

MEMORANDUM

October 24, 1996

To: David G. Marwell

From: Eric Scheinkopf

Subject: Documents on Lee Harvey Oswald from Russia and Belarus

This memorandum will summarize the myriad of cables between the United States Government and its embassies in Russia and Belarus regarding efforts by the Assassination Records Review Board to view and obtain additional records regarding Lee Harvey Oswald's time in the USSR from 1959-1962. The memorandum focuses on recent efforts (1995-present) to receive permission to examine these documents. I have cited some cables from 1992 and 1993 as background.

The basis for requesting documents from foreign governments comes from Section 10(b)(2) of the Assassination Records Collection Act (ARCA) which is Public Law 102-526. As Chairman Tunheim wrote in a letter to Secretary of State Warren Christopher on February 14, 1995, Section 10(b)(2) "specifically requires the Secretary of State to contact the Government of the Republic of Russia and any other foreign government that may hold materials relevant to the assassination and to seek other disclosure."

As you noted in a memorandum to Peggy Grafeld of the State Department on July 11, 1995 among the records that should be sought are those of the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB) and the Glaynoye Razedyvatelnoye Upravleniye (GRU). Among the records to search for are those relating to Oswald's defection to and time in the USSR, his visit to Mexico in 1963 and his telephone calls to the Soviet Embassy there, the USSR's reaction to the assassination itself and any communications with other governments, for example Cuba, concerning the assassination.

Your July 11, 1995 memorandum cites the key places and officials with whom a search should be conducted. In Russia the Presidential Archive and the Archive of the Ministry of Security (the former KGB Archive) are places to search. Individuals who have the authority to grant access to these documents are Rudolf G. Pikhovia, Dmitrii Volkogonov, and Boris Samyonovich Ivanov. Pikhovia was appointed by Boris Yeltsin to run the National Archival Administration (Rosarchiv), Volkogonov is the chair of the government commission on the declassification of archival documents and Ivanov is associated with the former KGB Archive.

On January 6, 1993 the State Department cabled the Moscow Embassy (93 State 3120) and asked them to contact the Russian Government and seek the disclosure of all records of the former Soviet Government, including those of the KGB and GRU, that are relevant to the assassination of President

Kennedy. About two weeks later, the Moscow Embassy cabled State (93 Moscow 1592) that they learned "some of the records in question may in fact no longer be in Russian hands." The paper Izvestiya published a series of articles in August 1992 that reported that the KGB files on Oswald are in the hands of the Belarus State Security Services in Minsk.

On August 3, 1995 the State Department provided the Board with two telegrams it sent to its Minsk Embassy (95 State 184658 and 95 State 184649) regarding efforts to obtain information from Belarus.

In paragraph 3 of 184658, it noted that KGB Chief Eduard Shirkovskiy met with US Ambassador Swartz on November 4, 1992 and indicated that the Oswald file had been transferred to Minsk and that it could not simply be handed over as that would reveal too much about KGB methods of operation. At the time, Shirkovskiy was willing to discuss an exchange of information and suggested the FBI submit a detailed list of questions. That same paragraph makes reference to (92 Minsk 703) which reported that Shirkovskiy announced on August 4, 1992 that the Belarusian KGB has six volumes of files on Oswald.

The attitude of the Belarus Government appears to change just a little over a month later. A September 20, 1995 cable from our Minsk Embassy to the State Department (95 Minsk 2594) noted that the Embassy, on September 19th, received a note from the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs which allows the United States Government basically the same access Norman Mailer had been given to KGB documents on Oswald's stay in Minsk. This cable was provided to the ARRB on January 23, 1996. The cable did say, however, that information which could be called sources and methods would be considered confidential by the Belarusian authorities.

In the same letter of January 23, the State Department enclosed two cables from its Moscow Embassy to State (95 Moscow 1583 and 1584) that noted the Russians had questions as to why the United States was making inquiries at this time. In cable 1583, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Chief Archivist Igor Lebedev noted that documents in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive relating to the assassination had been declassified and made available to the public. In light of this, Lebedev said the United States' request for new information raised several questions about the nature of the US inquiry- why were we again asking for documents. In the next cable, 1584, the Embassy reported that the Russians asked what circumstances led to the renewed interest in investigating the assassination. The Russians also indicated an interest in the ARRB - its status, members and when it was created as well as the number of Warren Commission documents declassified. The Embassy had the impression that the questions reflected "sincere puzzlement" as to the "timing" of the US request given the length of time since the events in Dallas and what they felt was the lack of awareness of their "responsiveness to the Warren Commission." The Embassy believes that the Russians will wish to help once they receive answers to their questions.

The latest telegram in the files is from Minsk on October 23, 1996. Minsk 2277 notes that it appears unlikely the question of access to the KGB's Minsk records can be resolved during the ARRB's one day visit and that there may not even be appropriate officials with whom to meet. The Embassy

will continue to work to arrange such meetings.