

A Cold War Odyssey: The Oswald Files

By Max Holland

On 20 June 1999, Russian president Boris Yeltsin unexpectedly handed US President Bill Clinton more than 80 pages of “declassified” Soviet-era documents pertaining to the shocking murder of President John F. Kennedy.¹ In doing so, Yeltsin added yet another chapter to the already convoluted saga of Moscow’s archival response to the November 1963 assassination.

There have been 10 authorized and significant disclosures in the nearly four decades since 22 November by the Soviet Union and its successor states.² Primary information has become available via three routes: the transfer of actual documents; the release of summaries based on authorized access to documents; and the publication of books based on privileged or unusual (to say the least) access to key archival files.

This piecemeal release of documentation began within days of the assassination, in recognition of the gravity of questions about Lee Harvey Oswald’s sojourn in the Soviet Union from October 1959 to May 1962.

- On 25 November 1963, Anastas Mikoyan, deputy chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, presented an expurgated version to the US State Department of the KGB’s 23 November summary report about Oswald, hurriedly compiled for the CPSU Central Committee after Oswald’s arrest.³
- On 30 November 1963, Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador to Washington, gave Secretary of State Dean Rusk photocopies from the embassy’s consular file on the Oswalds. The documents included a letter from Oswald dated as recently as 9 November.⁴
- In May 1964, after a request from the presidential Commission on the assassination, chaired by Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, transmitted via the State Department, the Soviet government provided additional routine documents (such as Oswald’s application for an exit visa) generated during the American’s 2½-year stay in Moscow and Minsk, Belarus (then Belorussia).⁵

This May 1964 release would be the last disclosure for nearly 30 years, although US interest in Soviet records never flagged during the remaining decades of the Cold War. Most notably, in the late 1970s the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) conducted another investigation into President Kennedy’s death and reopened the issue formally. Meetings were held between HSCA representatives and officials at the Soviet embassy in Washington. At one such encounter, a senior Soviet official explained that the request presented Moscow with “serious problems.” If Soviet agencies answered some questions, “they might find themselves having to answer other questions and, in the final analysis, no one would be satisfied with their responses anyway.”

Ultimately, the Soviet response to HSCA was that “all relevant documents concerning Oswald had already been transmitted” to the Warren Commission and that “no further documents could be made available.”⁶

The end of the Cold War opened new opportunities and so the pace of releases picked up again, although disclosure to deepen historical understanding was seldom the guiding principle. The release of Soviet-era, assassination-related documents remained highly erratic and often influenced by other considerations.⁷

- In November 1991, ABC News “Nightline” broadcast a program devoted to summarizing information contained in Oswald’s 6-volume, 4-foot thick KGB case file, then on deposit in the central KGB archives in Moscow.⁸
- In August 1992, *Izvestiya*, a Moscow newspaper, published a 5-part series based upon Oswald’s KGB case file, No. 31451.⁹ The file itself was now in the possession of the Belarusian KGB (BKGB) after having become the object of a tug-of-war between Russia and Belarus. The latter claimed ownership on the grounds that the bulk of the dossier had been compiled by BKGB counterintelligence agents.¹⁰
- In 1993, Oleg Nechiporenko, a retired KGB colonel, published a memoir in which he recounted, among other things, Oswald’s September 1963 visit to the Soviet embassy in Mexico City, where Nechiporenko was posted at the time.¹¹ Nechiporenko’s account was partially based on access to archival documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CPSU Central Committee, KGB/BKGB, and the author reproduced parts of several documents verbatim in his text.
- In 1994, Yeltsin’s journal for the tumultuous period August 1991 to October 1993 was published in the West as *Boris Yeltsin: The Struggle for Russia*.¹² Without much explication Yeltsin’s gratuitously included (in an appendix) portions of four KGB memos to the Central Committee CPSU from 1963, all of which pertained to the assassination.
- In 1995, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs turned over five KGB memoranda (a total of 17 pages) in response to a query from the Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB), the first official US entity to reopen the matter since the end of the Cold War.¹³ This very limited response did not even include the four KGB documents Yeltsin cited in his 1994 memoir.
- Also in 1995, Norman Mailer published a book most notable for its narrative about Oswald’s years in Minsk. This portion of Mailer’s book was based upon privileged access to Oswald’s case file and BKGB officers who had been directly involved. Mailer quoted actual

transcripts from the electronic surveillance of the Oswalds' apartment, as well as from reports written by the BKGB officers who had tailed Oswald in Minsk.¹⁴

• In 1997, Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali published *One Hell of a Gamble*. Though mostly devoted to the Cuban Missile Crisis, the book contained a chapter on the assassination and its aftermath which drew upon select documents from KGB, GRU, and Foreign Ministry archives.¹⁵

Yeltsin's 1999 gift thus fit squarely into a pattern of disclosure by installment. As the State Department prepared translations of this latest tease, Russian officials involved in gathering the records cautioned against expecting too much from the once-classified documents. "They don't contain any new revelations," Vladimir Sokolov, a Foreign Ministry archivist, told *Moscow Times* in late June. "There's nothing new or sensational there."¹⁶ Sokolov's assessment seemed accurate once the National Archives released the translations in August 1999. Though interesting (one of the items was Oswald's handwritten 16 October 1959 letter to the Supreme Soviet requesting immediate asylum and citizenship), the documents did not alter Washington's conclusion regarding KGB recruitment of Oswald, nor did they even shed much new light on what was already known about Oswald's time in the Soviet Union.

Indeed, once the translations became available, it seemed as if there was even less to Yeltsin's gift than initially met the eye. Mixed in among genuinely "TOP SECRET" documents were such innocuous items as a news commentary published by TASS in November 1963. The release also contained Khrushchev's long-available letter of condolence to President Johnson, along with several other routine condolence letters.¹⁷ Moreover, some of the documents that Yeltsin made available so ostentatiously had already been quoted from at length in Nechiporenko's 1993 memoir, and one CPSU Central Committee document had been previously released to the ARRB in 1995.

Nonetheless, there were a few truly novel documents mixed in among the Yeltsin papers, and these shed archival light on the past and ongoing reluctance to open relevant Soviet files. It has long been understood that Moscow faced an enormous problem after a self-styled Marxist, who had actually lived in the Soviet Union, was arrested in connection with President Kennedy's assassination. The preternaturally secretive Soviet leadership was agonizingly caught between a rock and a hard place: damned if it wasn't forthcoming and likely to be damned if it was (or so the Communist leaders thought). What had never been previously documented, however, is the torturous internal wrangling that occurred before Soviet leaders released the handful of records made available in 1963-1964.

The single most revealing episode involves two familiar figures—Anatoly Dobrynin and Anastas Mikoyan—who apparently played the key roles in bringing about the second Soviet release, that of documents from the Washington embassy's consular files. Working together, they managed

to bridge the gap between what reason suggested and what caution and ideology dictated. Dobrynin's actions, in particular, illustrate why he was so invaluable to both sides during the cold war. Few if any envoys had Dobrynin's suppleness of mind and ability to square the circle between two systems that could barely comprehend each other's logic. Little wonder that Dobrynin was Moscow's ambassador to six cold war American presidents, as the subtitle of his memoir, *In Confidence*, points out.¹⁸

The idea to make the consular records available apparently originated with ambassador Dobrynin not long after Oswald's arrest on the afternoon of 22 November. A prompt search of the embassy's consular files had revealed several pieces of correspondence, including a letter from Oswald dated 9 November. Because of its proximity to the assassination, Dobrynin immediately realized this letter was bound to be especially sensitive, regardless of its contents. In a TOP SECRET/HIGHEST PRIORITY cable to Moscow, Dobrynin reported that US authorities were undoubtedly aware of both the consular file and the latest letter because all mail routed via the US Post Office was routinely opened by the FBI. Although the US government knew that the Soviets knew about the mail-opening operation, Dobrynin anticipated that "U.S. authorities may ask us to familiarize them with the correspondence in our possession." The Soviet ambassador then proposed sharing the letter if not the entire file once internal Foreign Ministry documents had been removed, "inasmuch as there is nothing that compromises us in this correspondence."¹⁹

While Dobrynin's proposal was conditional—the documents were to be offered "as a last resort," as if to underscore the favor—it nonetheless qualified as a remarkable suggestion. Consular records were considered highly privileged and rarely exchanged, even between governments with the best of diplomatic relations.²⁰ In addition, the notion of agreeing to yield these documents at any point was all the more remarkable given the highly-charged atmosphere that was rapidly developing. As Dobrynin observed in the last line of his 22 November cable, the pervasive radio and TV coverage of the assassination was "alluding more and more often to the fact that the assassin was evidently connected with 'extreme leftist elements.'"²¹

Dobrynin heard nothing back about his proposal for two days. Finally, on Monday, 25 November, the CPSU Central Committee approved the draft response proposed by Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and KGB chief Vladimir Semichastny. The answer to Dobrynin was almost predictable, or at least in keeping with familiar Soviet behavior. "In the event that the U.S. authorities request you to provide information," began the instructions, "you can give them the following information on this matter." The balance of the cable was the most limited recitation of bare facts imaginable—nothing, indeed, that the US government did not already know from its own files on Oswald, consular and otherwise.²²

Moscow's rigidity was understandable to a degree. While still reeling from the assassination, the Communist

leadership (along with the rest of the world) had had to absorb a second shock on 24 November, namely, the murder of the accused assassin. To Soviet leaders already prone to believe in conspiracies, Oswald's murder *while in police custody* was incomprehensible—unless of course there was a conspiracy. In all likelihood the self-proclaimed Marxist (who had already been slandered by Moscow as a “Trotskyite”) had been silenced before the real perpetrators could be identified.²³ Given this unnerving situation it was not surprising for Moscow to hew to the most conservative approach imaginable. Despite Oswald's murder by a nightclub owner named Jack Ruby—or perhaps because of it—the effort to link Oswald's stay in the Soviet Union to probable contact with the KGB—and possible recruitment—was unabated among some elements of the US news media.

The day before Dobrynin received the Central Committee's instructions on 25 November, Anastas Mikoyan, deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, arrived for the state funeral bearing a redacted KGB report about Oswald's Soviet sojourn. The two officials clearly discussed the matter, because on Tuesday, 26 November, Dobrynin sent another TOP SECRET/HIGHEST PRIORITY cable to Moscow. In this second cable, in which Mikoyan concurred, Dobrynin presented an entirely different rationale for yielding the consular records. Rather than basing his argument again on straightforward pragmatic grounds—namely, that Moscow had nothing to hide—this time Dobrynin appealed directly to the conspiratorial mind-set that pervaded the Central Committee.

Like all the other correspondence in the consular file, Oswald's 9 November letter was genuine, differing only in that it was typed rather than handwritten. Yet, and without any real evidence backing him up, Dobrynin now insisted that Oswald's 9 November letter was “clearly a provocation . . . [designed to give] the impression we had close ties with Oswald and were using him for some purposes of our own.” The letter, wrote Dobrynin, was probably a forgery, and “one gets the definite impression that [it] was concocted by those who . . . are involved in the President's assassination.” Or if Oswald himself wrote it, Dobrynin asserted, it was probably dictated to him and then he was “simply bumped off after his usefulness had ended.” In essence, the Soviet ambassador now argued that disclosure was necessary to expose and pre-empt the “organizers of this entire provocation” before they used the letter “to try casting suspicion on us.”²⁴ It was a shrewd way of evoking the objectively correct (and self-interested) decision from the Central Committee, but the reasoning was Byzantine. If Dobrynin truly believed the 9 November letter was a forgery, Soviet interests would arguably be better served if this devastating trump card were held in reserve, to be played, if necessary, once the US government officially committed itself as to the identity of the assassin(s).

When Mikoyan returned to Moscow later in the week, in all likelihood he played a significant role in shaping the Central Committee's response. The deputy chairman had come back with a firm impression about how the US government intended to proceed in the assassination's wake, as evinced

by a 25 November cable Mikoyan dispatched while still in Washington. In this cable Mikoyan had reported on his conversations with US officials, most notably, Llewellyn “Tommy” Thompson, the State Department's leading Soviet expert and the US ambassador in Moscow who had permitted Oswald's return in 1962. “Judging from everything,” Mikoyan had concluded, “the U.S. government does not want to involve us in this matter, but neither does it want to get into a fight with the extreme rightists; it clearly prefers to consign the whole business to oblivion as soon as possible.”²⁵

Mikoyan obviously confused the State Department's desire not to roil US-Soviet relations unnecessarily with a supposed government-wide inclination not to apprehend alleged co-conspirators. Thompson and other Soviet hands had concluded that Oswald's sojourn in the Soviet Union was an unfortunate coincidence and that Moscow had nothing to do with President Kennedy's assassination. Therefore, insofar as possible, they wanted the controversy over Oswald to be treated as a matter separate from the pursuit of improved relations between the superpowers. Still, there was no actual basis for Mikoyan's assertion that the US government was uninterested in bringing other supposed perpetrators to justice. Mikoyan's point of view was primarily a reflection of his and/or Soviet ideology regarding the assassination, rather than an accurate judgment.

Notwithstanding Mikoyan's misreading of Washington's intentions, his perspective, combined with the logic of Dobrynin's second cable, apparently evoked a dramatic change in the Central Committee's position.²⁶ Three days after sending his 26 November cable, Dobrynin finally received an answer and it was more than the Soviet envoy had dared ask for. In a complete about-face, the Central Committee now instructed Dobrynin to provide photocopies of all consular correspondence with the Oswalds, including the especially sensitive 9 November letter, and *without waiting for a request from U.S. authorities*.²⁷

As if to act before Moscow could possibly change its mind, Dobrynin arranged to see Rusk the very next afternoon, even though it was the Saturday of the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. In a subsequent cable describing the meeting, Dobrynin reported that the US Secretary of State thanked him *twice* for the photocopies. “It was evident that Rusk was quite unprepared for this step on our part,” Dobrynin wrote, “while at the same time (judging from his general behavior) he was pleased with this development.” Rusk asked Dobrynin if he could make the correspondence available to the newly-formed Warren Commission. Dobrynin replied that it was left “totally to [Rusk's] discretion whether to present this material to anyone, as we were sure he would properly appreciate our step and would act appropriately.”²⁸ Most interestingly, in his report to Moscow, Dobrynin made no mention of the *other* part of his instructions. Upon presenting the photocopies to Rusk, Dobrynin was supposed to assert that from the moment the 9 November letter arrived, the Soviet embassy suspected it was “either a forgery or . . . a deliberate provocation.”²⁹

Some 32 years later, Dobrynin recounted this episode in his 1995 memoir, but stripped it of all its drama and complexity. According to the former Soviet ambassador, following Oswald's arrest officials immediately checked embassy files.

The consular department had kept all of its correspondence with the Oswalds, and it contained nothing blameworthy. I suggested to our government that this correspondence be made available to the Americans, and Moscow quickly approved. We immediately handed over copies to Rusk . . . [who] was clearly unprepared for our unusual act and did not conceal his satisfaction.³⁰

Dobrynin either intentionally smoothed out this episode, or gave it short shrift because this was the way he actually remembered it. At the time, however, this unprecedented act by the Soviet Union was a dramatic development. Since Dobrynin had imposed no conditions on how Rusk could use the consular documents, the Secretary of State saw no reason to keep the file-sharing secret; indeed, he was eager to publicize every shred of Soviet goodwill in the wake of the assassination. The State Department told the Washington press corps about the file-sharing as soon as it occurred, and the disclosure made headlines in every major American newspaper.

While it may be just as misleading to invest this episode with great meaning as it was for Dobrynin to gloss over it, it does seem to explain why even the most innocuous documents from Soviet files have had to travel such laborious routes before being disclosed. Admittedly, some relevant documents, such as Oswald's case file, remain too sensitive simply to hand over. Despite the passage of time, they undoubtedly reveal intelligence sources and methods, and the means of surveillance in the former Soviet states may not have changed all that much.³¹ Yet if there were an inclination to disclose as much as possible, even the case file could be redacted to protect sources and methods. Much more revealing is the fact that many records of interest, such as those that reflect high-level decision-making after the assassination, do not involve intelligence sources and methods at all and yet remain closed.³²

The political regimes may have changed, but a culture of suspicion persists in the successor states to the USSR, especially with respect to President Kennedy's assassination. Soviet propaganda/disinformation about the "real forces" responsible for the assassination exert such a grip on the Russian imagination that these states cannot bring themselves to disclose all but a handful assassination-related records.³³ That the records are exculpatory is irrelevant.

Max Holland is a research fellow at the Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia. He is writing a history of the Warren Commission for Alfred A. Knopf, and received the J. Anthony Lukas Work in Progress Award in 2001 from Columbia and Harvard Universities. The author is indebted to Vladislav Zubok, Raymond Garthoff, and Anna

Nelson, a member of the Assassination Records Review Board, for their comments and suggestions regarding this article.

NOTES

¹ William Drozdiak, "Affable but Ailing Yeltsin Gives JFK Files to Clinton," *Washington Post*, 21 June 1999 and Jane Perlez, "U.S. and Russians Strive to Repair Frayed Relations," *New York Times*, 21 June 1999. Though the presentation of the documents directly to President Clinton came as a surprise, elements of the U.S. government had been requesting access to Soviet-era, assassination-related documents for several years. Vice President Al Gore raised the matter, for example, with Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin in March 1998. See Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB), *Final Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998), p. 141.

² When KGB officer Yuri Nosenko defected to the United States in February 1964, he carried with him some first-hand knowledge of the Oswald case; the Nosenko episode is outside the scope of this article, which is limited to authorized disclosures of documents.

³ Walter Pincus & George Lardner, "Warren Commission Born Out of Fear: Washington Wanted to Stop Speculation," *Washington Post*, 14 November 1993. Although the Warren Commission had access to this KGB summary document, unlike other records provided by the Soviet government, it was not included among the Commission's exhibits. The Commission did not want to create the impression that it had relied on such a document.

⁴ Murrey Marder, "Russia's File on Oswald Is Handed Over to U.S.," *Washington Post*, 1 December 1963; the entire file, translated by the FBI, became Warren Commission Exhibit 986. See *Hearings Before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy: Exhibits 885 to 1053*, Volume XVIII (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), pp. 480-539.

⁵ *Hearings Before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy: Exhibits 885 to 1053*, Volume XVIII (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office). The Warren Commission's request is Exhibit 984, pp. 399-402. A State Department translation of all the Soviet documents submitted in response is Exhibit 985, pp. 403-479.

⁶ Memorandum to Jeremy Gunn, 24 January 1996, Box 16, David Maxwell Files, RG 541, JFK Assassination Records, NARA. See also *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations*, U.S. House of Representatives, 95th Congress, 2d session (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 103.

⁷ As noted below, author Norman Mailer achieved better access than an official agency of the U.S. government.

⁸ ABC News Nightline, *The KGB Oswald Files*, Broadcast 22 November 1991.

⁹ Sergei Mostovshchikov, "Agent Development Case No. 31451," *Izvestiya*, 6, 7, 10-12 August 1992.

¹⁰ *Izvestiya*, 7 August 1992. According to a 1999 *Washington Post* account, all relevant files were consolidated in Moscow after the assassination. These included records on Oswald's 1959 defection, his sojourn in Minsk and 1962 repatriation; the assassination itself; Oswald's September 1963 visit to the Soviet embassy in Mexico City; and Soviet investigations of the assassination. The records reclaimed by the BKGB pertained only to records generated in Minsk; it is more than likely, however, that the Russian

KGB made a copy of the case file before letting the records go. See George Lardner, "Papers Shed New Light on Soviets, Oswald," *Washington Post*, 6 August 1999.

¹¹ Oleg Nechiporenko, *Passport to Assassination: The Never-Before-Told Story of Lee Harvey Oswald by the KGB Colonel Who Knew Him* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1993).

¹² Boris Yeltsin, *The Struggle for Russia* (New York: Times Books, 1994), pp. 305-309.

¹³ *Washington Post*, 6 August 1999, and ARRB *Final Report*, p. 141. English translations of the documents, prepared by the State Department, can be found in Box 34, Jeremy Gunn Files, RG 541, JFK Assassination Records, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (NARA). The ARRB was established under U.S. law in 1992, after public complaints about the large number of U.S. government documents about the assassination that remained classified. Under the legislation, the ARRB was instructed to gather assassination-related documents into an omnibus collection at the National Archives, one that would include records generated by private parties and foreign governments.

¹⁴ Norman Mailer, *Oswald's Tale: An American Mystery* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. xx-xxi, and *Washington Post*, 6 August 1999. Mailer's access was negotiated by his long-time collaborator Lawrence Schiller.

¹⁵ Aleksandr Fursenko & Timothy Naftali, *'One Hell of a Gamble': Khrushchev, Castro, Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis 1958-1964* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997). Two of the KGB documents cited in *Gamble* were among the documents Yeltsin presented in his 1994 memoir.

¹⁶ "Sarah Karush & Brian Whitmore, "JFK Files May Yield Clues Into . . . Yeltsin?" *Moscow Times*, 25 June 1999; see also David Hoffman, "Oswald Letter Is Among Documents From Russia," *Washington Post*, 23 June 1999.

¹⁷ The condolence letter to LBJ was published in the 1996 *Foreign Relations of the United States* volume on Kennedy-Khrushchev exchanges, and was published in the Soviet press in 1963, along with several other similar letters.

¹⁸ Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (New York: Times Books, 1995).

¹⁹ Special Telegram No. 1967-1968, 22 November 1963, Documents Provided by Russian President Boris Yeltsin on 20 June 1999 (hereafter Yeltsin Documents).

²⁰ *Washington Post*, 1 December 1963.

²¹ Special Telegram No. 1967-1968, 22 November 1963, Yeltsin Documents.

²² Resolution of the CC CPSU, "On Measures (to be Taken) to Discredit the Slandorous Fabrications in the American Press Regarding Lee Harvey Oswald's 'Connections' with the Soviet Union," 25 November 1963, Yeltsin Documents. It's not absolutely clear this instruction was sent to Dobrynin, since the document is labeled as a "Draft." If so, Dobrynin's 26 November cable was sent after he had not received any response to his 22 November suggestion re the consular files.

²³ Victor Riesel, "Soviet Insinuations Call for Query on Oswald," *Dallas Morning News*, 6 December 1963. Labeling Oswald in this manner was not altogether inaccurate; Oswald was an avid reader of Trotskyite periodicals in addition to literature that was more to Moscow's liking.

²⁴ Telegram Special No. 2005, 26 November 1963, Yeltsin Documents.

²⁵ Telegram Special No. 2002-2004, 25 November 1963, Yeltsin Documents.

²⁶ Recently published Presidium minutes are silent on this

matter; see footnote 31.

²⁷ Central Committee CPSU, "Excerpt from Protocol No. 126," 29 November 1963, Yeltsin Documents.

²⁸ Telegram Special No. 2054-2056, 30 November 1963, Yeltsin Documents.

²⁹ "Excerpt from Protocol No. 126," 29 November 1963, Yeltsin Documents. Rusk's notes on the conversation also indicate that Dobrynin did not carry out this part of his instructions.

³⁰ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 108.

³¹ The BKGB chief, Eduard Shirkovskiy, made precisely this argument in 1992. See State Department Cable re Oswald Files, 4 November 1992, Box 16, David Marwell Files, RG 541, JFK Assassinations Records, NARA.

³² In addition to keeping the Oswald's case file under lock and key, there are yawning gaps in the KGB, Central Committee, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs documents that have been released haphazardly. For example, almost none of what must have been substantial communications between Moscow and the Soviet embassy and/or KGB *rezidentura* in Mexico City have seen the light of day. And according to Dr. Vlad Zubok, in the recently published minutes of the Central Committee Presidium (Politburo), "there is a conspicuous absence of any discussion and/or mention of the Kennedy/ Oswald matter." See Protocol no. 125, Session 26 November 1963, in: A.A. Fursenko, i.a. (eds.), *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964 Chernoviie protokolnie zapisi zasedanii. Stenogrammi. Postanovlenia*, vol. 1 (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2003).

³³ Though outdated, the best work on Soviet exploitation of the assassination remains Armand Moss, *Disinformation, Misinformation, and the 'Conspiracy' to Kill JFK Exposed* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1987). See also Max Holland, "The Power of Disinformation: The Lie That Linked CIA to the Kennedy Assassination," *Studies in Intelligence*, No. 11, Fall-Winter 2001, pp. 5-17.



Document No. 1
Cipher Telegram from Soviet Ambassador Anatoly
Dobrynin to CPSU Central Committee,
22 November 1963

[Source: Yeltsin Documents, US National Archives and Records Administration]

[handwritten: 1279 [?] 146121 3

TOP SECRET

CIPHER TELEGRAM

WASHINGTON 53927 07 30 23 XI 63

_____53928

Special no. 1967-1968

HIGHEST PRIORITY

At 16 hours 00 minutes, the US telegraph agency reported that police in Dallas, Texas, had arrested US national Lee H. Oswald, 24 years old, chairman of the local branch of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, on suspicion that he had

assassinated Kennedy.

It is also reported that Oswald was in the USSR some time ago and is married to a Russian woman.

It was ascertained by checking at the consular section of the embassy that Oswald really did spend several years in Minsk, where he married Soviet citizen Marina Nikolayevna Prusakova (b. 1941). In June 1962, they returned to the US. In March 1963, Prusakova applied to return with her daughter to the USSR for permanent residency.

The KU [?] of the MFA [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] of the USSR (letter no. KU-USA-540058-24518 of 7 October 1963) reported that her application was rejected.

The consular section of the embassy has the correspondence between Prusakova and Oswald regarding her return to the USSR. The last letter from Lee Oswald was dated 9 November (the text was transmitted on the line [sic] of nearby neighbors).

It is possible that the US authorities may ask us to familiarize them with the correspondence in our possession.

The US authorities are aware of the existence of this final correspondence, since it was conducted through official mail.

Inasmuch as there is nothing that compromises us in this correspondence, we might agree to do this as a last resort (after removing our internal correspondence with the MFA).

Please give instructions on this matter.

Radio and television, which have interrupted all other programming and are broadcasting only reports relating to the murder of the President, *are alluding more and more often to the fact that the assassin was evidently connected with "extreme leftist elements."*

22 November 1963

A.Dobrynin



Document No. 2

Top Secret Cipher Telegram from Anastas Mikoyan to CPSU Central Committee, 25 November 1963

[Source: Yeltsin Documents, US National Archives and Records Administration.]

[handwritten: 1088/48121 [?] 11/26/1963

TOPSECRET 46
CIPHERTELEGRAM

Copy no. 12

WASHINGTON 54416 11 30 26 XI 63 54419 54417
Special no. 2002-2004

HIGHEST PRIORITY
CC CPSU

Today, during the President's reception, I had a number of brief conversations with US officials.

In the remarks of these persons, two things are worth noting:

1. All of them ([Secretary of State Dean] Rusk, [US Ambassador to Moscow Llewellyn] Thompson, disarmament agency director Foster, high-ranking officials from the State Department), in addition to expressing their deep appreciation for the Soviet government's decision to send its special representative to Kennedy's funeral, made a point of saying from the outset they were sure that President Kennedy's policy on Soviet-US relations, as well as US foreign policy in general, would be kept [the same] under the new president—Lyndon Johnson.
2. In his conversation with me, Thompson pointedly touched on an issue he had discussed yesterday with comrade [Soviet ambassador] Dobrynin – the commentaries in the Soviet press concerning the assassination of President Kennedy, particularly the circumstances surrounding the investigation of this entire matter.

The gist of Thompson's comments was that the emphasis given in the Soviet press to the involvement of extreme right-wing circles in Kennedy's assassination (and then in Oswald's murder) complicates the situation of those in the US who favor improvement of Soviet-US relations, because the US press immediately counters such statement with assertions of Oswald's "communist and Cuban connections."

I told Thompson we did not want to make any complications; however, neither could we ignore a situation where the US government had not yet investigated all the circumstances surrounding the assassination, but the U.S. media were senselessly reproaching us and Cuba in connection with Kennedy's murder.

Thompson replied he was aware of that, but asked me to understand his remarks. The government is now investigating all the particulars of the case, Thompson said, and it is in our common interest to see that the Soviet press confine itself to setting forth the facts and refrain from "premature conclusions" until the end of the investigation, since this was only playing into the hands of right-wingers who were using this to fan anti-Soviet and anti-Cuban hysteria.

Judging from everything, the US government does now want to involve us in this matter, but neither does it want to get into a fight with the extreme rightists; it clearly prefers to consign the whole business to oblivion as soon as possible. Our reaction to these murders has already played its role. The President stated today publicly that a thorough investigation would be carried out.

I believe that in further statements by our press, this point should be taken into account. This will help weaken attempts to foment an anti-Soviet and anti-Cuban campaign.

A.Mikoyan
25 November 1963

Document No. 3
Cipher Telegram from Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin to CPSU Central Committee, 26 November 1963

[Source: Yeltsin Documents, US National Archives and Records Administration.]

LS no.0692061-26
 JS/BL
 Russian

[handwritten: 1077/4367[?]] [illegible]

TOP SECRET [illegible] 46 CIPHER TELEGRAM

[handwritten: 136 37 Copy no. WASHINGTON 54607 9
 40 27 XI 63

54419 54417

Special no. 2005

HIGHEST PRIORITY

Please note [Lee Harvey] Oswald's letter of 9 November, the text of which was transmitted to Moscow over the line [?] of nearby neighbors.

This letter was clearly a provocation: it gives the impression we had close ties with Oswald and were using him for some purposes of our own. It was totally unlike any other letters the embassy had previously received from Oswald. Nor had he ever visited our embassy himself. The suspicion that the letter is a forgery is heightened by the fact that it was typed, whereas the other letters the embassy had received from Oswald before were handwritten.

One gets the definite impression that the letter was concocted by those who, judging from everything, are involved in the President's assassination. It is possible that Oswald himself wrote the letter as it was dictated to him, in return for some promises, and then, as we know, he was simply bumped off after his usefulness had ended.

The competent US authorities are undoubtedly aware of this letter, since the embassy's correspondence is under constant surveillance. However, they are not making use of it for the time being. Nor are they asking the embassy for any information about Oswald himself; perhaps they are waiting for another moment.

The question also arises as to whether there is any connection now between the wait-and-see attitude of the US authorities and the ideas conveyed by [US ambassador Llewellyn] Thompson (though he himself may not be aware of this connection) on the desirability of some restraint on the part of the Soviet press and gradually hushing up the entire matter of Kennedy's assassination. Perhaps that is exactly what the federal authorities were inclined to do when

they learned all the facts and realized the danger of serious international complications if the interested US groups, including the local authorities in Dallas, continued to fan the hysteria over the "leftist" affiliations of Kennedy's assassin and the exposés we would have to issue in this case.

The main question now is: should we give the US authorities Oswald's last letter if they ask for our consular correspondence with him (there is nothing else in it that could be used to compromise us). After weighing all the pros and cons, we are inclined to pass on this letter as well to the authorities if they request all the correspondence, because if we don't pass it on, the organizers of this entire provocation could use this fact to try casting suspicion on us.

Please confirm [receipt].

Agreed upon with A.I. Mikoyan.

26 November 1963
 A.Dobrynin



Document No. 4
Top Secret Cipher Telegram from Anatoly Dobrynin to CPSU Central Committee, 30 November 1963

[Source: Yeltsin Documents, US National Archives and Records Administration.]

LS no.0692061-29
 JS/PH
 Russian

[handwritten number: 113]
 [handwritten: 1062/15124 ciph/12-1-63

TOP SECRET [illegible] 46

[handwritten: 126 116] Copy no. 12
 WASHINGTON 55380 8 50 1 XII 63
 55381 55382

Special no. 2054-2056
 URGENT

Today I met Rusk and handed him photocopies of the embassy's correspondence with Oswald, commenting appropriately on his final letter of 9 November (your special no. 1328).

Rusk thanked me for turning over these documents, saying he greatly appreciated the Soviet side's initiative in this matter. In addition, Rusk inquired if he could make this correspondence available to the newly formed presidential special commission chaired by *Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren*. I replied that we left it totally to his discretion whether to present this material to anyone, as we were sure he would

properly appreciate our step and would act appropriately.

Rusk thanked me again for the photocopies. It was evident that Rusk was quite unprepared for this step on our part, while at the same time (judging from his general behavior) he was pleased with this development.

Rusk asked me, if I could, to find out in Moscow the reasons why the Soviet authorities had refused to grant Soviet citizenship to Oswald when he was still living in the Soviet Union. *I promised to forward his request. Please instruct me how to answer Rusk.*

Rusk noted in conclusion that he hoped for the Soviet side's cooperation if the Warren Commission had any requests or queries relating to its investigation. He, Rusk, would then want to turn to me confidentially.

Rusk also said he wanted to use our meeting to touch on certain other matters unofficially.

1. *Rusk informed me* that yesterday President Johnson had received FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] director [Najeeb E.] Halaby and instructed him to meet with Soviet representatives for a final settlement of technical issues related to a future agreement on the establishment of a New York-Moscow air route. The US embassy in Moscow has been instructed to consult the MFA on the USSR on this matter. Halaby would be ready to come to Moscow 10-11 December.

Rusk then noted that this entire idea belonged to him, since, apart from the issue itself, he thought it important to show that business was continuing under the new president in the same manner as under J. Kennedy. President Johnson agreed with this, according to Rusk.

2. *Rusk then mentioned his meetings with [Soviet Foreign Minister] A.A. Gromyko in New York and Washington at which he raised the issue of the military budget. "I think," he told me, "that soon, in about 10-15 days, I will be able to tell you [the ambassador] in strict confidence the amount the US government plans to appropriate for the military in next year's fiscal budget. It will not be larger than the present amount and might even be less."* Rusk then wondered when we would be considering the budget. He did not pose the question directly, but one could gather that he would also like to get some information on this subject from us as well.

Rusk emphasized several times that his remarks did not mean the US government was now concluding some agreement with the Soviet government on this matter. It could not do this for the reasons that had already been set forth in talks with A.A. Gromyko. Nor could it guarantee that the figures Rusk intends to provide us soon in a strictly unofficial form would not be changed later in some way by the US Congress itself, which constitutionally and traditionally has its rights. But he, Rusk, is continuing to think about the usefulness of such an unofficial exchange of opinions "on mutual intentions."

3. Having mentioned his remarks in the talks with A.A. Gromyko "on the subversive activities of [Cuban leader Fidel] Castro's government," Rusk asked me to convey to him in this connection, in a strictly personal, unofficial form, that

it had been precisely determined that the three tons of weapons seized the other day in Venezuela had come from Cuba. (Rusk said: "We checked out in particular the numbers of the rifles purchased by Castro some time ago in Belgium and seized now in Venezuela.")

"I am saying this," Rusk noted, "not as any representation or comment. Nor can this be the subject of an official talk between us, since Castro's government exercises authority in its own country and it is unlikely that it consults with anyone when it decides to send weapons to one Latin American country or another, although the Chinese (Rusk added parenthetically, as it were) might be mixed up in this." Rusk said in conclusion: "I by no means wish to exaggerate the significance of this incident in Venezuela, it's not that great, but I would simply like to bring this last example to the attention of Mr. Gromyko, with whom I spoke about this matter before. Of course, *I do not expect any answer in this matter, and please don't mention in official conversations and talks what I said today.*"

I told Rusk that the latest events in Venezuela were well known, and if one were to speak frankly, they clearly showed the world once more that the Betancourt regime had no popular support, especially now, on the eve of elections; therefore, would it not be logical to expect (and judging from everything, this is indeed the case) that this regime is prepared to stage any provocation, even an international one, just to remain in power?

Rusk smiled but said nothing more.

A fair amount of time was devoted to discussing the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. However, Rusk did not say anything new compared to his previous statements on this subject. I reiterated our position.

Rusk noted in the course of the conversation that the upcoming NATO meeting in December of this year would be "routine in nature" and, judging from everything, issues relating to the establishment of NATO nuclear forces would basically not be discussed there (Rusk interjected that these issues "are generally discussed through other channels," but did not amplify on this theme).

Rusk said there were no plans yet for a trip to the upcoming NATO meeting by the new president, Johnson, but it has not been ruled out completely. "Evidently," Rusk said as though thinking out loud, "Johnson may instead travel to Europe this spring to meet with a number of heads of states that are US allies. But for the time being, no meetings have been planned specifically between the new president and other heads of state, although there is agreement in principle about such meetings with some of them."

In conclusion, Rusk asked me again to consider our meeting unofficial, as if held "in a family atmosphere." The entire conversation was between the two of us; nobody else was in the office.

Rusk looks very tired; his eyes are red from sleeplessness ("I'm sleeping 3-4 hours a day right now," he remarked), but he himself is animated, in an obviously good mood, and gives the appearance of a person secure about his present position in spite of the change in presidents.

RESEARCH NOTES

30 November 1963

A.Dobrynin

REPORT: No. 1328 (outgoing no. 33600) of 29 November 1963.

Comrade Gromyko said the embassy could give Rusk photocopies of the embassy's correspondence with Oswald, including his letter of 9 November, but without waiting for a request by the U.S. authorities.