The White House saw the resumed secret war as a way of keeping Castro off balance and neutralizing bureaucratic discontent while deciding whether it would be possible to risk a try at accommodation. But the CIA, under its distended theory of authorization, saw it as a licence to renew its attempts to kill the Maximum Leader. These attempts made even less sense in 1963 than they had before. The notion of invading Cuba had been dead for years. I suppose that, in 1961 and 1962, CIA might still have regarded assassination as the ultimate logic of a frenetic overthrow-Castro policy drastically modified and with the White House drifting toward accommodation, assassination had no logic at all.

In the Spring of 1963, moreover, the Standing Group had asked the CIA’s Intelligence Branch to assess possible developments in the event of Castro’s death. This had nothing to do with assassination plots; estimating the consequences of the death of a national leader, from whatever cause, was a favorite intelligence exercise, applied indifferently to de Gaulle, Khrushchev, Salazar or Castro. The CIA Office of National Estimates decided that Castro’s death, far from benefiting the United States, would probably mean that “his brother Raul or some other figure in the regime would, with Soviet backing and help, take over.” And, if Castro were by any chance assassinated, “the U.S. would be widely charged with complicity.” (56)

So far as the Church committee could discover, the Clandestine Service’s assassinatory enthusiasm had lain dormant after January 1963, when its technicians failed to perfect the explosive seashell designed to blowup the Maximum Skindiver.

SINCE you are going to see Kennedy again, be an emissary of peace… I don’t want anything. I don’t expect anything. But there are positive elements in what you report. (see note 88)

“Es una mala noticia,” he muttered again and again; “This is bad news.” To Daniel: “Voila, there is the end of your mission of peace.” Later: “I’ll tell you one thing: at least Kennedy was an enemy to whom we had become accustomed. This is a serious matter, an extremely serious matter.” In the afternoon he had a fusillade of questions about Lyndon Johnson. Finally, as if well aware that political leaders might not be able to control their intelligence agencies: “What authority does he exercise over the CIA?” (note 89)

The next day at the UN, Lechuga at last received instructions from Castro to begin talks with Atwood. On December 4, Atwood told me that his secret explorations were, he believed, reaching a climax; that Castro might be trying to get out from under Guevara and the Communists and strike a deal with the United States. (90) But on December 23, Bundy observed at his morning staff meeting that, because Lyndon Johnson expected to run against Nixon, he did not want to give him any openings; “i.e., he does not want to appear soft on anything, especially Cuba.” (91) Bundy informed Atwood that “the Cuban exercise would probably be put on ice for a while – which it was,” Atwood wrote in 1967, “and where it has been ever since.” (92)

Castro, looking back a decade later, reflecting perhaps on an opportunity he had squandered because he overestimated his capacity to make a revolution in Venezuela,
(Note: June ’64, after his operatives failed in Venezuela, Castro said he would cut off all adi to revolutionary movements in Latin America in return for a normalization of relations with the US. 94) said of Kennedy, “He was one of the few men who had enough courage to question a policy and to change it…We would have preferred that he continue in the presidency.” (93) On balance, it must be judged unlikely that Fidel Castro was conspiring to kill the American President with whom he was striving to come to terms --- and whose successor offered no promise of more favorable policies.*

*Donald E. Schulz also emphasizes Castro’s public threats in his September interview with Daniel Harker: “If Castro were going to have Kennedy assassinated would he broadcast it to the world? … The demand for retaliation would have been overwhelming” (Kennedy and the Cuban Connection, Foreign Policy, Spring 1977)

Nor could he be sure how violent the opposition in his own ranks might be to a policy of rapprochement --- from Che Guevara; from the communists; from his intelligence people, who like the CIA, might have unleashed projects of their own; from allies in the American underworld, who had independent reasons for wishing to end the power of the Kennedys.

Kennedy also faced a formidable resistance to a change in course. The State Dept, apart from Harriman, was not happy with Kennedy’s willingness to accept the social changes wrought by the revolution; nor it must be supposed, did Kennedy’s Miami speech of November 18 delight former owners of plantations, mines, and mills for whom the “liberation” of Cuba meant primarily the restoration of lost wealth and privilege. And, though the Attwood plan was closely held, it seems inconceivable that the CIA knew nothing about it. American intelligence had Cuban UN diplomats under incessant surveillance. It followed their movements, tapped their telephone calls, read their letters, intercepted their cables. Suspecting, as it must have, that Attwood and Lechuga were doing something more than exchanging daiquiri recipes, the CIA, in pursuing the AM/LASH operation, must be convicted either of abysmal incompetence, which is by no means to be excluded, or else of a studied attempt to wreck Kennedy’s search for normalization.

But the deepest rage of all against John Kennedy was among the anti-Castro fanaticos in the Cuban exile community. In their obsessed view normalization would complete the perfidious course begun at the Bay of Pigs and carried farther during the missile crisis. No one had a greater interest in putting the Kennedy-Castro explorations on ice than those Cubans who had committed their lives to the destruction of the Castro regime.

Robert Kennedy had stayed in touch with his friends in the Brigade. But the administration made no effort to keep the Brigade alive as an entity or to make it a political force or military force. (95) Instead those of its members not recruited by CIA were offered only the opportunity to enlist in the United States Army as individuals. The Brigade leaders protested to the CIA in June that commando raids would not overthrow Castro, that the only hope was “a massive U.S.

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intervention.” They were, Helms reported to the Attorney General, “disheartened in that they do not foresee such an invasion.” (96)

Most Bay of Pigs prisoners were constrained for a season by their loyalty to the
Kennedys, to whom, after all, they owed their freedom. Other exiles were less constrained. Miro Cardona resigned as chairman of the Cuban Revolutionary Council in an outburst of wild accusations against the Kennedy administration. A broadside of unknown origin told Cuban exiles in Miami that “only one development” would return them to their homeland --- “if an inspired act of God should place in the White House within weeks a Texan know to be a friend of all Latin Americans.” (97) The Task Force W Cubans, trained by the CIA in clandestinity and violence, brooded darkly over what one of them, Dr. Orlando Bosch, denounced in an angry letter to the President as their betrayal by the Kennedys. (98) Thereafter the compliant ones, like Barker, Sturgis, Martinez, huddled around the CIA case officers and went down a trail of espionage, deception and dirty tricks that ended in Watergate. The crazy ones, like Orlando Bosch, became terrorists. In 1968 Bosch’s exploits won him ten years in the federal penitentiary. Paroled in 1972, he went underground, resumed murderous activities of diverse sorts and in 1977 was in a Venezuelan prison charged with organizing the bombing of an Air Cuban plane and killing all seventy-three aboard. Other CIA Cubans were implicated in a wave of bombings and killings in Miami. Even the once sober Miro Cardona cried in 1973, “We are alone, absolutely alone… There is only one route left to follow and we will follow it: violence.” (99)

The men in Washington who in 1960 had planned the murder of Castro and the invasion on Cuba poured a stream of malignant emotion, pro-Castro and anti-Castro, into the very wellsprings of American life.