrait of a Cold Warrior*. G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1976.

Summers, Anthony. *The Arrogance of Power: The Secret World of Richard Nixon*. New York: Viking, 2000.

Thomas, Evan. *The Man to See: Edward Bennett Williams*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991.

Waldron, Lamar with Thom Hartmann. *Ultimate Sacrifice*. New York: Carroll & Graf, 2005.

Waldron, Lamar. *Watergate: The Hidden History*. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012.