

The following earlier op-ed is included here because it deals with the issue of whether President Kennedy knew about the CIA assassination plots against Fidel Castro.

The Washington Times

Oliver Stone, Richard Nixon and Fidel Castro

(The role, or lack of role, of presidents Kennedy and Eisenhower in the plots to kill Castro)

By David Pitts

(Originally published January 5, 1996)

Of the many instances of historical revisionism in Oliver Stone's new movie, "Nixon," none is more bizarre than the liberal director's assertion that Richard Nixon was in on CIA assassination plans to kill Fidel Castro.

President Nixon is portrayed as having intimate knowledge of the program of "executive action" while serving as vice president in the Eisenhower administration when the schemes were first hatched against Fidel Castro and a number of other foreign leaders.

The CIA murder attempts – eight in total, some involving Mafia figures – continued during the Kennedy administration. But Mr. Stone portrays President Kennedy as innocently unaware of the intelligence agency's activities against the Cuban leader.

The facts, as documented by the U.S. Senate's investigation of assassination attempts against foreign leaders, do not support Oliver Stone's contentions in his film.

Scores of witnesses, including high-ranking administration officials and CIA operatives in the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations, testified under oath before the special Senate committee chaired by liberal Democrat, Frank Church.

The committee's report, based on 8,000 pages of sworn testimony and published in 1975, remains the most thorough investigation of the murky world of covert operations, specifically of assassination attempts, ever documented.

The report states: "There was insufficient evidence from which the committee could conclude that presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, or their close advisors, or the Special Group, ordered the assassination of Castro." The committee did not even mention Mr. Nixon in its conclusion since none of the witnesses who testified indicated that the vice president had any knowledge of the plots.

Instead, the report addresses how much presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy may have known about the murder schemes and whether the lack of a trail leading directly to the Oval Office was the because the two chief executives were allowed "plausible deniability."

Top officials in the Eisenhower administration testified that the president had no knowledge of the plots. Even the CIA director, Allen Dulles, may have been kept in the dark, although the Senate report says, "The evidence as to whether Allen Dulles, CIA director during the Eisenhower administration, was informed of the Castro assassination attempt is not clear."

Richard Bissell, the CIA's deputy director of plans, authorized the early assassination attempts, according to the report. But Mr. Bissell testified that he "did not inform the Special Group or President Eisenhower of the Castro assassination operation." Mr. Bissell said that he "knew nothing of authorization outside the CIA for the Castro assassination effort."

Gordon Gray, President Eisenhower's national security advisor, confirmed Bissell's view testifying, "that the Special Group, which was in charge of covert operations, never approved a Castro assassination attempt."

Similarly, all of President Kennedy's senior advisors and cabinet secretaries who testified said they were convinced he had not authorized and had no knowledge of the plots although two witnesses clearly indicate the state of Mr. Castro's health pre-occupied President Kennedy.

Sen. George Smathers, a personal friend of the president, testified Mr. Kennedy once asked him what he thought would happen in Latin America if Fidel Castro were to be assassinated. "I told the president that even as much as I disliked Fidel Castro that I did not think it would be a good idea for there to be even considered an assassination of Fidel Castro, and the president of the United States completely agreed with me."

Tad Szulc, a New York Times reporter, testified that JFK also asked him what he would think of an attempt on the Cuban leader's life. Mr. Szulc stated that he told the president it would be wrong to do that. He quoted Mr. Kennedy as saying, "I agree with you completely."

Szulc continued: "He (JFK) then went on for a few minutes to make the point how strongly he and his brother felt that the United States for moral reasons should never be in a situation of having recourse to assassination." Mr. Szulc added, however, that Kennedy indicated he was "under terrific pressure," to approve plans to kill Castro, and that he was "resisting pressures." In fact, the CIA operation already was in progress.

Contrary to Mr. Stone's theorizing in "Nixon," there is no evidence that presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, let alone their vice presidents, Nixon and Johnson, knew the CIA was actively trying to kill Fidel Castro, although the idea appears to have been raised and not specifically ruled out.

The facts about who knew what about the assassination attempts may in one sense be beside the point. Both administrations were actively committed to the overthrow of the Castro dictatorship, a course of action that, had it succeeded, might logically have led to the Cuban leader's death.

The Senate report indicates little difference between the policies of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, or the knowledge of top officials in either administration, about the plots to kill Castro. If anything, the Kennedy administration was more determined to get rid of the Castro

regime than the Eisenhower administration, and during the 1960 election campaign, Mr. Kennedy specifically criticized Vice President Nixon for not doing enough to end the Cuban dictatorship.

Mr. Stone's movie would have been more effective without gross distortions of Mr. Nixon's views and actions. There is enough material on the 37th president to appeal to people of Mr. Stone's persuasion. It need not be invented.