

# Unique view of JFK assassination

by Jeffrey Steinberg

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## **JFK: The CIA, Vietnam and the Plot to Assassinate John F. Kennedy**

by L. Fletcher Prouty

Carol Publishing Group, New York, 1992  
366 pages, hardbound, \$22

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L. Fletcher Prouty is known to many people as the author of *The Secret Team*, the mid-1970s epic history of the founding and corrupting of the post-World War II American intelligence establishment, and scores of articles on international finance and national security affairs. For a handful of cognoscenti, he is also known as an expert on railroads and the author of annual encyclopedia entries on the subject. But for millions more people around the world, Colonel Prouty is better known as “Mr. X”—the enigmatic Washington national security insider played by Donald Sutherland in Oliver Stone’s recent nationally acclaimed motion picture about the John Kennedy assassination, “JFK.”

In the film, “Mr. X” meets with New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison and provides him with an insider’s view of the role of the military-industrial complex in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The “Mr. X” character, whom Stone states was modeled on Colonel Prouty, ties the whole film together by providing Garrison and the audience with what might be called the “bigger picture”—the complex of motives, personalities, and capabilities—behind the Kennedy murder and the coverup.

As powerful a film as Oliver Stone put together, it is dwarfed by the masterful job that Fletcher Prouty has done in his new book. In fairness to Stone—who wrote the book’s introduction—it is nearly impossible to convey in even a three-hour motion picture the full history that necessarily must be presented to begin to approach a comprehensive portrait of the Kennedy assassination.

What Fletcher Prouty has put together—drawing upon his own unique, eyewitness experiences as well as a skilled investigator’s eye for crucial details—is more than just a history of the Cold War era. Prouty’s *JFK* provides the reader with critical insights into the underlying policy issues that have shaped the last half century of world history.

## **The malthusian power elite**

In the very first chapter, Prouty lays the conceptual foundations for his probe of the JFK assassination by providing the reader with an eye-opening profile of an “international power elite,” which has shaped politics for centuries, hiding behind a thick cloak of secrecy. Prouty identifies five leading authors of the “propaganda schemes” that have shaped the thinking and motives of this power elite: John Locke, Thomas Malthus, Charles Darwin, Werner Heisenberg, and G.W.F. Hegel. The “propaganda schemes” developed by these five individuals—whose roots he traces to the British East India Company—have been used to justify wars, genocide, racism, colonialism, and the suppression of scientific progress for centuries.

Prouty argues that with the development of the hydrogen bomb, this global elite was forced to abandon the option of large-scale war-fighting—which could lead to nuclear Armageddon and thus their own demise—in favor of secret wars, often drawing on the resources of intelligence agencies rather than on conventional armies.

What Prouty calls the United States’ thirty years’ war in Indochina (1945-75), a central theme of *JFK*, is a paradigmatic case of this kind of secret warfare.

As Prouty writes about the Vietnam War Phoenix Program, under which tens of thousands of Vietnamese were “neutralized” on the basis of being suspected North Vietnamese sympathizers and agents:

“In a war where ‘body count’ seemed to be the primary objective of the fighting forces, one must not lose sight of the great significance of underlying factors that establish a climate of legitimacy for murder, or ‘neutralization.’ In fact, these underlying beliefs serve to promote genocide. For example, there are many people in this world who believe it is not only ‘all right’ but essential to reduce the total human population, and to reduce it by any means. This conviction, which stems from the work of the British East India Company’s chief economist at the turn of the nineteenth century, Thomas Malthus, pervades certain elements of our global society. Malthusianism is a deeper motivational factor than the more popularly recognized ideological confrontations.

“When it is ‘their turn,’ the Soviets have performed these common genocidal functions as well as ‘the West’ has. Witness the slaughter of millions of non-combatants in Afghanistan and the forced movement of no fewer than 6 million Afghan natives from their ancient homeland over the great passes to Pakistan.”

## **An eyewitness to history**

Prouty’s work is no abstract treatise on the tragic events of the last half century. It is a rich and detailed tracing of some of the most critical events of those decades, often punctuated by Colonel Prouty’s own eyewitness accounts.

As a young Army pilot, Fletcher Prouty shuttled members of the American and Chinese delegations to the critical

Teheran and Cairo conferences in 1943, where the secret presence of Chiang Kai-shek already signaled that the great bipolar struggle would shift from the war against Nazism to the war against communism—even as World War II was still playing out on the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific.

For Prouty, the Indochina war began the very day that the Allies and Japan signed the armistice on the *U.S.S. Missouri* in 1945. It was on that day that all of the American military equipment formerly earmarked for the invasion of Japan was shipped from Okinawa to South Korea and Vietnam—into the waiting arms of Syngman Rhee and Ho Chi Minh. It was part of the strategy hatched by figures like Winston Churchill and the Dulles brothers to turn wartime ally Russia into arch Cold War enemy—all for the sake of keeping the malthusian wheel in motion.

As Prouty points out with irony, the United States shifted its Indochina policy away from its initial support for Ho Chi Minh and an independent Vietnam state to a policy of covert military support for the French in their efforts to retain their colonial empire in Indochina. When Ho Chi Minh defeated the French decisively at Dien Bien Phu in 1956—using arms provided by the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) at the close of World War II—the United States stepped into the vacuum. No sooner had the dust settled in the Korean War, than the United States was engaged in a secret war in Indochina.

When John F. Kennedy threatened to abandon the American military presence in Indochina and to make this the hallmark of his 1964 reelection campaign, he was threatening to overturn the entire structure of the Cold War arrangement, carefully built up by the international power elite over a two-decade period. Kennedy's threat to that entire malthusian structure—not simply his desire to remove American ground troops from Southeast Asia—was one of the critical motives behind his assassination.

### **McGeorge Bundy and the Bay of Pigs**

By 1955, Fletcher Prouty, who had become a colonel in the U.S. Air Force, was assigned to the Pentagon, where he served as chief of special operations for the Air Force, and later head of the Office of Special Operations for the secretary of defense and eventually for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. His primary mission was to provide military support for CIA covert operations around the world. Thus he was in a crucial position to witness and assess the evolution of such monumental events as the Bay of Pigs invasion and the buildup to the American military involvement in Vietnam.

Among the most suggestive of the personal anecdotes that punctuate the book is Colonel Prouty's account of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. The Bay of Pigs fiasco is pivotal in assessing the assassination of John F. Kennedy, since myth has it that Kennedy was personally responsible for the failure to overthrow Castro as the result of his refusal to authorize Air Force air cover for the invasion.

As Prouty points out, the President was, at the time,

forbidden by law from providing U.S. military equipment and personnel for covert operations. The idea of official U.S. Air Force involvement in the Bay of Pigs was never even a consideration.

On the contrary, President Kennedy had explicitly ordered that the first action in the covert CIA program to overthrow the Castro regime must be the destruction of the entire Cuban Air Force on the ground. This was to be carried out by the CIA-provided World War II airplanes in the hands of the Cuban invasion force, piloted by CIA-trained Cuban flyers. With the Castro Air Force destroyed on the ground, the naval invasion force would be able to hit the beaches without fear of air attack. Cuban ground forces, largely barracked long distances from the invasion point, would have been hard pressed to quickly respond to the invasion. Once a beachhead had been established on Cuban territory, the United States would have been in a position to provide its official support to the insurgent government.

Prouty presents a compelling case that the Bay of Pigs invasion plan, had it been successfully executed, would have likely succeeded in overthrowing the Castro communist regime. But things did not work out that way.

Although the majority of Cuban fighter planes were in fact destroyed, three Soviet jet trainers equipped with heavy weapons were not destroyed. According to Prouty, the planes were left untouched on orders from Kennedy's national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy. Bundy inexplicably countermanded Kennedy's orders without ever consulting the President. Allan Dulles, Director of Central Intelligence, and the architect of the Bay of Pigs program, was, for unknown reasons, out of contact, attending a conference in Puerto Rico on the day the invasion began.

The role of McGeorge Bundy in sabotaging the Cuba invasion was detailed in a study of the failed covert operation ordered by President Kennedy and carried out by Gen. Maxwell Taylor, Robert Kennedy and Allan Dulles in May-June 1961. The findings of the Cuba Study Group were memorialized in a letter from Taylor to President Kennedy dated June 13, 1961.

That letter makes it clear that the onus of the failed invasion lay on Bundy. As the result of the Taylor letter, John Kennedy made a number of decisions that threatened to overturn the limited warfare doctrine.

In National Security Action Memorandum #55, signed just 15 days after the Taylor report reached his desk, Kennedy ordered the Joint Chiefs of Staff to assume responsibility for directing the military defense of the United States in the context of the Cold War—in much the same way that the JCS was mandated to operate during wartime. This meant more than just a downgrading of the role of the CIA in covert operations. It implied the reassertion of traditional war-fighting doctrine and a rejection of the kinds of utopian schemes implicit in the evolving Vietnam limited war and the failed Cuba secret operation.

In fact, that move toward the restoration of classic war-fighting doctrine also begged the question of how the U.S. could reach a strategic *modus vivendi* with the Soviet Union and a break from the entire Yalta structure, including the malthusian population warfare.

Unfortunately, Colonel Prouty did not choose to deal more extensively with the role of both McGeorge Bundy and Allan Dulles in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. Prouty strongly implies that it was actually Bundy and Dulles who willfully sabotaged the invasion—knowing full well that President Kennedy would have no choice but to assume full public responsibility for the fiasco. It was a case of the secret government carrying out a calculated destabilization against an elected President who threatened to diminish their power.

This reviewer has always suspected that McGeorge Bundy was a pivotal player in the assassination of John Kennedy and the coverup. It was Bundy, speaking from Air Force One just hours after the Kennedy assassination, who declared that the President had been killed by a lone assassin—thereby ordering all investigations into a possible conspiracy to be shut down before they ever started. Bundy's unilateral declaration that there was no conspiracy came at a time when eyewitnesses on the scene in Dealey Plaza in Dallas were providing police with detailed accounts of shots having been fired from several different locations.

That role played by Bundy in the crucial hours after the Kennedy murder is the kind of singularity that begs further study. Given Prouty's account of Bundy's role in sabotaging the Bay of Pigs program, the Bundy issue is even more pressing.

### Debunking the Vietnam War

One of the most chilling features of the Prouty book is his detailed account of the buildup of the United States' covert presence in Indochina. Prouty provides an absolutely unique assessment of the tragic policy blunders carried out by the CIA and others during the Eisenhower and Kennedy years. It is a story based on a deep appreciation of the socio-economic and cultural foundations of Vietnamese society and the impact of the forced relocation of over 1 million northern Vietnamese Catholics into the Buddhist south during the early years of the Republic of South Vietnam (1955-62). What Prouty draws out is the fact that much of the insurgency that U.S. advisers were quick to label as communist insurgency was in reality banditry brought on by the economic turmoil caused by the U.S. meddling incompetence.

The history of the Vietnam War as told by Fletcher Prouty is so important a feature of the Cold War tragedy and the buildup to the Kennedy assassination that it merits far more than the short shrift we can give it in the space of a review. It is mandatory reading for anyone struggling to understand the history of the past half century and committed to ensuring that the same mistakes are not repeated. Buy this book and read it carefully.

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## Complete Schubert Songs

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# A grand idea has mixed results

by Kathy Wolfe

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### Complete Songs

The Hyperion Schubert Edition

Vol. 2, Stephen Varcoe, baritone (CDJ 32002); Vol. 6, Anthony Rolfe Johnson, tenor (CDJ 33006); Vol. 7, Elly Ameling, soprano (CDJ 33007); Vol. 11, Brigitte Fassbänder, mezzo-soprano (CDJ 33011); Vol. 14, Thomas Hampson, baritone (CDJ 33014); Vol. 15, Thomas Allen, baritone (CDJ 33015); \$17.99 each

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British lieder pianist Graham Johnson's grand idea of recording all of Franz Schubert's 600-plus lieder on CD for Hyperion is having mixed results, but given the size of the task, it's understandable.

The latest release, Vol. 14 by baritone Thomas Hampson, songs to poems of antiquity, is too romantic. Mr. Johnson, however, plays beautifully with the better singers, so Vol. 15, due out soon by baritone Thomas Allen, should be excellent, since Allen excels at lieder.

Johnson has wisely built the series one disc at a time, around a specific singer's voice and musicality. I also recommend those by soprano Elly Ameling, mezzo-soprano Brigitte Fassbänder, tenor Anthony Rolfe Johnson, and baritone Stephen Varcoe, all fine bel canto artists.

Best, the project allows us to study, one 70-minute collection at a time, the full overview of Schubert's songs (as published in the *Neue Schubert Ausgabe*, the complete edition compiled over the past two decades from the autograph scores, which added many new pieces as well as correcting errors in earlier "complete" editions, such as Peters). Johnson's intelligent program notes are a bonus. Avoiding a chronological approach, he introduces the 400 or so almost unknown Schubert songs along with the fewer famous ones, such that each disc draws attention to the "tiny gems which might otherwise be overlooked," as he says, and rewards us with a few familiar prizes.

It is a shame many songs are not in the original key, nor sung by the correct, specific voice species Schubert wanted. For example, "Der König in Thule," D. 367, originally for