

# Trump Releases JFK Assassination Files

*The long-awaited release could shed more light on what Fidel Castro or the CIA knew before the 1963 killing*

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WASHINGTON—The Trump administration on Tuesday released more than 30,000 pages of previously classified or censored documents relating to the death of former President John F. Kennedy, potentially providing answers to decades-old questions that helped make the 1963 assassination an [emblem of distrust in government](#).

Trump had said last year on the campaign trail he would disclose those documents if elected, and on Monday said most of the 80,000 remaining pages would be released in full. “You’ve got a lot of reading,” he told reporters while visiting the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Lawyers from the Justice Department’s national-security division were tapped to review hundreds of documents each, which they did late into the night on Monday, in preparation for the release, according to a person familiar with the matter. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, said officials were working to unseal additional documents still covered by grand jury and other secrecy laws.

The Warren Commission in 1964 found that Kennedy was killed by Lee Harvey Oswald, who acted alone. In the years since, a raft of alternate theories have bubbled up, including whether the U.S. government itself killed him. Some have suggested Kennedy’s vice president, Lyndon Johnson, worked with the Central Intelligence Agency [and the mafia to eliminate a president](#) who was skeptical about U.S. involvement in Vietnam. No evidence has substantiated those claims, but the CIA withheld from the commission key information about its own operations, fueling those suspicions.

The latest release, made public by the National Archives, contains at least 31,000 pages of digitized paper documents going back to the 1960s. Some have faded typewritten text and handwritten notes; others contain faint classified “SECRET” markings. The documents appeared to address a range of topics, from a trip Oswald took to Finland, to a \$210 rent reminder for a CIA safe house in Maryland, to the financing of covert operations. One March 1993 memo shows the CIA arranged for two Washington Post reporters to interview Yuri Nosenko, a former KGB agent, about his knowledge of Oswald when he lived in the Soviet Union. “The POST reimbursed Nosenko for expenses and paid him a \$250 consulting fee,” the memo said.

The secrecy around Kennedy's assassination was in many ways ground zero for the idea of "deep state" bureaucrats acting secretly to undermine elected officials, historians say, an idea that has been crucial to Trump's rise. Before Kennedy's assassination, most American conspiracy theories were about foreign countries meddling in U.S. affairs, said Steven Gillon, a historian on the Kennedy family. Kennedy's killing, U.S. dishonesty about the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal all created "a breeding ground of suspicions that lead to this fear of a deep state," Gillon said.

Documents released Tuesday help explain why some of the materials have remained secret for decades. CIA operations that could be exposed spanned dozens of countries, from Japan to Zaire, requiring officials to assess the damage that disclosure would bring to spy programs in each nation. "Public acknowledgement of a station in India would be a problem. US and India foreign relations are always delicate; the Indian government is very sensitive to perceived slights," one official wrote in a 1995 assessment. Disclosure of CIA operations in Berlin on the other hand would "cause no specific damage," the official wrote.

The documents, many of them fully unredacted, provide a rare window into the overlap between covert action and statecraft. One CIA document from 1960 recounts how Mexico's President Adolfo López Mateos, who had spoken publicly against American intervention in Cuba, praised American plans to oust Castro. López Mateos asked the CIA's local station chief to convey to President Dwight D. Eisenhower that "he is delighted that a decision has now been made to get rid of Castro."

While most Kennedy scholars don't expect any released documents to dispute the notion that Oswald shot Kennedy, they say the documents could shed more light on whether Cuban or Soviet officials knew about the former Marine's intentions to kill the president. The release could also provide more information about whether the CIA and Federal Bureau of Investigation ignored obvious warning signs about Oswald's plans in the months before the Dallas shooting.

Other files released in recent years have already shown that both agencies withheld information from the Warren Commission about Oswald's interactions with Soviet and Cuban officials. "Both the FBI and CIA had pretty clear evidence that Oswald was a threat in particular to John Kennedy," said Philip Shenon, author of a book on the Warren Commission. "It was in their files and because they ignored it and he did what he did, there was an aggressive coverup," he said.

One previously declassified FBI report showed that, in the months before the assassination, Oswald had tried to defect to Cuba, and sought a visa from Havana's mission in Mexico City. After being rejected for the visa, Oswald was heard

screaming that he was going to kill Kennedy, that FBI report alleged. Castro also knew about Oswald's visit and his threat, the report alleged, attributing the comments to an FBI source who spoke to Castro after Kennedy's death.

Oswald had [previously defected to the Soviet Union](#) but left Russia to return to the U.S. He also approached the Soviet mission in Mexico City in the months before the killing and asked for its help in procuring a visa, a CIA report said. The CIA, which was closely monitoring those two missions at the time, learned that Oswald met a KGB officer who was an expert in assassinations and sabotage.

Another document released Tuesday says that the CIA's station chief in Mexico City asked about an American trying to get a visa and having a problem with the Soviet consul. "Can we identify?" the chief wrote. An officer identified the American as Oswald, pulled the tape of the wiretap of the Soviet consulate that captured his visit, and marked it "urgent," the document said.

The CIA would later admit to a "benign coverup" in not disclosing information to the Warren Commission about its own attempts to kill Castro, which could have been relevant. Just two months before the assassination, Castro warned that if the U.S. tried to kill "Cuban leaders, they themselves will not be safe."

In dealing with investigators, the agency put in place "a process designed more to control information than to elicit and expose it," according to a [later CIA assessment](#). The CIA saw any possible involvement by Castro as an "unfounded rumor" that could lead to direct conflict with the Soviet Union. The agency saw as its job to keep away any information that would fuel that perception and instead provide only information that would lead to "best truth" that Oswald killed Kennedy for reasons that were unclear, according to the 2013 document.