

THE HSCA AND THE CIA: THE VIEW FROM THE TOP

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In the fall of 1962, the CIA had a problem. The Cuban missile crisis had ended with a peaceful resolution. Most Americans had been greatly relieved. But the organization that the CIA considered to be the single most popular Cuban exile organization was very upset with the American government.¹ That organization was the Revolutionary Student Directorate, usually referred to by the initials “DRE” representing its name in Spanish.² The DRE was the direct descendent of a Cuban student group founded in Cuba with the help of CIA agent David Phillips.

The week after the missile crisis ended the DRE provided information to the Washington Evening Star newspaper that there were still missiles hidden in Cuba. The story ran with a front page head line. Twelve days later the Secretary-General of the DRE appeared on NBC’s “Today Show” where he once again claimed to have seen, with his own eyes, nuclear missiles hidden in caves and hills in Cuba.³

Richard Helms was then the Deputy Director of Plans for the CIA. As such he was in charge of the clandestine services – political warfare and covert

¹ Morley, “Revelation 19:63,” Miami New Times, 4/12/2001, available at <http://www.miaminewtimes.com/2001-04-12/news/revelation-19-63/>.

² Directorio Revoucionario Estudantil.

³ Morley.

operations. As such, he did not want to lose the Agency's influence with the DRE. Most of the funding for the organization was provided by the CIA, but they were proving to be a difficult organization to control. Helms summoned the Secretary-General of the DRE to Washington for a face to face meeting. As a result of that meeting, Helms told the DRE that he would appoint a case officer who would be personally responsible directly to Helms to work with the DRE.⁴

The officer Helms chose was George Joannides. We know from the limited information that has been released about Mr. Joannides, that his work with DRE was considered to have been very good and successful. He began working with the group in late 1962. His second specific duty was serving as case officer for a "student project involving political action, propaganda, intelligence collection and hemisphere-wide apparatus" – the DRE.⁵ By January of 1963 he was commended for "resolving complicated problems involving control of an unruly group."⁶ In July of 1963, his fitness report noted that Joannides "has done an excellent job in the handling of a significant student exile group which hitherto had successfully

⁴ Id.

⁵ Joannides, George, "Fitness Report," 01/19/1963, RIF 104-10304-1000.

⁶ Id.

resisted any important degree of control.”⁷ He was promoted to take over as head of the Political Warfare branch of the CIA’s Miami station – in other words, he became the manager of the propaganda operations and the only organization that he retained under his direct control was DRE⁸.

The Assassinations Record Review Board released the copies of Joannides fitness reports that the Agency turned over to them. From the start of his work with the DRE in the fall of 1962 there are quarterly reports until July of 1963. The next released Fitness Report is dated May 15, 1964 and covers the period from April 1, 1963 to March 31, 1964. In that time he has been promoted to head the Cover Action branch of the Miami Station, while remaining the senior case officer for DRE. The Report praises Joannides for the quality and quantity of his propaganda and political action programs and his “ability to translate policy directives into meaningful action by all of his assets.”⁹

As most of you know, it was in this period – in August, 1963 – that Lee Harvey Oswald had an encounter with DRE representatives in New Orleans. That encounter resulted not only in widespread publicity in New Orleans at the time,

⁷ Joannides, George, “Fitness Report,” 07/31/1963, RIF 104-10304-1000.

⁸ Id.

⁹ Joannides, George, “Fitness Report,” 05/15/1964, RIF 104-10304-1000.

including newspaper articles, television coverage and radio interviews, it also resulted in the first reports trying to tie Lee Harvey Oswald to Castro after the assassination of John Kennedy. DRE released their information the day of the assassination and it was covered in both the Miami Herald and the Washington Post the next day.¹⁰ The DRE published the details in their own paper.

The CIA never told the Warren Commission about their support of, and work with, the DRE in 1963. To my knowledge, the CIA never told the Church Committee about it. The ARRB asked the Agency about DRE at the suggestion of Jeff Morley. The CIA initially told the ARRB the same thing they told me and the HSCA: the Agency had no employee in contact with DRE in 1963. The ARRB conducted its own examination of CIA records and found Joannides personnel file with its clear indication that he was the DRE case officer.

When working as Chief Counsel for the HSCA, I requested all the Agency files on the DRE and its members as early as March of 1978. That request included a demand that the Agency identify any employees who had, in the period from 1960 to 1964, worked with the DRE.¹¹ After that initial request for records,

¹⁰ Morley.

¹¹ Letter from G. Robert Blakey to Patrick Carpenter, CIA Office of Legislative Counsel, 03/22/1978, RIF 180-10140-10065.

at least two additional requests were made in May and July of 1978. The Agency repeatedly assured the Committee that they had no contact with the DRE in 1963, having severed all contacts in April of that year.

The leaders of the DRE, in interviews with the Committee's staff, indicated that they worked with a CIA case officer in 1963. The Agency assured me they would search their records to try to identify such an officer. The Agency employee who contacted me to advise that they could find no record of any such case officer was George Joannides. He did tell us, however, that he would keep looking.

George Joannides was brought out of retirement by the Agency to specifically work as a liaison with our Committee. He was specifically tasked with dealing mainly with Dan Hardway and Ed Lopez. But he also lied directly to me.

A lawsuit by Jeff Morley sought to force the CIA to divulge more of its files on Joannides. In the course of that lawsuit the CIA, in a sworn affidavit, revealed that Joannides was working in an undercover capacity during his time as a liaison to the Committee. Joannides and the CIA effectively frustrated the HSCA investigation into whether the Agency had any involvement with those who may have had a hand in bringing about the death of John Kennedy.

Had the Agency told the truth about George Joannides, he would have been called as a critical witness. He would have been deposed and would have likely testified in Executive Session. If they had not delivered the records, the records would have been subpoenaed. I know that Dan and Eddie believe that he ended any effective investigation that they were undertaking. They complained bitterly about it at the time. I should have listened to them.

Admiral Stansfield Turner, the DCI in a letter to Chairman Stokes, on November 30, 1978, said, in the context of addressing the problems Dan and Eddie were causing by not believing that the Agency was cooperating with us, “We believe that we have provided you with all the information available to us which is pertinent to your investigation, and hope very much that you can accept this letter as the final assurance of that fact.”¹² At the time I did. I was wrong.

I can no longer say with confidence, as the HSCA Final Report did, that Oswald had no significant relationship with DRE.¹³ At this point what we know is that the CIA has hidden this information from every investigation into the facts and circumstances surrounding the assassination. Indeed, they have not just hidden the information, they have lied to, at least, both the HSCA and the ARRB.

¹² Letter in Reply to HSCA Request on Non-Existence of Records, Turner to Stokes, 11/30/1978, RIF 104-10150-10027.

¹³ HSCA Final Report, p. 145.

I believe that this rises to the level of probable violation of the law that prohibits impeding the due and proper inquiry of a committee of Congress.¹⁴

I no longer trust anything that the Agency has told us in regard to the assassination. It lied to the Warren Commission. It lied to the ARRB. It lied to the HSCA. In admitting that Joannides was employed in a covert capacity as liaison with the HSCA, it has admitted that it violated its charter and ran a domestic covert operation aimed at subverting the HSCA and its investigation.

I do not believe for a minute that records did not exist. They may not now, but they did at one time. Money was involved and money had to be internally documented, even at the Agency. That the Agency would put a material witness in a covert capacity as a filter between the committee staff and the Agency was an outrageous breach of our understanding with the Agency, the Agency's charter and the laws of this country. As a result, I now believe that we were not able to conduct an appropriate investigation of the CIA.

What the Agency did not give us, none but those involved in the Agency can know for sure. I do not believe any denial offered by the Agency on any point. The law has long followed the rule that if a person lies to you on one point, you may reject all his testimony. The CIA not only lied, it actively subverted the

¹⁴ 18 U.S.C. § 1505.

investigation.

It is time that either Congress, or the Justice Department, conduct a real investigation of the CIA. Indeed, in my opinion, it is long past time.