

National Archives releases thousands of documents on John F. Kennedy assassination

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17 December 2022

On Thursday, the US National Archives and Records Administration posted a cache of 13,173 documents, largely from the Central Intelligence Agency, relating to the November, 22 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The previously withheld documents were released on the orders of President Joe Biden, in belated compliance with a law passed by Congress in 1992 requiring the government to make public all documents concerning the assassination and subsequent investigation by October 2017. The 1992 law included a caveat allowing a sitting president to postpone release of JFK documents that could compromise US intelligence “sources and methods” or directly damage vital US foreign policy interests.

The CIA and other US state agencies have long sought to block or limit the release of the documents, and President Donald Trump cited national security reasons for delaying the scheduled release in 2017. In 2018, however, Trump authorized the disclosure of 19,045 documents, some three-quarters of which contained redactions.

In 2021, Biden cited the COVID-19 pandemic as the reason for postponing a further document disclosure. In a memo released Thursday, the White House said it was authorizing the new document release in the interests of “transparency,” and then added it would make exceptions “when the strongest possible reasons counsel otherwise.”

In fact, the administration is still withholding some 3,000 documents at the behest of the National Archives and “other agencies,” which will have until May 2023 to review them. After that, “any information withheld from public discourse that agencies do not recommend for continued postponement” will be released before June 30, 2023.

In other words, documents considered particularly sensitive will continue to be kept from public view.

The events of late November 1963 marked a watershed in American history and played a major and ongoing role in the undermining of popular confidence in, and support for, the US political system. Millions have watched footage of President Kennedy as he was killed by shots allegedly fired from the Dallas Book Depository Building as the presidential limousine, with its top down, made its way through Dealey Plaza on November 22, 1963.

Within hours, Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested for the killing of a Dallas police officer and soon thereafter charged with the assassination of Kennedy. Two days later, on live television, Oswald was shot dead by local nightclub owner Jack Ruby as police escorted the alleged assassin through the basement of the Dallas police headquarters.

The official Warren Commission report, which concluded in 1964 that the killing of Kennedy was the work of a lone assassin, Oswald, who acted on his own, and that there was no conspiracy, was widely, and rightly, seen at the time as a cover-up. This public perception has not changed over time. An opinion poll commissioned by the US website FiveThirtyEight in 2017 found that only a third of Americans believed the official story that Oswald was solely responsible.

In fact, Oswald’s own biography, connections and actions have since the beginning pointed to complicity by the CIA, or elements within it, in the assassination of Kennedy. The former Marine and would-be Soviet defector, who was active in both pro-Castro and right-wing circles and in September of 1963 visited the Soviet embassy in Mexico to obtain a visa to Cuba, was being closely tracked by the CIA since the late 1950s.

Historians, journalists and Kennedy specialists have

only just begun poring over the newly released documents, and the *World Socialist Web Site* intends to carefully review them in the coming days, but what is already known of the contents of the records makes clear that the elimination of Kennedy, notwithstanding his imperialist and Cold War credentials, was a state operation.

The assassination took place in the midst of bitter conflicts between the Kennedy White House and both the CIA and the military brass in the aftermath of the 1961 Bay of Pigs Cuba invasion fiasco and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Following the Bay of Pigs debacle, Kennedy fired then-CIA chief Allen Dulles, who nevertheless was brought onto the Warren Commission.

The *Washington Post* cites Jefferson Morley, a former *Post* staff writer and current vice president of the Mary Ferrell Foundation, which sued the Biden administration in October over the delay of the document release, who points to a 15-page document from 1961 from Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. to Kennedy titled “Memo to President CIA Reorganization.” The document was previously released by the National Archives in redacted form.

The newspaper quotes Morley as saying, “What the CIA has hidden” is whether it had an “operational interest in Oswald” at the time of the Kennedy assassination.

According to press reports, the focus of Thursday’s document release is the CIA’s 80-volume “personality file” on Oswald, which the agency says it began compiling in December of 1960, nearly three years before Kennedy’s murder, following Oswald’s failed defection to the Soviet Union in 1959. The file is reported to total more than 50,000 pages. The Warren Commission was never given the full CIA file on Oswald, for reasons that remain unexplained.

Several of the declassified CIA documents concern Oswald’s trip to Mexico City just weeks before the Kennedy killing, where, according to CIA reports, Oswald made contact with Soviet and Cuban spies, including an alleged KGB assassination specialist. Yet the CIA, the Secret Service and other agencies allowed the Kennedy motorcade to proceed, with the first couple in plain sight, along the line of fire of the building where Oswald worked.

Another document, cited by *Politico* in its report,

concerns George Joannides, who served as the CIA’s liaison to a special House committee in the 1970s that reinvestigated Kennedy’s murder. The agency never revealed to lawmakers that Joannides had led spying operations during the Kennedy administration to overthrow Castro, a position that put him in close contact with anti-Castro forces that blamed Kennedy for the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Politico also cites an internal CIA memo dated February 1964, declassified decades later, showing the agency was aware that at least 37 documents had disappeared from the file when it was reviewed in the days after the assassination, including documents related to Oswald that the FBI and State Department had shared with the CIA.

Despite the ample evidence of state involvement in the assassination of Kennedy, the corporate media has consistently sought to discredit the critics of the Warren Report as “conspiracy theorists.” This continues to be a prominent theme in media reports on Thursday’s document release, along with assertions that the newly released documents will not disturb the Warren Commission narrative.

The *Guardian* wrote that “the trove of documents will keep JFK assassination obsessives busy for months,” adding, “Few expect bombshells among the pile, however.” It complained that the repeated postponements of the document release “allowed conspiracy theories to flourish.”

CNN cited Larry Sabato, author of *The Kennedy Half Century: The Presidency, Assassination, and Lasting Legacy of John F. Kennedy*, as saying, “The truth is not that Oswald was part of a conspiracy to kill Kennedy... The truth is that this assassination was preventable and could have been prevented...”

The *New York Times* quoted Mark S. Zaid, a Washington lawyer who has led Freedom of Information cases on the Kennedy assassination, who told the newspaper: “There’s not going to be any smoking guns. There’s not going to be anything that pushes the needle one way or the other.”



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