

The Deep State's JFK Triumph over Trump

Fifty-four years after President Kennedy's assassination, the CIA and FBI demanded more time to decide what secrets to keep hiding – and a chastened President Trump bowed to their power, observes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

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*It was summer 1963 when a senior official of CIA's operations directorate treated our Junior Officer Trainee (JOT) class to an unbridled rant against **President John F. Kennedy**. He accused JFK, among other things, of rank cowardice in refusing to send U.S. armed forces to bail out Cuban rebels pinned down during the CIA-launched invasion at the Bay of Pigs, blowing the chance to drive Cuba's Communist leader **Fidel Castro** from power.*

It seemed beyond odd that a CIA official would voice such scathing criticism of a sitting President at a training course for those selected to be CIA's future leaders. I remember thinking to myself, "This guy is unhinged; he would kill Kennedy, given the chance."

Our special guest lecturer looked a lot like **E. Howard Hunt**, but more than a half-century later, I cannot be sure it was he. Our notes from such training/indoctrination were classified and kept under lock and key.

At the end of our JOT orientation, we budding Agency leaders had to make a basic choice between joining the directorate for substantive analysis or the operations directorate where case officers run spies and organize regime changes (in those days, we just called the process overthrowing governments).

I chose the analysis directorate and, once ensconced in the brand new headquarters building in Langley, Virginia, I found it strange that subway-style turnstiles prevented analysts from going to the "operations side of the house," and vice versa. Truth be told, we were never one happy family.



President John F. Kennedy in the motorcade through Dallas shortly before his assassination on Nov. 22, 1963. (Photo credit: Walt Cisco, Dallas Morning News)

I cannot speak for my fellow analysts in the early 1960s, but it never entered my mind that operatives on the other side of the turnstiles might be capable of assassinating a President – the very President whose challenge to do something for our country had brought many of us to Washington in the first place. But, barring the emergence of a courageous whistleblower-patriot like **Daniel Ellsberg**, **Chelsea Manning** or **Edward Snowden**, I do not expect to

live long enough to learn precisely who orchestrated and carried out the assassination of JFK.

And yet, in a sense, those particulars seem less important than two main lessons learned:

(1) If a President can face down intense domestic pressure from the power elite and turn toward peace with perceived foreign enemies, then anything is possible. The darkness of Kennedy's murder should not obscure the light of that basic truth; and

(2) There is ample evidence pointing to a state execution of a President willing to take huge risks for peace. While no post-Kennedy president can ignore that harsh reality, it remains possible that a future President with the vision and courage of JFK might beat the odds – particularly as the American Empire disintegrates and domestic discontent grows.

I do hope to be around next April after the 180-day extension for release of the remaining JFK documents. But – absent a gutsy whistleblower – I wouldn't be surprised to see in April, a *Washington Post* banner headline much like the one that appeared Saturday: "*JFK files: The promise of revelations derailed by CIA, FBI.*"

The New Delay Is the Story

You might have thought that almost 54 years after Kennedy was murdered in the streets of Dallas – and after knowing for a quarter century the supposedly final deadline for releasing the JFK files – the CIA and FBI would not have needed a six-month extension to decide what secrets that they still must hide.

Journalist **Caitlin Johnstone** [hits the nail on the head](#) in pointing out that the biggest revelation from last week's limited release of the JFK files is "the fact that the FBI and CIA still desperately need to keep secrets about something that happened 54 years ago."

What was released on Oct. 26, was a tiny fraction of what had remained undisclosed in the National Archives. To find out why, one needs to have some appreciation of a 70-year-old American political tradition that might be called "fear of the spooks."

That the CIA and FBI are still choosing what we should be allowed to see concerning who murdered John Kennedy may seem unusual, but there is hoary precedent for it. After JFK's assassination on Nov. 22, 1963, the well-connected **Allen Dulles**, whom Kennedy had fired as CIA director after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, got himself appointed to the Warren Commission and took the lead in shaping the investigation of JFK's murder.



Autopsy photo of President John F. Kennedy.

By becoming *de facto* head of the Commission, Dulles was perfectly placed to protect himself and his associates, if any commissioners or investigators were tempted to question whether Dulles and the CIA played any role in killing Kennedy. When a few independent-minded journalists did succumb to that temptation, they were immediately branded – you guessed it – "conspiracy theorists."

And so, the big question remains: Did Allen Dulles and other “cloak-and-dagger” CIA operatives have a hand in John Kennedy’s assassination and subsequent cover-up? In my view and the view of many more knowledgeable investigators, the best dissection of the evidence on the murder appears in James Douglass’s 2008 book, *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters*.

After updating and arraying the abundant evidence, and conducting still more interviews, Douglass concludes that the answer to the big question is Yes. Reading Douglass’s book today may help explain why so many records are still withheld from release, even in redacted form, and why, indeed, we may never see them in their entirety.

Truman: CIA a Frankenstein?

When Kennedy was assassinated, it must have occurred to former **President Harry Truman**, as it did to many others, that the disgraced Allen Dulles and his associates might have conspired to get rid of a President they felt was soft on Communism – and dismissive of the Deep State of that time. Not to mention their vengeful desire to retaliate for Kennedy’s response to the Bay of Pigs fiasco. (Firing Allen Dulles and other CIA paragons of the Deep State for that fiasco simply was not done.)

Exactly one month after John Kennedy was killed, the *Washington Post* published an op-ed by Harry Truman titled “Limit CIA Role to Intelligence.” The first sentence read,

“I think it has become necessary to take another look at the purpose and operations of our Central Intelligence Agency.”

Strangely, the op-ed appeared only in the *Post*’s early edition on Dec. 22, 1963. It was excised from that day’s later editions and, despite being authored by the President who was responsible for setting up the CIA in 1947, the all-too-relevant op-ed was ignored in all other major media.



CIA Director Allen Dulles

Truman clearly believed that the spy agency had lurched off in what Truman thought were troubling directions. He began his op-ed by underscoring “the original reason why I thought it necessary to organize this Agency ... and what I expected it to do.” It would be “charged with the collection of all intelligence reports from every available source, and to have those reports reach me as President without Department ‘treatment’ or interpretations.”

Truman then moved quickly to one of the main things clearly bothering him. He wrote

“the most important thing was to guard against the chance of intelligence being used to influence or to lead the President into unwise decisions.”

It was not difficult to see this as a reference to how one of the agency’s early directors, Allen Dulles, tried to trick President Kennedy into sending U.S. forces to rescue the group of

invaders who had landed on the beach at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961 with no chance of success, absent the speedy commitment of U.S. air and ground support. The planned mouse-trapping of the then-novice President Kennedy had been underpinned by a rosy “analysis” showing how this pin-prick on the beach would lead to a popular uprising against Fidel Castro.

Wallowing in the Bay of Pigs

Arch-Establishment figure Allen Dulles was offended when young President Kennedy, on entering office, had the temerity to question the CIA’s Bay of Pigs plans, which had been set in motion under President Dwight Eisenhower. When Kennedy made it clear he would *not* approve the use of U.S. combat forces, Dulles set out, with supreme confidence, to give the President no choice except to send U.S. troops to the rescue.

Coffee-stained notes handwritten by Allen Dulles were discovered after his death and reported by historian **Lucien S. Vandembroucke**. In his notes, Dulles explained that, “when the chips were down,” Kennedy would be forced by “the realities of the situation” to give whatever military support was necessary “rather than permit the enterprise to fail.”



Cuban leader Fidel Castro with his trademark cigar.

The “enterprise” which Dulles said could not fail was, of course, the overthrow of Fidel Castro. After mounting several failed operations to assassinate Castro, this time Dulles meant to get his man, with little or no attention to how Castro’s patrons in Moscow might react eventually. (The next year, the Soviets agreed to install nuclear missiles in Cuba as a deterrent to future U.S. aggression, leading to the Cuban Missile Crisis).

In 1961, the reckless Joint Chiefs of Staff, whom then-Deputy Secretary of State **George Ball** later described as a “sewer of deceit,” relished any chance to confront the Soviet Union and give it, at least, a black eye. (One can still smell the odor from that sewer in many of the documents released last week.)

But Kennedy stuck to his guns, so to speak. A few months after the abortive invasion of Cuba — and his refusal to send the U.S. military to the rescue — Kennedy fired Dulles and his co-conspirators and told a friend that he wanted to “splinter the CIA into a thousand pieces and scatter it into the winds.” Clearly, the outrage was mutual.

When *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters* came out, the mainstream media had an allergic reaction and gave it almost no reviews. It is a safe bet, though, that Barack Obama was given a copy and that this might account in some degree for his continual deference – timorousness even – toward the CIA.

Could fear of the Deep State be largely why President Obama felt he had to leave the Cheney/Bush-anointed CIA torturers, kidnappers and black-prison wardens in place, instructing his first CIA chief, **Leon Panetta**, to become, in effect, the agency’s lawyer rather than take charge? Is this why Obama felt he could not fire his clumsily devious Director of National Intelligence **James Clapper**, who had to apologize to Congress for giving “clearly erroneous” testimony under oath in March 2013? Does Obama’s fear account for his allowing then-National Security Agency Director Keith Alexander and counterparts in the FBI to continue to mislead the American people, even though the documents released by Edward Snowden showed them – as well as Clapper – to be lying about the government’s surveillance activities?

Is this why Obama fought tooth and nail to protect CIA **Director John Brennan** by trying to thwart publication of the comprehensive Senate Intelligence Committee investigation of CIA torture, which was based on original Agency cables, emails, and headquarters memos? [See [here](#) and [here](#).]

The Deep State Today

Many Americans cling to a comforting conviction that the Deep State is a fiction, at least in a “democracy” like the United States. References to the enduring powers of the security agencies and other key bureaucracies have been essentially banned by the mainstream media, which many other suspicious Americans have come to see as just one more appendage of the Deep State.



Sen. Charles Schumer, (D-N.Y)

But occasionally the reality of how power works pokes through in some unguarded remark by a Washington insider, someone like **Sen. Chuck Schumer**, D-New York, the Senate Minority Leader with 36 years of experience in Congress. As Senate Minority Leader, he also is an *ex officio* member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, which is supposed to oversee the intelligence agencies.

During a Jan. 3, 2017 interview with MSNBC’S **Rachel Maddow**, Schumer told Maddow nonchalantly about the dangers awaiting President-elect Donald Trump if he kept on “taking on the intelligence community.” She and Schumer were discussing Trump’s sharp tweeting regarding U.S. intelligence and evidence of “Russian hacking” (which both Schumer and Maddow treat as flat fact).

Schumer [said](#):

“Let me tell you, you take on the intelligence community, they have six ways from Sunday at getting back at you. So even for a practical, supposedly hard-nosed businessman, he’s being really dumb to do this.”

Three days after that interview, President Obama’s intelligence chiefs released a nearly evidence-free “assessment” claiming that the Kremlin engaged in a covert operation to put Trump into office, fueling a “scandal” that has hobbled Trump’s presidency. On Monday, Russia-gate special prosecutor Robert Mueller indicted Trump’s one-time campaign manager Paul Manafort on unrelated money laundering, tax and foreign lobbying charges, apparently in the hope that Manafort will provide incriminating evidence against Trump.

So, President Trump has been in office long enough to have learned how the game is played and the “six ways from Sunday” that the intelligence community has for “getting back at you.” He appears to be as intimidated as was President Obama.

Trump’s awkward acquiescence in the Deep State’s last-minute foot-dragging regarding release of the JFK files is simply the most recent sign that he, too, is under the thumb of what the Soviets used to call “the organs of state security.”

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