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American Journalism and the Landscape of Secrecy: Tad Szulc, the CIA and Cuba

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Abstract

The relationship between secret services and the press is an enduring one. Although the CIA did not seek the kind of salient media profile enjoyed by the FBI, it nevertheless maintained an informal press office from its foundation in 1947. Directors of the CIA and their senior staff devoted significant time to the public profile of the Agency. Their efforts to engage with the world of newspapers divided journalists. Some saw it as their patriotic duty to assist the Agency, even reporting for it overseas, while other saw it as their constitutional role to oppose the Agency. This was especially true during the Vietnam War and Watergate. Thereafter, a more nuanced relationship developed in which the press saw themselves as an informal wing of new accountability processes that provided the intelligence community with oversight. This was ambiguous terrain and its complexities are explored here by focusing on the example of the prominent *New York Times* journalist Tad Szulc, whose complex relationship with the CIA spanned several decades and connected closely with the vexed issue of Kennedy and Cuba. Szulc played a number of roles including outrider, renegade and overseer, but there was confusion about who was servant and who was master.

Despite the prolific press coverage of the intelligence services during the last half-century, the interaction of the CIA and the media has received little sustained academic analysis.¹ This article argues that the relationship between intelligence and the media is long-standing and remarkably close, with its origins lying far back in the first decade of the Cold War. Although the CIA only created a formal press office during the Carter presidency, Directors of Central Intelligence and their immediate assistants spent much of their time attending to the public profile of the Agency. Allen Dulles, an iconic early director (1953–61), devoted significant time to public affairs, regularly briefing trusted journalists and using the dinner table of his home in Georgetown as the CIA's first press office. The CIA's Office of Public

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¹ See, however, Robert Dover and Michael S. Goodman (eds), *Spinning the Spies: Why Intelligence needs the Media, Why the Media needs Intelligence* (New York, 2009); Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), pp. 225–49; Loch K. Johnson, 'The CIA and the media', *Intelligence and National Security*, 1/2 (1986), pp. 143–69.

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Affairs is correct to assert that its predecessors have in fact existed since the creation of the Agency in 1947.²

What of the journalists? During the Cold War, journalists have broadly been seen as occupying three positions on the landscape of secrecy, namely outrider, renegade or overseer. Initially, many American writers and journalists effectively served as outriders, willingly cooperating with the intelligence services both in reporting information and also in the expanding realm of cultural warfare. Thereafter, and especially during the late 1960s and 1970s, a period of moral turpitude characterized by the Vietnam War and then Watergate, a new wave of journalists saw themselves as renegades developing a counter-culture of revelation, focusing the spotlight of investigative journalism upon what they considered to be governmental miscreants whose secret activities were deemed incompatible with democracy. Finally, from the mid-1970s, a more nuanced relationship developed that embraced the growing panoply of intelligence committees on Capitol Hill. Journalists increasingly took a middle path, viewing themselves as an informal part of the new accountability processes that provided the intelligence community with oversight. Indeed, much of the outrage evoked by the Iran–Contra affair in the 1980s focused precisely upon the circumvention of congressional restrictions which had only recently been placed upon covert activities.³

While broadly accepting this orthodox narrative, this article nevertheless argues that the landscape of secrecy is in fact ambiguous territory for the journalist. In navigating this complex terrain, journalists often adopt multiple identities. This schizophrenia is driven by tensions between everyday practice and ultimate purpose. As several Directors of Central Intelligence have pointed out while addressing the national press corps, journalists and spies are kindred spirits. They are both required to seek out human sources with valuable information and they attach great importance to the professional ethic of source protection. Both place a premium upon timely reporting and high-quality analysis.⁴ However, one species is in the business of secrecy and the other is in the business of exposure. Their paths cross frequently and they are simultaneously collaborators and competitors. As mediators in the complex terrain of national security and secrecy, their relationships rarely fit comfortably into a single category. This moral and political ambiguity is illustrated here by focusing on the example of the

² 'The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) has existed in one form or another since the Agency's inception in 1947', *Public Affairs*, 4 April 2007, <<https://www.cia.gov/offices-of-cia/public-affairs/index.html>> [accessed 12 April 2014].

³ This article does not seek to move beyond the framework of the Cold War. However, we might observe that in the last decade, with the visible clash of national security imperatives and core values, many journalists have abandoned the idea of effective oversight in favour of regulation by revelation.

⁴ William Casey, DCI, Presentation to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 9 April 1986, File 1, Box 27, William Odom Papers, Library of Congress.

prominent *New York Times* journalist Tad Szulc, whose relationship with the CIA embraced the roles of outrider, renegade and overseer – sometimes contemporaneously.

Tad Szulc was a citizen of the world. Born in Warsaw in 1926, he attended the Le Rosey private school in Switzerland before spending a year in France in 1940. Aged fourteen, he then escaped war-torn Europe and travelled to Brazil to join his family who, as Polish Jews, had taken the wise precaution of departing the previous year. Although he enrolled as a student at the University of Brazil, after two years he was lured away by the prospect of work as a reporter for the Associated Press in Rio de Janeiro. His talent was evident from the outset. By 1949 he had moved to New York City to cover the United Nations for United Press and in 1954 he became an American citizen, sponsored by his uncle, Ambassador John Wiley. Boasting a suite of six languages, he was then recruited by the *New York Times* as their Latin American correspondent and covered the coups and conflicts of the 1950s. This prompted his first book, *Twilight of the Tyrants*, published to considerable acclaim in 1959.⁵ Over the next thirty years, Szulc shuttled backwards and forwards between New York and Havana, simultaneously becoming intimate with Castro, then working to overthrow him and eventually becoming his most distinguished biographer.⁶ Szulc was a highly professional journalist, but his most important quality was a natural charm which persuaded people to give him scoops. Typically, in his landmark study of Castro published in 1986, he revealed that the CIA had extended some financial assistance to Castro during the mid-1950s.⁷

The uneasy cooperation between Tad Szulc and the CIA embraced substantial covert action against Castro's Cuba during the period 1963–5. Although Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond novels, is often identified – rather improbably – as one of the originators of some of the more hair-brained schemes designed to topple Castro, a more substantial case exists for the role of Tad Szulc as covert action consultant to President John F. Kennedy.⁸ The nature of Szulc's interventions, in which he served as an initiator of the idea of promoting a military *coup d'état* in Cuba, point us in the direction of the idea of 'state-private networks'. Recent work by Helen Laville, Scott Lucas and Hugh Wilford has advanced the argument that the CIA's collaborators in the realm of cultural warfare and covert action were often equal partners,

⁵ Tad Szulc, *Twilight of the Tyrants the Lives and Times of Five Latin-American Dictators* (New York, 1959).

⁶ Tad Szulc, *Fidel: A Critical Portrait* (New York, 1986). The remarkable interviews with Castro's circle conducted for this study are now archived at the University of Florida.

⁷ 'CIA helped fund Castro in '50s, author contends', Associated Press 10/19/86, Box 3, Series 3, Tad Szulc Papers, JFK Library.

⁸ Henry Brandon, *Special Relationships: A Foreign Correspondent's Memoirs from Roosevelt to Reagan* (London, 1989), p. 111.

rather than mere puppets.⁹ Certainly Tad Szulc was no mere functionary in the CIA's efforts against Castro. Instead, Szulc had taken an elaborate scheme direct to the Kennedy brothers who then insisted that the CIA work with him to implement it. As an interlocutor with the President and one of America's top experts on Castro, arguably Szulc was working alongside the CIA, perhaps even above it and certainly not under its direction. During the early 1960s, Szulc cooperated with the CIA on his own terms to pursue his own projects because there was no other plausible home within American foreign policy for government-supported anti-Castro activity. During this period, Szulc nevertheless operated a self-denying ordinance in not writing about the CIA. Finally, in the 1970s, repulsed by Watergate, Szulc became a vehement public critic of the Agency.

Research on the relationship between the CIA and journalists is problematic. Writers on this subject inevitably turn back to the controversial writings of Carl Bernstein in the late 1970s, but since then we have learned little more.¹⁰ The CIA remains sensitive about the subject, partly because working with journalists – especially American journalists – often generated accusations of interference in the domestic space which lay outside its remit. Nevertheless, many journalists working overseas willingly cooperated with the CIA during the Cold War out of patriotic duty by acting as intelligence outriders.¹¹ This mostly consisted of reporting what they saw in the countries they visited and receiving briefings in return.¹² While confident in their own minds about their course of action, they have nevertheless remained uneasy about sharing the facts of this cooperative relationship with their colleagues, even in retirement. Historians of the CIA suspect that some journalists were 'on the payroll' and that other journalists were regular CIA officers under cover, but documenting and analysing this phenomenon is difficult.¹³

The use of journalism as a non-official cover for CIA operatives abroad has been somewhat controversial. The press corps has fre-

⁹ Helen Laville, *Cold War Women: The International Activities of American Women's Organizations* (Manchester, 2002); W. S. Lucas, *Freedom's War: The US Crusade against the Soviet Union* (Manchester, 2000); Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer*. See also W. S. Lucas, 'Beyond freedom, beyond control: approaches to culture and the state-private network in the Cold War', in Hans Krabbendam and Giles Scott-Smith (eds), *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945–1960* (London, 2003).

¹⁰ Carl Bernstein, 'The CIA and the media: how America's most powerful news media worked hand in glove with the Central Intelligence Agency and why the Church Committee covered it up', *Rolling Stone*, 20 Oct. 1977. See also U.S. Congress, House, *Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Subcommittee on Oversight*, 'The CIA & the media'. Hearings (Washington DC, 1979).

¹¹ There are many examples of routine journalistic reporting in the papers of Richard Helms. See for example Estabrook (*Washington Post*) to Helms, 14 Nov. 1961, Helms Papers, 4/22, Lauinger Library, Georgetown University.

¹² McCone (DCI) memo for Executive Committee 'Agency relations with news media', 16 Jan. 1964, CIA-RDP80B01676R000100130041-4, CIA Research Search Tool (CREST) at National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

¹³ See the memoirs of Austin Goodrich, who has confirmed that he used his role as a correspondent for CBS as non-official cover: Austin Goodrich, *Hot War, Cold War and Beyond: Tales from the Trenches of the 20th Century* (Bloomington, IN, 2011), pp. 88–9.

quently claimed that this practice leaves many American journalists working overseas open to the suspicion that they might be hostile intelligence agents. Certainly many authoritarian states were paranoid about the possibility of foreign espionage during the Cold War. Similar controversies have surrounded the use of anthropology and archaeology as cover for intelligence operatives. In 1977, the US press corps presumed that it had obtained a firm assurance from the CIA that it would not use journalistic cover in the future. However, in reality this was an undertaking only to use such cover under exceptional circumstances. When the qualified nature of this assurance was highlighted by Walter Pincus in 1996, another furore ensued.¹⁴

The controversial nature of the CIA–journalist relationship means that hard facts are difficult to come by. The Tad Szulc case is therefore valuable in providing us with insights from documentary primary sources that are uniquely detailed, partly due to his own excellent private papers. First, abundant material on Tad Szulc appears in the CIA records declassified as part of the mandatory review of materials relating to the JFK assassination in the 1990s. In 1992, Congressional pressure resulted in the John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act and one consequence was greater disclosure of CIA materials than would normally be the case, since the agencies were not the final arbiter of what was released.¹⁵ Second, on 15 March 1975, Szulc himself submitted a Freedom of Information Request through his lawyers for all CIA documents on himself. In the mid-1970s the Freedom of Information Act was a more effective piece of legislation in the context of intelligence and the CIA was compelled to release some seventy-six documents to Szulc, albeit some of them redacted.¹⁶ Curiously, in the private papers of journalists – collections that are often overlooked by researchers – are copies of documents obtained through Freedom of Information in the 1970s that would probably not now be released.¹⁷

I

We commonly conceptualize journalists as observers and commentators, rather than actors and participants. Unusually, Tad Szulc is both subject and object. His own writing is certainly mentioned with reverence in the pages of diplomatic history and no discussion of Castro or

¹⁴ Sheryl M. Kennedy, 'Déjà scoop: journalists and the CIA', *American Journalism Review*, 18/3 (1996), pp. 10–12.

¹⁵ Anna Kasten Nelson, 'The John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Review Board', in Athan G. Theoharis (ed.), *A Culture of Secrecy: The Government Versus the People's Right to Know* (Lawrence, KS, 1998), pp. 211–32; Anna Kasten Nelson, 'The outsider as insider: reflections on the Kennedy Assassination Records Review Board', *The Public Historian*, 21/1 (1999), pp. 57–62.

¹⁶ Some 146 documents remained closed in their entirety. Gene F. Wilson Information and Privacy Co-coordinator CIA to Patrick Macrory, 15 Jan. 1976, File: Legal Material: CIA Documents, Box 61, Tad Szulc Papers, Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

¹⁷ Debra Gersh Hernandez, 'National security vs. the public's right to know', *Editor & Publisher*, 127/10 (1994), pp. 12–14; David Corn, 'C.I.A. vs. F.O.I.A.', *The Nation*, 259/11, 10 Oct. 1994.

Cuba is complete without a footnote to his landmark biography of the Cuban leader.¹⁸ However, Tad Szulc was initially credited with revealing or ‘blowing’ the Bay of Pigs operation in a story in the *New York Times* some ten days before it was launched in mid-April 1961. Historians have since concluded that this was not the case and that the story had no direct impact on events. Even had Castro’s efficient security services not infiltrated the anti-Castro rebels in Florida and Guatemala, the KGB station in Mexico, the most important in the western hemisphere, had detected the invasion well in advance. As Szulc himself remarked, the Bay of Pigs operation was the most open covert operation in history.¹⁹

Nevertheless, Szulc’s ‘pre-invasion’ writings during April 1961 remain contested territory. Historians continue to debate the extent to which they were suppressed – and if so by whom. What is clear is that Tad Szulc’s pre-invasion reporting created a furore. In early April 1961, Szulc had been returning from a long period in Latin America to take up an assignment in New York. En route, he visited friends in Miami and, almost before he had finished his first martini, he came across rumours of the Cuban invasion. He discovered that refugees who were opposed to the newly installed Castro regime were undergoing CIA training in Florida and also in Guatemala. Probing this further, he also learned that there was a plan to invade Cuba in mid-April 1961, now only ten days away. He realized that he had a scoop and – fearful of using the telephone in case it was intercepted – he rushed back to New York to talk with his editors. His editors were no less excited and asked him to set up a ‘war bureau’ to cover forthcoming events. The *New York Times* editors who worked on the front page, Ted Bernstein and Lew Jordan, decided to make this the main headline for 7 April running across four columns.²⁰ However, the *New York Times* later decided to shrink the story. A rumpus followed and several editors threatened to resign. An unhappy compromise was reached. On 7 April, the story appeared on the front page, but now reduced to one column. Headed ‘Anti-Castro forces trained at Florida bases’ it did not indicate the date of the invasion, nor did it mention the involvement of the CIA. Although the CIA was not an unknown organization in 1961, it was largely portrayed in the press as focused on intelligence. Covert action was rarely if ever mentioned by the press.²¹

¹⁸ See for example, Alan McPherson, ‘Courts of world opinion’, *Diplomatic History*, 28/1 (2004), pp. 83–112; Thomas G. Smith, ‘Negotiating with Fidel Castro: the Bay of Pigs prisoners and a lost opportunity’, *Diplomatic History*, 19/1 (1995), pp. 59–86; Robert A. Pastor, ‘a discordant consensus on democracy’, *Diplomatic History*, 17/1 (1993), pp. 117–28; Stephen G. Rabe, ‘The Caribbean triangle: Betancourt, Castro, and Trujillo and U.S. foreign policy, 1958–1963’, *Diplomatic History*, 20/1 (1996), pp. 55–78.

¹⁹ Howard Jones, *Bay of Pigs* (New York, 2009).

²⁰ Thomas W. Benson, *Writing JFK: Presidential Rhetoric and the Press in the Bay of Pigs Crisis* (College Station, TX, 2004), p. 58.

²¹ Myrna Oliver, ‘Tad Szulc: foreign correspondent broke Bay of Pigs invasion story’, *Los Angeles Times*, 22 May 2001.

What happened to Szulc's scoop? The extent to which either the White House or *New York Times* editors attempted to censor Szulc's coverage of the Bay of Pigs prior to the attack is an increasingly vexed issue for those interested in the history of Cold War journalism or press freedom. Remarkably, two recent studies by Woody Klein and W. Joseph Campbell have come to diametrically opposed conclusions on the matter.²² Klein takes the orthodox view that Kennedy personally attempted to prevent the story being published. He agrees with Richard Reeves's well-received account of Kennedy which recounts how the *New York Times* rang the White House on the evening of 6 April 1961 and summarized the story that they planned to print the next day about the planned Bay of Pigs operation. This included a forecast of the invasion date and discussion of CIA involvement. Reeves asserts that Kennedy 'blew up' and shouted angry words like 'treason'.²³ A little later, it is suggested, having recovered himself, Kennedy rang Orville Dryfoos, the paper's manager, and asked him to kill the story.²⁴ A recent account of the Bay of Pigs by Howard Jones offers a similar narrative of attempted suppression by Kennedy.²⁵ Indeed, most standard accounts of this period assert that Kennedy personally attempted to prevent the story being published.²⁶

W. Joseph Campbell, by contrast, argues that the story of Kennedy's apoplexy and subsequent intervention with Dryfoos is one of the great myths of modern journalism. For Campbell, this is a story which, despite uncertain provenance, is simply too good to die. Campbell explains that on the evening of 6 April 1961 Kennedy was engrossed in a meeting with Harold Macmillan and that in any case the White House telephone logs record no calls to the *New York Times* during this time period. Campbell appears to be correct this assertion. There are no records at the John F. Kennedy Library that indicate White House intervention, nor do those closest to the *New York Times* editorial team recall any interaction with the President or his staff with regard to the Szulc story.²⁷

Myths are themselves significant phenomena and stand in need of explanation. How might the story of Kennedy's personal intervention have arisen? Simultaneously, the liberal magazine *New Republic* had also obtained the same material. The editor, Gilbert Harrison, recalls that he approached Kennedy to seek his advice and subsequently

²² See in particular Woody Klein, *The Inside Stories of Modern Political Scandals: How Investigative Reporters Have Changed the Course of American History* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2010), pp. 22–38; W. Joseph Campbell, *Getting it Wrong: Ten of the Greatest Misreported Stories in American Journalism* (Berkeley, CA, 2010), pp. 80–110.

²³ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (New York, 1993), pp. 84–5.

²⁴ Dryfoos took over from his father-in-law, Charles Sulzberger, as head of the company on 25 April 1961, but had long been operations manager. Dryfoos died an untimely death two years later at the age of fifty.

²⁵ Jones, *Bay of Pigs*.

²⁶ Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York, 2000), p. 140.

²⁷ Campbell, *Getting it Wrong*, pp. 80–110.

acceded to the President's request to suppress the story in the national interest in what he calls an act of 'self-censorship'.²⁸ Kennedy's personal intervention in this case is well documented and Arthur Schlesinger's description of the contemporaneous Harrison episode – offered almost in the same breath as his commentary on the Szulc episode – suggests that some people may have mistakenly conflated the two stories. The *New Republic* story was written under a pseudonym by Karl Meyer, the Latin American specialist on the *Washington Post*, and a close friend of Szulc who would soon join him in co-authoring a book about the Bay of Pigs.²⁹ Meyer had gone to the *New Republic* under a pseudonym because he was sure his own editors on the *Washington Post* would not carry the story on national security grounds.³⁰

Campbell is somewhat less persuasive in arguing that the *New York Times* was not influenced by national security imperatives in redacting the Szulc story. He suggests that the story was not diluted or emasculated and that, instead of self-censorship, the contraction of the original story merely reflected professional editorial caution.³¹ While Campbell cites an impressive list of *New York Times* editors who subsequently claimed that there was no suppression of the story, including Harrison Salisbury, Campbell does not mention that Salisbury, Charles Sulzberger and others had themselves been involved in pugilistic controversies over CIA connections at the *New York Times* by the time they came to write their memoirs and were hardly objective witnesses.³²

Arthur Schlesinger, who knew Tad Szulc rather well, offers the most convincing account. Schlesinger suggests that anxiety about national security verging on moral anguish resulted in a degree of self-censorship. He asserts that Turner Catledge, the managing editor, telephoned James Reston, the senior editor, who was then at his weekend retreat in Virginia, to request his advice: 'Reston counseled against publication: either the story would alert Castro, in which case the Times would be responsible for casualties on the beach, or else the expedition would be cancelled, in which case the Times would be responsible for grave interference in national policy.' Schlesinger describes the decision of Reston to modify the story as a 'patriotic act' although he later reflected somewhat ruefully that fulsome coverage might have spared the country a disaster.³³

²⁸ G. A. Harrison, 'The Bay of Pigs: self-censorship and the national interest', lecture at UCLA, 15 Nov. 1966, Gilbert A. Harrison Papers, UCLA Special Collections. See also G. A. Harrison, *Self-Censorship and the National Interest: The Bay of Pigs Incident* (Los Angeles, 1966).

²⁹ Arthur Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (New York, 1965), p. 261.

³⁰ Montague Kern, Patricia W. Levering and Ralph B. Levering, *The Kennedy Crisis: The Press, the Presidency and Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1980), p. 106.

³¹ Campbell, *Getting it Wrong*, pp. 80–110.

³² See Matthew Jones, 'Journalism, Intelligence and the New York Times: Cyrus L. Sulzberger, Harrison E. Salisbury and the CIA', in this volume.

³³ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 261.

Newspaper editors do not keep minutes of meetings and it is difficult to unravel the complexities of these precise editorial decisions. However, James Reston's own account also mentions national security imperatives: 'It was one thing, I thought then and still do, to report that the anti-Castro legions were mobilizing . . . but quite a different thing to inform Castro of the timing of the invasion.' Catledge removed the assertion that the invasion was imminent and any reference to the CIA; he also cut the headline down from four columns to one. Ted Bernstein and Lew Jordan, the editors who normally looked after the front page, were 'furious' and five years later were still denouncing both Catledge and Reston for the changes.³⁴

Reston claims that he went to see Allen Dulles, Director of Central Intelligence, in the week before the invasion, and Dulles 'denied that his agency had anything to do with it'.³⁵ Remarkably, Szulc himself also claims to have visited Allen Dulles around 5 April 1961, two days before his story appeared. They discussed the impending invasion and Dulles had asked Szulc not to publish his story on grounds on national security. Szulc respectfully replied that he was not prepared to do this.³⁶ During this visit, Szulc was staying in his father-in-law's house in Georgetown and made good use of his time in the capital. A few days later he contacted an old friend, Donald M. Wilson, who was Deputy Director of the US Information Agency (USIA) and invited him round for breakfast. Szulc explained that only part of what he had discovered about the rebel forces had been printed in the *New York Times* and that he was personally convinced that an invasion was imminent. Wilson took the story to his boss Ed Murrow who promptly called Allen Dulles. Murrow and Wilson then met with Allen Dulles, who by now must have been tiring of his stream of impromptu visitors. Dulles was 'very bland' and did not admit to any of it. So while the Bay of Pigs was an open book to America's enemies, the USIA operated in the dark.³⁷

Szulc's discomfort reflected a keen awareness of the competition. He was not the first journalist to notice the secret army of Cuban exiles in training in Guatemala. It had first been mentioned by *The Nation* magazine in November 1960, and this was followed by similar accounts by the *Los Angeles Times*. In January 1961, the *New York Times* ran a similar story, and it is safe to assume that someone in Havana was reading the American press.³⁸ Szulc kept pressing his editors, and on 8 April the *New York Times* ran another story that had plenty of detail: 'This is a city of the legions of exiled Cubans who plot the downfall of Premier Fidel Castro and his regime. Men come and go quietly on their secret missions of sabotage and gun-running into Cuba, while others

³⁴ James Reston, *Deadline: A Memoir* (New York, 1991), pp. 325–6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

³⁶ Campbell, *Getting It Wrong*, p. 90.

³⁷ Donald M. Wilson, Oral History Interview (JFKOH-DMW-01), 14–15, JFK Library.

³⁸ Myrna Oliver, 'Tad Szulc: foreign correspondent'.

assemble at staging points here to be flown at night to military camps in Guatemala and Louisiana.’ Szulc proclaimed that the exiles intended ‘to gain a beachhead in Cuba to set up a “Government in Arms” and then request diplomatic recognition by foreign nations.’³⁹ The Bay of Pigs invasion came nine days later. Denied air support by a nervous White House and ravaged by Cuban military aircraft armed with rockets, many were killed and over 1,000 rebels surrendered.⁴⁰

Shortly after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, John F. Kennedy addressed the American Newspaper Publishers Association. He called for a consensual system of voluntary media restriction on national security issues, not unlike Britain’s D-Notice System. However the tide was now moving in the opposite direction heralding an era of media exposure for intelligence.⁴¹ In April 1962, on the first anniversary of the now infamous invasion, Szulc published a book entitled *The Cuban Invasion: The Chronicle of a Disaster*, written with Karl E. Meyer, from the *Washington Post*.⁴² In the wake of the ill-starred invasion fleet there followed a flotilla of books on the CIA, hitherto a taboo subject for American publishers. This included a study of the shooting-down of the Gary Power U-2 aircraft by the journalists David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, together with the first general survey of the CIA penned by Andrew Tully.⁴³ Although the precise choreography of Kennedy’s interaction with the press during the Bay of Pigs remains contested, there can be little doubt that this represents an important milestone in the media journey from what Gabriel Schoenfield has called a culture of deference towards a culture of defiance.⁴⁴

For Szulc himself, the significance of these writings was to elevate his credentials with the White House staff. Initially, Kennedy had asked Arthur Schlesinger to prepare a critique of Szulc’s writings on the Bay of Pigs in the hope of rebutting them, but Schlesinger replied that this would be difficult as there were few inaccuracies.⁴⁵ Subsequently, Szulc was able to speak at length to both Arthur Schlesinger and Richard Goodwin as he worked to prepare his book on the Bay of Pigs with Karl E. Meyer.⁴⁶ Unsurprisingly, the book was much more critical of the CIA and the Pentagon than of the White House – indeed the CIA’s Deputy

³⁹ ‘Cuban intrigue boiling in Miami as Castro foes step up efforts’, *New York Times*, 8 April 1961.

⁴⁰ D. Lewis, ‘Tad Szulc, 74, dies: *Times* correspondent who uncovered Bay of Pigs imbroglio’, *New York Times*, 22 May 2001.

⁴¹ Ted Galen Carpenter, *The Captive Press: Foreign Policy Crises and the First Amendment* (Washington DC, 1995), p. 59.

⁴² Tad Szulc and Robert E. Meyer, *The Cuban Invasion: The Chronicle of a Disaster* (New York, 1962).

⁴³ David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, *The U-2 Affair* (New York, 1962); Andrew Tully, *CIA: The Inside Story* (New York, 1962) was the first substantive book on the Agency to appear in the United States.

⁴⁴ Gabriel Schoenfield, *Necessary Secrets: National Security, the Media and the Rule of Law* (New York, 2010), p.181.

⁴⁵ Schlesinger memorandum to JFK, 7 April 1961, PO, Box 85, JFK Library.

⁴⁶ Editorial, *National Review*, 5 June 1962.

Director of Security complained that the ‘verbal abuse of this Agency’ exceeds that found in Soviet journals.⁴⁷ By contrast Schlesinger was referred to in reverential tones. Szulc was already the most respected American writer on Latin America. As a result of these private interactions he gradually began to develop a new role as an informal consultant to the White House concerning the revised American strategy towards Castro’s Cuba.

II

Tad Szulc’s relationship with Castro was already complex. His co-author, Karl E. Meyer, had introduced him to Castro in 1959, not long after he had assumed power in Havana.⁴⁸ Immediately, all three of them sat down for an ‘all-night session’. Szulc later recalled: ‘We sat all night in the kitchen – Fidel’s favourite place to meet with people – of the Havana Hilton. Then the three of us went to the First People’s Beach and sat until 4am drinking Cokes in the sand.’⁴⁹ Szulc actively developed his relationship with Castro and in July 1959 held an extended conversation with him about Cuba’s projection of revolution elsewhere in the region – something with which he already professed himself disappointed. State Department officials were in awe, noting this was the first time they could recall anyone managing a direct exchange with Castro concerning attempts to export revolution to the Dominican Republic and to Central America.⁵⁰

Despite these intimate conversations, Szulc was not an admirer of Castro. As a convinced liberal, Szulc was appalled by Cuba’s rapid transition from a popular national revolution with broad support to a communist dictatorship. Moreover, while he found Castro fascinating and enjoyed remarkable access to the Cuban premier, he was also repulsed by his egotism and cruelty. In June 1961, he wrote a long essay for the *New York Times* Sunday magazine on the new Cuba. He emphasized the ‘all powerful secret police’ and how quickly this had developed into a ‘Soviet-style Security Service’ operated by its own ministry and ‘a legion of informers’.⁵¹ In common with many journalists at this time, Szulc routinely reported his impressions to both the CIA and the State

⁴⁷ Robert L. Bannerman, Deputy Director of Security to Colonel Stanley J. Grogan, Assistant to the Director. Subject: ‘The Cuban Revolution, the chronicle of a disaster by Karl E. Mayer and Tad Szulc’. Folder Legal Material, CIA Documents, Box 51, Tad Szulc Papers, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

⁴⁸ Karl E. Meyer had received Overseas Press Club award for his coverage of Latin America and had interviewed Fidel Castro in the Sierra Maestra before he came to power.

⁴⁹ Felix Corley, ‘Tad Szulc’, *Independent*, 13 Aug. 2001. See also Szulc, *Fidel*.

⁵⁰ Memorandum of a telephone conversation between the Director of the Office of Caribbean and Mexican affairs (Wieland) in Washington and Tad Szulc of the *New York Times* in Miami, 15 July 1959, *FRUS* 1958–1960, VI, 58–60, doc. 334.

⁵¹ Tad Szulc, ‘The two Cubas of Fidel Castro’, *New York Times* magazine, 25 June 1961.

Department on returning from foreign assignments, including his visits to Cuba.⁵²

Continued personal meetings with Castro and the high volume of his reporting during 1961 reinforced his position as one of America's top Cuba experts. His opinion was valued and frequently sought. As we have seen, he was already known to Arthur Schlesinger and Richard Goodwin, two key staffers in the White House. Indeed, in the summer of 1961, Castro seems to have used Szulc as a one of the conduits to explore a possible *modus vivendi* with the United States. Tad Szulc returned from a trip to Havana and relayed this offer to Arthur Schlesinger, although it was received without enthusiasm.⁵³ In the autumn of 1961, Richard Goodwin, then Special Assistant to the President, asked Szulc to meet with the Attorney General Robert Kennedy to discuss the situation in Cuba. They met on 3 November 1961.⁵⁴ Goodwin knew that Szulc had undertaken a prolonged visit to Cuba in May and June 1961 immediately after the Bay of Pigs and, once again, had spent hours with Castro. Castro had personally walked Szulc over the battlefield of the Bay of Pigs 'pointing out what he had done at different moments of the invasion'. Szulc recalled 'we had a series of very long conversations'. After a long lunch with Bobby Kennedy at the Justice Department discussing the situation in Cuba, Szulc was asked if he would mind meeting the President.⁵⁵

At 11.00 the next day Szulc was in the White House with John F. Kennedy and Richard Goodwin. The conversation lasted about an hour and a half. Discussions ranged over the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs and then turned to America's policy options – ranging from hostility to dialogue. At one point Kennedy turned to Szulc and asked, rather unexpectedly, 'what would you think, if I decided to authorize the assassination of Premier Castro?' Szulc was taken aback, but once he had recovered his poise, he advised the President that it would not affect matters in Cuba much, since the communist governing system would continue regardless. Szulc added that on moral grounds he would be opposed to such activities. JFK quickly responded that he agreed completely, adding: 'well I was just testing you'. However, he then confided that not everyone in American government was of that opinion: 'I am under very very strong or powerful pressure from certain people . . . to authorize an operation resulting in the assassination of Premier Castro.'⁵⁶

⁵² CIA document of 13 Sept. 1960 entitled 'Cuba/Details of Debriefing Szulc 8th of September 1960'. Folder Legal Material, CIA Documents, Box 51, Tad Szulc Papers, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

⁵³ Szulc to Schlesinger, 23 June 1961, Box 65, POF, JFKL.

⁵⁴ Reeves, *President Kennedy*, pp. 264–5.

⁵⁵ Szulc testimony, 10 June 1975, US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Report of Proceedings, vol. III, HSCA Segregated CIA Collection, Box 36, JFKA records, NARA. Szulc had recently met with Goodwin, who confirmed that his recollections of the conversations were correct.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Notoriously, American efforts to undermine Castro's regime included numerous assassination plots launched by the United States and had begun with a Covert Action plan signed off by President Eisenhower in January 1960.⁵⁷ After the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, pressure from both John F. Kennedy and his brother to do something about Castro reached new heights. Bobby Kennedy was the driving force behind these efforts but was unsure what form they might take.⁵⁸ Tad Szulc himself recalled that the Kennedy brothers may have hoped to topple Castro in time to reap the benefits for the presidential election at the end of 1964.⁵⁹ Despite innumerable plans there was widespread disagreement on how any such toppling might be achieved.⁶⁰ Arthur Schlesinger was clear about the different schools of thought and later told a friend that: 'It was Richard Bissell who conceived the plots and brought in the mob. Richard Helms inherited the operation after Bissell's departure and did what he deemed his duty.'⁶¹ Giving a sense of the attitude within American government, Schlesinger has explained that there were broadly two different schools of thought:

The CIA wished to organize Castro's overthrow from outside Cuba, as against the White House, the Attorney General's office and State who wished to support an anti-Castro movement inside Cuba. The CIA's idea was to fight a war; the others hoped to promote a revolution. Any successful anti-Castro movement inside Cuba would have to draw on disenchanted Castroites and aim to rescue the revolution from the Communists.⁶²

One of the most prominent architects of the White House approach was Tad Szulc. In January 1963, he took his ideas for a military rebellion to the White House and the State Department in the hope of finding some American channel for his scheme other than the CIA, whom he disliked. Although Szulc had continued to report information to the CIA, the Bay of Pigs fiasco had left Szulc with severe doubts about its competence in the realm of covert action.⁶³ The following month Szulc's idea was discussed at a Special Group meeting, with John McCone, the new Director of the CIA, taking the lead. McGeorge Bundy was proposing an accommodation with Castro, but Bobby

⁵⁷ Don Bohning, *The Castro Obsession: US Covert Activities Against Cuba, 1959–1965* (Dulles, VA, 2005), p. 57.

⁵⁸ Kathryn S. Olmsted, *Real Enemies: Conspiracy Theories and American Democracy, World War I to 9/11* (New York, 2009), pp. 124–8.

⁵⁹ Tad Szulc, 'Cuba on our mind', *Esquire*, Feb. 1974.

⁶⁰ Gus Russo, *Live by the Sword: The Secret War against Castro and the Death of JFK* (Baltimore, 1998), pp. 202–38.

⁶¹ Schlesinger to Newfield (New York Post), 16 Dec. 1972, 3/24, Helms Papers, Lauinger Library, Georgetown University.

⁶² Arthur Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy* (New York, 1978), pp. 510–11.

⁶³ CIA memo, 'Operations to Split the Castro Regime – Interim Working Draft, reviewed 10 February 1977, with Attachments, File: 10, Box 36, Tad Szulc Papers, Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

Kennedy preferred Szulc's proposal for a military rebellion. He pressed his brother to agree to develop the scheme. The President called in Robert Hurwitch, the State Department's representative on the Cuba Co-ordination Committee. He set out Szulc's aggressive plan for using the Cuban military to get rid of Castro. Hurwitch was not impressed by this and listened in silence, realizing there was little he could do to dissuade his chief.⁶⁴

Szulc's idea focused on a *coup d'état* by Cuban armed forces. Entitled 'Operation Leonardo', it was developed in combination with his friend George Volsky of the US Information Agency and the Cuban exile Nestor Moreno. Moreno suggested that by contacting and exfiltrating senior Cuban officers a coup could be launched. Szulc had not wished to work with the CIA and instead had hoped for some discreet financial support from the State Department. However, on 9 February 1963, Szulc found himself presenting a detailed version of the plan in a CIA safe house in Washington DC. The meeting was led by Robert Hurwitch, the State Department Cuban Coordinator. Also in attendance were three CIA officers: Al Rodriguez who was Szulc's regular CIA contact; Dave Morales, the chief of covert operations at JMWAVE, the CIA's Miami station; and Colonel Davies, a CIA military contractor. The CIA subsequently gave its operations focused on an internal *coup d'état* the codename AM/TRUNK, while its externally mounted operations were codenamed AM/LASH.⁶⁵

Senior CIA officers were sceptical about the viability of a military rebellion and concluded that this option was wishful thinking on the part of the Kennedys. However, Richard Helms, who was then liaising with the White House on covert action, realized that they had little choice but to press ahead. By April 1963 Langley was cabling its stations and bases in Latin America urging an 'intensive effort to seek out disaffected key personnel in Cuban armed forces with aim of uniting and turning non-Communist elements against Castro'. By August 1963, the responses had been 'disappointing' and CIA HQ at Langley urged its outstations to do more, insisting that developing operations to penetrate the Cuban armed forces was a 'high priority objective'⁶⁶

The CIA already enjoyed a long-term briefing relationship with Szulc via Alfonso Rodriguez. Szulc briefed both CIA and State Department officers on his return from visits abroad and received official information in exchange. However, the CIA loathed having Szulc and his friends imposed upon them from above by the White House as covert action partners. Superficially, the disagreements were about approach, with the CIA and the Pentagon hoping to launch a war from outside Cuba, while the White House and the State Department wished to split

⁶⁴ Russo, *Live by the Sword*, pp. 180–1.

⁶⁵ CIA memo, 'Chronology of significant documents in the AMTRUNK file', April 1977, Folder 23, Box 36, HSCA Segregated CIA Collection, JFK records, NARA.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

the existing Castro regime. More fundamentally, the tensions were political. The White House and the State Department wished to deploy left-liberal defectors from the Castro camp, figures such as Manolo Ray and Huber Matos. Ray and Nestor Moreno ran an anti-Castro group known as 'JURE'. The CIA preferred rightist exiles, some of whom had links to the old Batista regime.⁶⁷

Richard Helms, who superintended covert action programmes for the CIA at this point, was certainly under no illusion that Szulc had impressed the President. He explained to Alfonso Rodriguez, the CIA case officer in Washington who looked after AM/Trunk, that his work with Szulc reflected a 'presidential request'.⁶⁸ On 5 September 1963, Richard Helms and his CIA colleague Seymour Bolten met with White House aide Ralph Dungan to review progress on the operation.⁶⁹ As with many covert actions designed to instigate rebellion, it was difficult to keep the operation secret and there were constant worries about security. A few months later, one of the CIA's better agents with high-level contacts with the Cuban military had to be exfiltrated after concerns that his activities had been uncovered. During 1964, active operations continued, often conducted by sea, to infiltrate and exfiltrate agents connected with AM/Trunk and to set up weapons caches.⁷⁰

Throughout 1964, the CIA continued to regard Szulc as an important collaborator who not only enjoyed high-level contacts in the White House but who was also supremely well informed about events in Cuba on account of his own networks. Szulc was continually moving between Washington and Miami, offering his opinions on who were the key players and where the frictions lay between the competing groups of exiles. Szulc seems to have integrated his work with AM/Trunk and his work for the *New York Times* almost completely. Obviously he was not writing directly about the CIA or AM/Trunk, but regular contact with the CIA allowed a constant exchange of information about the latest developments in Cuba that was beneficial to both parties. Typically, on 19 May 1964, Szulc asked his CIA contact, Alfonso Rodriguez, if a U-2 aircraft had been shot down over Cuba. Rodriguez dismissed this as rumour, but was struck how the CIA and Szulc's own network exchanged information almost as equal partners.⁷¹

At his point Szulc's relationship with the CIA was little short of schizophrenic. Although he had temporarily ceased to write explicitly about the CIA while engaged on AM/TRUNK, nevertheless he simultaneously regarded the Agency as a subject he was investigating. This is

⁶⁷ The CIA had allocated Tad Szulc the codename 'AMCAPE-1'.

⁶⁸ CIA memo, 'AMTRUNK Operation – interim working draft', 14 Feb. 1977, Box 36, HSCA Segregated CIA Collection, (104-10103-10097), JFK records, NARA.

⁶⁹ Bolten superintended the CIA's operations in Latin America, White House Staff Exit Interview, Seymour Bolten, 4 Feb. 1981, Jimmy Carter Library.

⁷⁰ CIA memo, 'Tad Szulc telephonic conversation', 19 May 1964, LA Div Work File, (104-103-10115), HSCA, JFK records, NARA.

⁷¹ Ibid.

illustrated by his relationship with Manuel Ray, a former Castro minister who had fallen out of favour and had fled to Florida, where he now ran a leftist faction with the fissiparous anti-Castro resistance movement. Manuel Ray also enjoyed CIA support, and in July 1964 Alfonso Rodriguez pressed Ray on the nature of his relationship with Szulc. Ray explained that Szulc was ‘constantly prying’ to try and discover the precise relationship between himself and the CIA. Rodriguez responded to Ray that Szulc was often asking him exactly the same questions and he thought this ‘normal activity for a newspaper correspondent’. However, Ray quickly denied admitting to Szulc that he was receiving support from the CIA. Rodriguez concluded that a ‘mutual admiration society’ existed between figures such as Tad Szulc, Jorge Volsky and Manuel Ray. They were all fellow left-liberals, and both Szulc and Volsky saw Ray as an intellectual of real integrity with a progressive orientation and perhaps even as a future leader of Cuba.⁷² The CIA noted that: ‘All three were to some degree antipathetic to the Agency and were difficult to control.’ They freely admitted being ‘anti CIA’ and explained that they were working with the Agency only because there was ‘no alternative if they wished to accomplish their mission’.⁷³

For Theodore Shackley, chief of the CIA’s JMWAVE Station, the antipathy was mutual. He loathed the AM/Trunk operation because Szulc and his friends continually paraded their White House connections in front of CIA field officers, threatening to complain to higher authority. For the CIA, AM/Trunk transgressed one of the basic rules of agent-running, that the CIA was in charge of its agents, not the other way around. Yet the CIA had little choice but to support the AM/Trunk operation and its over-mighty subjects, which continued until at least 1965. Shackley provided them with resources and support but kept them semi-detached from his own operations. However, the AM/Trunk approach of encouraging internal disaffection continued to be favoured by key advisers in the Lyndon B. Johnson White House, notably by Walt Rostow.⁷⁴

By September 1965, the CIA had become increasingly concerned that both its main streams of covert activity in Cuba – known as AM/Lash and AM/Trunk – were being monitored by DSE, the Cuban security service. Some even suggested that parts of the operations were being controlled by DSE. As a result, ongoing operations were suspended until the bona fides of some of the key agents could be re-established using ‘intensive interrogation and polygraph’. In late February 1966, the

⁷² CIA memo by Alfonso Rodriguez, ‘Tad Szulc; Relationship with Manuel Ray’, 7 July 1964, HCSA Segregated CIA collection (microfilm reel 16, Ricciadellie – Ruby) (104-10180-10454) CIA 80T01357A, JFKA records, NARA. Rodriguez is discussed in Philip Agee, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary* (London, 1975), p. 184.

⁷³ CIA memo, ‘Operations to split the Castro regime’; see n. 63.

⁷⁴ David Corn, *Blond Ghost: Ted Shackley and the CIA’s Crusades* (New York, 1994), p. 102.

arrest of one of their key agents in the Cuban hierarchy, Rolando Cubela, crystallized their fears about operational security. Predictably some within the CIA insisted that Cubela was a double agent. Either way, the transcript of Cubela's subsequent trial in Havana forced the CIA to conclude that the DSE investigation had 'surfaced the entire AM/TRUNK internal network'. Szulc had already detected that the sun was setting on the various anti-Castro movements and had accepted a posting away from the *New York Times* Washington bureau to become their chief correspondent in Spain and Portugal.⁷⁵ His relationship with the CIA was moving into a new phase.

III

Over the next five years, Szulc managed to be expelled twice by authoritarian regimes in Europe. He was first thrown out of Portugal by the Salazar regime, before being appointed the *New York Times* eastern European correspondent, based in Prague. Szulc was favourably disposed towards Alexander Dubcek and the reformist movement in Czechoslovakia, which struck a chord with his own progressive views. He returned to Prague from a family holiday in Cape Cod just a week before the crushing of the Prague Spring and was soon busy reporting the activities of the Warsaw Pact invaders. As a result of his detailed dispatches on the activities of the Red Army he was expelled for revealing secret military information. In 1969, he returned to the United States to spend four years with the *New York Times* Washington bureau. In 1972, he resigned, claiming that he felt unduly constrained by the editors in terms of what he could write. This was true, since some of his stories had been pulled by the editors. However, his decision to leave the paper after more than twenty years also reflected the fact that he could now make a substantial living from writing popular non-fiction and from freelance work for magazines such as *Esquire* and *The New Yorker*.

Szulc instinctively disliked the Nixon administration. He was also disturbed by the growing revelations about the CIA that emerged during the early 1970s. He now felt comfortable writing about the CIA and did not hesitate to use inside information from his previous contacts to inform his increasingly critical writing about the Agency. Notably, in 1974, he published a biography of E. Howard Hunt, a CIA officer who as extensively involved in Watergate. In this book he expressed a wish to explore 'the men – and the state of mind – that could embark with such frightening enthusiasm upon the Watergate adventures', adding that he wished to probe Hunt's 'CIA Psychology'.⁷⁶ In turn, the CIA was increasingly irked by his writings, noting that he had covered Watergate

⁷⁵ CIA memo, 'Chronology of significant documents'; see n. 65.

⁷⁶ Tad Szulc, *Compulsive Spy: The Strange Career of E. Howard Hunt* (New York, 1974), pp. 4, 11.

extensively and *en passant* had ‘demonstrated an extreme bias against the CIA’.⁷⁷

Szulc now enjoyed excellent contacts in the higher echelons of government. One colleague who worked with him in his final year on the *New York Times* recalls that the first thing he would do when coming into the office in the morning was carefully to check his mail. Friends in the White House, the CIA and the State Department would often send him classified material through the post.⁷⁸ In April 1970, in a reprise of the Bay of Pigs episode, one of the stories that he reportedly uncovered was the forthcoming invasion of Cambodia. The editors of the *New York Times* agreed that this story could not be run on grounds on national security.⁷⁹ Szulc’s talent for eliciting secrets from high places did nothing to abate Henry Kissinger’s notorious obsession with secrecy. In April 1971, Kissinger became concerned that Szulc was close to uncovering his improving relations with the Chinese – with whom he was meeting discreetly in Paris. He discussed his anxieties about Szulc and the *New York Times* with the Chinese and added: ‘I have come to France secretly eleven times by five different methods. I am going to write a detective novel when I am through.’⁸⁰

Szulc also worried the CIA. On 13 September 1972, he wrote an article giving precise details of the current CIA and DIA estimates of North Vietnamese strengths. He asserted that these had been prepared for the National Security Council and both agencies concurred that recent heavy bombing had failed to slow the flow of men and equipment to the south in any meaningful way.⁸¹ The CIA was horrified since the leak could only have come ‘from a very high level’. Howard Osborn, the CIA’s Director of Security, was informed that there were only three possible reports that contained the intelligence that Szulc had discussed and each was ‘a very sensitive document’ with distributions of between one and three copies outside the Agency – going to figures such as Kissinger and Defense Secretary Melvyn Laird.⁸² By 1974, Szulc had begun to hint a little at his own part in the events of the 1960s, but now with a more critical voice. In an article in *Esquire* written in February 1974, he recounted his conversation with Kennedy in November 1961 about the possible liquidation of Castro. As a result, Szulc found himself giving classified evidence to the Senate Select Committee on

⁷⁷ LAD/JFK Task Force memo, ‘Tadeusz (tad) Witold SZULC (AMCAPE-1) (201-590539)’, 14 Feb. 1977, HSCA Segregated CIA Collection, Box 36 (104-10103-10097), NARA.

⁷⁸ Confidential interview, Washington DC, June 2010.

⁷⁹ ‘The global gumshoe’, *Time*, 21 Oct. 1974. Also confidential interview, New York, June 2011.

⁸⁰ Memo of a conversation between Kissinger, Vernon Walters, Winston Lord, Huang Chen – PRC Ambassador to France, Tsao Kuei Sheng – First Secretary, Wei Tung – Sec to PRC Ambassador, 19 Aug. 1971, White House memo, <<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc4.pdf>> [accessed 12 April 2014].

⁸¹ Tad Szulc, ‘Hanoi held able to fight 2 years at present rate’, *New York Times*, 13 Sept. 1972.

⁸² Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs to Osborn, 14 Sept. 1972, attaching memo to DCI Helms, ‘Distribution of Agency publications possibly referred to in 13 September *New York Times* article by Tad Szulc’, 13 Sept. 1972, CIA-RDP80T01719R000400050005-1, CREST, NARA.

Intelligence as part of their inquiry into assassination. Part of Szulc's evidence to the committee remains closed.⁸³

Szulc's view of the CIA had never been enthusiastic – but it now darkened considerably. In the late 1970s, Szulc took a particular interest in the revelations about CIA experiments with LSD and wrote several articles on the subject.⁸⁴ The antipathy was mutual, and the CIA now voiced its suspicions about Szulc and began to review his personal file. Back in June 1962, the CIA considered that Szulc was an unproblematic individual from a security point of view, despite his Polish background. John Wiley, the American ambassador to Lisbon in 1947, was his uncle and had served as his sponsor. He also had a cousin, Ignacy Sachs, working in the Polish embassy in Washington with whom he occasionally shared information. However, the CIA had asserted that there was no espionage since Szulc made no secret of the relationship. Moreover, his cousin was not considered to be an intelligence officer, but merely an official in the press section of the Polish embassy.⁸⁵

By the 1970s the CIA's tone had changed. They noted that Szulc was in frequent contact with communist party leaders and functionaries throughout Latin America, although this was a normal part of his duties. They conceded that: 'Suspicious about his motives or possible connections with foreign intelligence services have never been proven.' However, they added that doubts about Tad Szulc 'are unconfirmed but remain alive'.⁸⁶ These growing doubts about Tad Szulc were probably driven by the activities of his daughter, Nicole Szulc, who was now collaborating with Philip Agee.⁸⁷ Agee was a renegade CIA officer who was devoting his time to exposing CIA activities and identities. Nicole Szulc was a freelance journalist with an interest in American intelligence and security agencies. The CIA alleged that she had approached the Cuban embassy in Mexico City with a request for Cuban material on CIA operations to aid her research. The Cubans eventually responded by inviting her to what they called a 'clandestine-type' meeting in a car with Cuban officials from the UN delegation in New York. She was then invited to come to Cuba to carry out joint research in the autumn of 1974.⁸⁸ In 1976, the CIA claimed that while attending an International Women's Conference in Madrid she had described herself as working as an adviser for the Cuban Foreign Ministry (Minrex)

⁸³ Szulc testimony, 10 June 1975, US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Report of proceedings, vol. III, Box 259–15, JFK records. Szulc had recently met with Goodwin and they had agreed that his recollections of the meeting were accurate.

⁸⁴ Tad Szulc, 'The CIA's electric kool-aid acid test', *Psychology Today*, 11 (1977), pp. 92–4.

⁸⁵ CIA memo, 'Tadeusz Szulc', 2 June 1961, Folder 16, Box 36, JFK records, NARA.

⁸⁶ CIA Comments on Book V, Final Report of the Investigation in to Assassinations, 30 Aug. 1977, HSCA Segregated CIA Collection Box 36, JFK records, NARA.

⁸⁷ Agee, *Inside the Company*, p. 640.

⁸⁸ CIA memo, 'Nicole Szulc', 10 Nov. 1974, File: 10, Box 36, Tad Szulc Papers, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

Counter-intelligence Section and also described her assistance to Philip Agee on a recent book.⁸⁹

All this seems to have prompted the CIA to reflect anew on the history of their collaboration with Szulc. In February 1977, they conducted a review of the AM/Trunk operation and concluded that it was possible that the whole thing 'might have been a political action operation' run by the Cubans against the CIA. Throughout the operation, his case officer Alfonso Rodriguez and indeed many of the staff based at the CIA headquarters in Langley had been enthusiastic. However, the CIA's massive JMWAVE station just south of Miami, headed by Ted Shackley, had always entertained doubts. Whether these concerns related to security or a turf war over control with Szulc's independently minded group is not clear. Whatever the reality, four AM/Trunk assets were arrested in Cuba in late 1965 and early 1966, some receiving prison sentences of thirty years. JMWAVE were probably correct at this point in concluding that all the key figures in the network had now been 'rolled up'.⁹⁰

During the 1970s, no-one uncovered Szulc's own work for the CIA. However, in 1978, three political scientists who were writing a book about Kennedy, international crises and the press came quite close.⁹¹ In an interview with them, Szulc admitted that he had known about the ongoing CIA raids and incursions into Cuba that continued after the Bay of Pigs invasion, although he insisted he had not known about the assassination attempts. They noted that Szulc had not written about American involvement in these ongoing raids in the *New York Times* during 1962 and 1963, and they found it puzzling that the focus of his reporting during this time was on rather humdrum economic and diplomatic activities. When they pressed him on the matter, his answers were bland and unconvincing. The truth was that Szulc had himself been part of this activity, but in 1978 this was not something that Szulc wished to discuss.⁹²

Who was Tad Szulc really working for? The picture remains unclear. However, the likely conclusion is that Tad Szulc was primarily working for Tad Szulc. Having spent the late 1950s reporting on some of the hotter regions of the Cold War, Szulc had quickly discovered the interplay between intelligence, covert action and the wider currents of international affairs in the Third World. As early as 1959, Szulc had tried to befriend a CIA representative in Santiago, and many similar incidents resulted in a warning to all Latin American stations to 'beware of Szulc and his efforts to interview Agency personnel'. By 1960 his growing reputation and impressive contacts prompted several different

⁸⁹ CIA cable, C/EUR 3 to Director, 18 Feb. 1976, *ibid.*

⁹⁰ CIA memo, 'AMTRUNK Operation'; see n. 68.

⁹¹ Kern et al., *The Kennedy Crises*, p. 106.

⁹² Interview with Tad Szulc by P. and R. Levering, 3 Feb. 1978, Box 001, Series 1. Montague Kern, Patricia Levering, and Ralph Levering Personal Papers, JFK Library.

CIA officers to call for an investigation to clear up ‘once and for all’ his suspected connections with a hostile intelligence agency. Nothing suspicious was uncovered. Even in 1977, the CIA conceded that all of Szulc’s activities could easily be explained by ‘the combination of his personality, ambitions and the demands on an investigative reporter for the NYT’. He is, they concluded, ‘an aggressive, instinctive and persistent journalist’. Tad Szulc would doubtless have been delighted by such an epithet.⁹³

⁹³ CIA Latin American Division/JFK Task Force memo, ‘Tadeusz’; see n. 77.