**ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER, Jr. – B3**

TALBOT: An article that Arthur Krock wrote in the New York Times in October, a month before the assassination, in which he says that the CIA is ignoring instructions that the White House was sending to them in Vietnam and he specifically brings up the possibility if there ever was a coup like a ‘Seven Days in May’ coup it wouldn't come from the Pentagon, he's quoting now an official in Saigon, but it would come from the CIA. And I'm wondering if someone who was inside, of course, the administration during that time, whether you ever felt that, boy, you know, they're not obeying or are listening to the Kennedy orders and they're defiant; there's certain people within the Pentagon or the intelligence community who were defying the Kennedys and where the Kennedys were trying to take the country.

SCHLESINGER: Well, certainly we did not control the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

TALBOT: Right.

SCHLESINGER: Kennedy, after the Bay of Pigs, had contempt for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I remember once going into his office in the spring of '61. He waved some cables at me. General Lemnitzer was there then, [Unintelligible] on an inspection tour. He said, “If it hadn't been for the Bay of Pigs, I'd have been impressed by this.”

TALBOT: But he was contemptuous of what Lemnitzer was…

SCHLESINGER: There, particularly with the missile crisis…

TALBOT: Right

SCHLESINGER: … which was not only the most dangerous moment in the cold war but the most dangerous moment in human history because never before two contending powers possessed between them the technical capacity to blow up the world. And the Joint Chiefs of Staff were insistent on an invasion and taking the missiles out by surprise attack, invading them, and so on. And as we later discovered, the Red Army had 40 ,000 troops in Cuba, we only expected 10 or 12, and they had, not only for strategic missiles, but for tactical missiles, and with delegated authority to use them to repel an American invasion.

TALBOT: Right.

SCHLESINGER: I was sitting next to Bob McNamara in Havana with General (Anatoly) Gribkov, the head of the Red Army contingent in Cuba in '63, '62, when he said that they had tactical nuclear warheads and the right to, authorization to use them. Bob McNamara nearly fell out of his seat. Because he never, we had never had expectation of a tactical nuclear warhead. Of course, McNamara was among those who opposed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on invasion.

TALBOT: So, the stakes were even higher than you had known at the time?

SCHLESINGER: Yeah.

TALBOT: And, of course, the CIA, or at least part of the CIA, was sending in these raiding parties even at the height of the crisis.

SCHLESINGER: Yes. Well, it must be said that the Operation Mongoose had been authorized by the Kennedys.

TALBOT: Right.

SCHLESINGER: But it was a sabotage operation.

TALBOT: Right. Not assassination.

SCHLESINGER: Not assassination. That was a separate track.

TALBOT: Are you still convinced as you’ve been for many years that the Kennedys did not authorize an assassination?

SCHLESINGER: I do not believe that Eisenhower began under whose administration Bob came who was hired by the CIA. I think He did not know about it, and I think Kennedy did not know about it. John McCone, whom Kennedy brought in to clean up the CIA; Helms and others testified before the Church Committee that they had not told John McCone, and if they told Kennedy, they felt the authorization dating from the time of Allen Dulles was sufficient. If they told Kennedy, they must have said, "Well, you can't say anything about it to John McCone."

TALBOT: Right.

SCHLESINGER: Because we haven't told him. And that's a bureaucratic improbability because Kennedy, as I say, brought in McCone to clean up the Agency.

TALBOT: Sure. Are you aware of some recent scholarship on something called Project Freedom, which apparently was a campaign that had been cooked up within the administration again shortly before Kennedy was killed to foment a coup in Cuba? And according to this recent scholarship by a researcher named Lamar Waldron, Bobby was in charge of Project Freedom.

SCHLESINGER: Never heard about it.

TALBOT: You never heard of that. Okay.

SCHLESINGER: Because the Kennedys were involved, Bobby was Involved, JFK was involved in the Atwood project…

TALBOT: Yes

SCHLESINGER: …which Peter Kornbluh was recently …

TALBOT: No, I'm familiar with that. Do you… Is it not accurate then to say that Bobby was more militant against Castro than his brother?

SCHLESINGER: I think that the Cuban Missile Crisis, if they were, the Kennedys were obsessed with Castro, as is often claimed, the Cuban Missile Crisis would have provided a totally legitimate, understandable pretext for smashing Castro and overthrowing him.

TALBOT: Right

SCHLESINGER: But JFK opposed it and Bobby equally opposed it. They were seeking a political solution, not a military solution. If they'd been so obsessed with the, I mean everyone would have regarded as legitimate a military reaction, but they both opposed it, which seems to me contrary to their alleged obsession with Castro.

TALBOT: So, you saw no difference from a policy point of view on Cuba between the brothers?

SCHLESINGER: Bill Atwood, as you know, came back from Guinea. Sekou Touré, having told him that his pal Castro was furious with the Russians because Khrushchev pulled the missiles out without notifying Fidel. Bill Atwood, who was recovering from a mild attack of polio, was detailed to the work with Adlai Stevenson at the U.N. and he proposed this project, which he talked over with Harriman, who was under Secretary of Political Affairs, State Department. Averell says it's fine by me, but you should go and talk to Bobby, because Bobby, the election year is ‘63, right? The next year is the election year, and there may be political implications, and so Bill Atwood sent a memorandum to Robert Kennedy. Kennedy was all in favor of it and said, "You must talk to Bundy about it." Well, Bundy had been advocating for some time for exploration of the possibilities of normalization with, normalizing relations with Cuba. And so…

TALBOT: So, Bobby approved it then, informed Bundy.

SCHLESINGER: Yeah.

TALBOT: Speaking of Mr. Atwood, Mr. Schlesinger, I came across something a remarkable thing recently in my research. It was a phone conversation that Atwood had with a British film/ TV producer named Richard Tomlinson back in 1986 before Mr. Atwood died. And this is Tomlinson's record of what he told him, and let me just read it to you quickly.

*“He, (meaning Atwood), is still very interested in the background to the Kennedy assassination and is skeptical that Oswald acted alone. When asked about his own role in the secret negotiations with the Cubans at the UN, he said he thought his critical mistake had been to use phones which were tapped by the CIA. Until that point, only six people knew about the negotiations, but he remains certain that there were elements within the CIA who were violently opposed to Rapprochement with Cuba. Atwood says that to connect his story with the assassination is speculation, but very interesting speculation. His own suspicions were raised when he heard that Bobby Kennedy was shattered by the conclusions of the Warren Report, so he did not want any further investigation of a possible conspiracy for reasons of national security. Attwood also thinks the revelations about the CIA, which were exposed by the Church Committee, give more credence to the possibility of a conspiracy involving disgruntled CIA operatives and Cuban exiles. His theory, which he hastened to stress, is only a theory, is that the secret negotiations with Cuba were, quote, ‘the last straw’ as far as the conspirators were concerned. It was then that they took the decision to kill Kennedy.”*

So, I was astonished to read that. I know you knew Mr. Atwood and I'm wondering if you think that's an accurate presentation of the way he felt.

SCHLESINGER: I think it is an accurate representation. I think there were elements in the CIA, particularly, I mean, in the, it's the anti -Castro -Cubans, I’m an agnostic on the subject of conspiracy, and, but I do think the, the Warren Commission report was this, this, this, was inadequate because both the F.B.I. and the CIA withheld information from the Warren Commission, which would have been relevant, certainly. I think my guess is that they did it not because they were involved in a conspiracy, an assassination conspiracy, but because they were bureaucratic self -protection, they wanted to, they did not want others to know they were incompetent.

TALBOT: Sure. But speaking, going back to Atwood, so did you speak to Mr. Atwood about his suspicions about the assassination?

SCHLESINGER: I don't remember that I did. I saw it, we used to have lunch every couple of months, but if he went along with his line, but it doesn't seem to be inconsistent.

TALBOT: Okay, one more remarkable thing that I came across recently, I also wanted to get your comment on. In the book, *"One Hell of a Gamble"* about the Cuban Missile Crisis, In the last chapter, there's the story of the amazing mission to Moscow that William Walton undertook at Bobby's request, and it seems to aim to put Soviet fears to rest. But also, he carried the message apparently from Bobby that Bobby felt his brother had been killed by a conspiracy. And that's what Walton told Bolshakov, Bobby's back-channel ally. Do you have any information about that?

SCHLESINGER: I have none. I was startled when reading this because Bill Walton was a very old friend. The day I was perplexed by the story, which I never heard before, and I can't make any informed comment on it.

TALBOT: Okay, do you have any reason to suspect that version that was given in the book?

SCHLESINGER: Well, it's a Bolshakov version, I suppose.

TALBOT: Right. But you haven't seen any papers in the Kennedy Library?

SCHLESINGER: No.

TALBOT: Walton papers that...

SCHLESINGER: No.

TALBOT: Okay. Do you think...

SCHLESINGER: That was '64, wasn't it?

TALBOT: I believe so. Well, no, the mission, I think... That might have been ’64, yes.

SCHLESINGER: I don't recall Bill Walton, who was an old friend, going to the Soviet Union.

TALBOT: Right. Well, apparently it was a mission that Jack had asked him to undertake before his assassination as part of an artistic exchange program.

SCHLESINGER: Oh, yeah.

TALBOT: And he was, of course, postponed because of the events in Dallas, but then Bobby asked him, according to this version, to go there and carry this message to the Soviets.

SCHLESINGER: He was chairman, Bill Walton was painter as well as other things.

TALBOT: Exactly.

SCHLESINGER: and he was chairman of the Fine Arts Commission of the District of Columbia.

TALBOT: Right> What…? There's been many different versions of what Bobby actually felt about the assassination. You, of course, wrote about it in your book. Frank Mankiewicz told me, as he's told, I think Evan Thomas and others, that he undertook some research into the assassination at Bobby's request. And he told Bobby as best as he could determine that it was some kind of conspiracy between elements of the CIA and Cuban exiles and perhaps the mafia, and that Bobby looked at him with a, you know, a pained look on his face when he told him this. Do you have any new information since your biography, Mr. Schlesinger, about what Bobby was thinking and feeling about?

SCHLESINGER: I don’t know. The times we discussed some of the Warren Commission report and the New Orleans investigation, Jim Garrison and so on…

TALBOT: Yes.

SCHLESINGER: … are all in the book.

TALBOT: Okay. You don't have in the years since the book came out, you haven't come across any additional information

SCHLESINGER: No.

TALBOT: Okay. Do you think Bobby would have reopened the case if he'd been elected president?

SCHLESINGER: I don’t know, the pain, it grieved him so much that he might have… it all depended on the power of the evidence.

TALBOT: Right. So you're not certain what he would have done?

SCHLESINGER: No.

TALBOT: Okay. I don't know if you're familiar with a letter that was recently published in the New York Review of Books about the Kennedy assassination. It was signed by an interesting group of people, including Norman Mailer and Gerald Posner and Anthony Summers and a number of other people who have looked into the assassination across the spectrum of people who have bearing beliefs about it. But it was put together by Jeff Morley, who was a reporter at The Washington Post, and it was based on research that he'd done that indicated that the CIA officer in charge of being the liaison between the CIA and the House Select Committee on Assassinations under Bob Blakey was a fellow named George Joanides, who it turns out, even though he failed to tell this to Blakey and the committee, it turns out back in '62 and '63 was the CIA agent in Miami, who was monitoring the Cuban student group, the DRE, that was in turn monitoring Oswald. And the young staffers who worked for Bob Blakey told Blakey at the that Joanides was stonewalling them and not giving them relevant documents. And Blakey did not back them at the time. But I've interviewed Bob Blakey. In fact, he signed this letter in the New York Review books as well. And he now is calling it an obstruction of justice. And this group is demanding that the CIA release all relevant documents on Joanides.

SCHLESINGER: What was the occasion of the letter?

TALBOT: This was because they're filing under the Freedom of Information Act a lawsuit to get the CIA to release these documents and it was work being done by this the Washington Post reporter Jeff Morley that brought this to a head.

SCHLESINGER: What issue? Do you remember?

TALBOT: Yes, it was right before Christmas it was I think the Christmas issue, actually, the big books issue, I'm pretty certain it was.

But it was very interesting to me because of the group. Bob Blakey signed it, Posner, of course, who's the big skeptic about conspiracies, signed it. Norman Mailer signed it, and a group of others. But you haven't heard anything about this Joanides matter?

SCHLESINGER: No.

TALBOT: Okay. I found it, you know, some people are saying it's the most interesting development in the case in the last few years because it does suggest that there was some effort on the part of the agency to cover up something as the House Committee was looking into this.

SCHLESINGER: Yes. The House Committee decided that there were two bullets, I mean, two shooters, two marksmen.

TALBOT: That's right, they did, based on acoustic evidence, and they said that they couldn't identify the conspirators, but they did not rule out, they said it was a conspiracy and they didn't rule out either the mafia or Cuban exiles. But now based on what, the CIA obstruction, Bob Blakey's saying that his mind has been, you know, that he's been made suspicious about the CIA as well. And Blakey seems, you know, has over the years been very cautious, as you probably know about what he's said…

SCHLESINGER: Yeah.

TALBOT: … and particularly about the CIA. But I interviewed him at his home in Notre Dame recently before the holidays and he's irate about what these new revelations about the CIA. It's interesting.

SCHLESINGER: Who would have been the point-man at the CIA?

TALBOT: Well, the person, all I know is the person who was the patron of George Joanide's in the CIA, the person who really backed back through his career and the person who probably brought him back out of retirement, although he was not in the Agency at that time, to serve this role as liaison with the committee was Richard Helms.

SCHLESINGER: Oh really?

TALBOT: Yes.

SCHLESINGER: Does Dick Helms mention the Warren Commissi his memoir?

TALBOT: He doesn't. I've just scanned his memoir and it has very little on the assassination. I think it's only a half a page.

SCHLESINGER: I know Dick. I knew Dick very well.

TALBOT: And what did you make of Dick Helms?

SCGLESINGER: He was a perfect bureaucrat.

TALBOT: Right.

SCHLESINGER: But, uh, he was, we were together in the second world war.

TALBOT: Oh, you've served in the OSS with him?

SCHLESINGER: Yeah.

TALBOT: Right. But he wasn't a Bill Harvey in terms of his sort of

SCHLESINGER: No.

TALBOT: … venomous feelings about the Kennedys?

SCHLESINGER: No.

TALBOT: Right.

SCHLESINGER: And I remember he was, when I came back to Washington in the Kennedy years, Dick and I used to lunch together at the Occidental Restaurant every couple of months, and after the Bay of Pigs, uh, we assumed because of Dick Bissell's rendition of Allen Dulles that this had been, had the backing of the CIA.

TALBOT: Uh-huh.

SCHLESINGER: But it had the backing only of Dulles and Bissell. Dick Helms explained it to me. Dick Helms and Dick Bissell were rivals.

TALBOT: I see.

SCHLESINGER: And, for example, Bob Amory, who was head of the DDI, Deputy Director for Intelligence, had never, he knew about a Pigs project.

TALBOT: Right.

SCHLESINGER: But he was never asked to provide an estimate of the reaction within Cuba.

TALBOT: Right.

SCHLESINGER: I mean, Allen Dulles said that the landing of the exiles would produce defections from the militia, uprisings behind the line and so on.

TALBOT: Yeah.

SCHLESINGER: Amory was never asked to verify that and it was held very closely. But, I can't believe Dick Helms had any…

TALBOT: Might have been involved in a plot.

SCHLESINGER: No.

TALBOT: No. It might have been quite, as you say, he was the ultimate bureaucrat so his interests were perhaps just protecting the integrity of the Agency …

SCHLESINGER: Yeah.

TALBOT: … and so on. What about Angleton? Would he have been the kind of character who might have been involved in something more sinister?

SCHLESINGER: I knew Angleton very slightly, and he was a twisted fellow …

TALBOT: Right.

SCHLESINGER: … after being suckered by Kim Philby.

TALBOT: Yes, exactly.

SCHLESINGER: He proposed everyone. He suspected me of being a Soviet agent. He suspected Harriman of being a Soviet agent. I mean, he was a destructive, twisted…

TALBOT: Paranoid character.

SCHLESINGER: Paranoid character.

TALBOT: Yeah. But did he ever, or did you ever get wind of any kind of animus he might have had against the Kennedys?

SCHLESINGER: No. No, actually no.

TALBOT: The other name that comes up often in research on the CIA, besides Bill Harvey, of course, who was famously, you know –

SCHLESINGER: Two -gun Harvey.

TALBOT: Exactly …is this fellow David Atlee Phillips, who worked with Harvey, who was the--

SCHLESINGER: He's written a book, hasn't he?

TALBOT: He did, called *Night Watch*, it’s his memoir; he's dead now, but he was the Latin American chief at the CIA; he rose to become the chief of the Latin American division.

SCHLESINGER: I never knew him, but there was a fellow, a veteran, who was in charge of the CIA operations, operations in Latin America; colonel, somebody or other?

TALBOT: - Oh, yeah.

SCHLESINGER: I, Philips, always, I knew about him.

TALBOT: Right.

SCHLESINGER: And he seemed a more reasonable figure than Harvey.

TALBOT: But you knew him only slightly, Philips?

SCHLESINGER: I never met Philips.

TALBOT: Oh, you never met him? - Ah -hah. - Okay. Well, I mean, again, I know you're agnostic on the subject, and I don't want to put any words in your mouth. But if there were, as some people now suspect, Agency involvement in the assassination, from your knowledge of the bureaucracy, could it have been something that that was plotted at a low level with the Cuban exiles, perhaps with the mafia, where they already were working with Johnny Roselli, Traficanti, those people. Could it have happened at the Harvey and Phillips level, and then once the Agency realized to their horror what had happened, that they acted to cover it up?

SCHLESINGER: I doubt it, because I think if the CIA were involved it would be renegade CIA people.

TALBOT: Right.

SCHLESINGER: Not in the bureaucracy.

TALBOT: But I mean, once …

SCHLESINGER: Because McCone, Helms and people like that, even Angleton, would be too intelligent, too, in a way, too decent to get involved than anything like that.

TALBOT: Right, but I guess what I'm asking is, even though they wouldn't have been involved in the crime itself, that once the crime had occurred, in the interest of what they felt was national security and the integrity of the Agency, would they have participated in the cover -up then?

SCHLESINGER: They may, as I say, I think they withheld certain information, both the CIA and the FBI to cover up or protect them, the agencies, from this suspicion of incompetence.

TALBOT: Right. Right.

SCHLESINGER: But they might also, but I can't conceive that there would be evidence of criminal involvement in the assassination which that they would try to suppress because it was bound to come out.

TALBOT: Right. Right.

SCHLESINGER: And in the long run, they would do something, protect the Agency better by identifying ways.

TALBOT: Right. What gives... Why would you not endorse then the Posner view of the assassination? You say you're agnostic on the subject. What gives you doubt still at this point that Lee Harvey Oswald didn't act alone?

SCHLESINGER: Well, I forget, but I have settled on an agnostic position because I, I just don't know.

TALBOT: You don't know.

SCHLESINGER: Yeah.

TALBOT: Okay. Okay.

SCHLESINGER: Because of the, partly because of the inadequate information provided by the FBI and the CIA.

TALBOT: Right. Who do you think is worth talking to, Mr. Schlesinger, who might have been, who might still be interesting in a subject from your days working in the Kennedy White House, or people who've done subsequent research, do you think?

SCHLESINGER: Wayne Smith.

TALBOT: Wayne Smith. And who is that?

SCHLESINGER: Wayne Smith, was head of the Cuban Interest Section in Havana in the 1980s.He's a professional, Foreign Service professional, FSO, and he's a conspiracy theorist. [https://www.c-span.org/program/news-conference/coalition-on-political-assassinations/65343]

TALBOT: Is he? Uh -huh. And where would I find him?

SCHLESINGER: In Washington.

TALBOT: Is he with the State Department?

SCHLESINGER: No. You ask anybody who is involved with the Castro affairs about Wayne Smith.

TALBOT: Right.

SCHLESINGER: He's a very competent professional. Diplomatic professional. And he's constantly quoted in the papers because he’s on anything Fidel does.

TALBOT: Uh-huh.

SCHLESINGER: And he's a good man. He's very strong on human rights.

TALBOT: Right.

SCHLESINGER: But he travels to Cuba quite often.

TALBOT: Great. Then I definitely should talk to him. Um, anyone else that you can think of?

SCHLESINGER: No, not off hand.

TALBOT: All right. I know you're busy and I'm looking forward to the second installment in your memoirs. When is that coming out, by the way?

SCHLESINGER: When I finish it.

TALBOT: [Laughs] Okay.

SCHLESINGER: It's like asking Rumsfeld, when, when, how long will it take before the American troops withdraw from Iraq?

Right. Well, in any case, I'm going to be in New York in February, and if you are [END]