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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY
NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

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***BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS
AND
THE BAY OF PIGS***



Nothing had been more depressing in the whole series of meetings than to watch a collection of officials, some of them holdovers from the previous administration, contentedly prepare to sacrifice the world's growing faith in the new American President in order to defend interests and pursue objectives of their own

Arthur Schlesinger Jr.
- Thousand Days

LTCOL D C. O'BRIEN USMC/ CLASS OF 1995
COURSE III
SEMINAR A
FACULTY SEMINAR LEADER. COL DRENNAN
FACULTY ADVISOR. COL GLASGOW

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INTRODUCTION

On 17 April 1961, a brigade of 1300 Cuban exiles conducted an amphibious assault at the Bay of Pigs (*Bahia de Cochinos*) on Cuba's southern coast. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had recruited, organized, trained and equipped the Cuban brigade. CIA operatives participated in the assault and American pilots flew combat missions in support of the invasion. U.S. naval surface forces and carrier aircraft were involved in the operation. Less than 72 hours later, Castro had crushed the invasion. Over 100 Cuban exiles were dead and the Cuban survivors of the assault force spent the next 18 months languishing in Havana prisons. Four American pilots were killed.¹ Having taken place within the first 90 days of the new administration, one of the worst U.S. foreign policy disasters of the 20th Century seriously jeopardized the nascent Kennedy Presidency.

Kennedy's self-confidence was badly shaken. He privately agonized over how, as a life-long skeptic of "experts", he could possibly have allowed himself to be so badly misled into approving an operation which had been intellectually, morally, and tactically bankrupt from its inception. Graham T. Allison's subsequent modeling of national security policy decisions illuminates the shadowy recesses of Kennedy's dilemma. The debacle which has become arguably synonymous with professional buffoonery and national embarrassment is a textbook case study of Allison's bureaucratic political model. The basic unit of analysis, organizing concepts, dominant inference patterns, and general propositions of bureaucratic politics present a framework for examining the Bay of Pigs operation.²

¹Peter Wyden *Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979) 240. Four Alabama Air National Guard pilots and two CIA contract pilots flew actual combat missions during the invasion. Of these six, four were shot down and either killed in the crashes or were shot after they were on the ground. The body of one American pilot, Leo Francis Baker from Birmingham, Alabama, remained in a Havana morgue until as late as 1979. A spokesman for the Cuban Foreign Ministry told Wyden in 1979 that the Cuban government was waiting for the United States to claim the body. (Although U.S. Navy jets from the USS *Essex* flew sorties in the Amphibious Objective Area, including close formation on Castro's jets to discourage attacks on the assault force, none were involved in actual combat.)

²Graham T. Allison "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis" *American Political Science Review* 63 no. 3 (September 1969) 689-718.

No presidential directive was ever issued to begin planning for an armed invasion of Cuba, the controversial invasion was the outcome of the pulling and hauling between a diverse cast of personalities and organizations. As Allison's model would have predicted, the outcome included individual group results, resultants emerging from inter-group dynamics, and foul-ups. Conflicting personal and organizational goals and interests, later chronicled by Arthur Schlesinger, were significant. The diversity of chiefs, staffers, indians, and ad hoc players was staggering, and their baggage of parochial priorities and perceptions contributed to amateurish planning and sloppy execution. Misperceptions and reticence were the rule rather than the exception. Styles of play, including Kennedy's, were major determinants in shaping events. Although the failure was charged to the Kennedy administration (and Kennedy publicly accepted full responsibility), the seeds of the ill-fated adventure were planted during the waning days of the Eisenhower administration.

The Central Intelligence Agency and other government organizations had given serious consideration to the Cuban situation since 1958. A top secret paper, *A Program of Action Against the Castro Regime*, was drafted by the CIA and contained the following four main points:

- (1) *Creation of a responsible and unified Cuban government in exile*
- (2) *A powerful propaganda offensive*
- (3) *A covert intelligence and action organization in Cuba, to be responsive to the exile opposition*
- (4) *A paramilitary force outside of Cuba for future guerrilla action*

The program (as Eisenhower, with an eye towards plausible deniability, preferred to call plans which he had not formally approved) was endorsed by Eisenhower and the Special Group on 17 March 1960.³ No decision was made as to when (or if) the guerrillas would actually be inserted, although the CIA estimated required training would take eight months. The endorsement specifically granted authorization to train a 300 man Cuban paramilitary cadre outside the United

³Wyden 24-25. The *Special Group* also known as the 5412 Committee consisted of only a Deputy Undersecretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. The group was authorized under NSC 5412/2 and met weekly. It was the most secret operating unit of the government at that time.

States for eventual clandestine insertion into Cuba as guerrillas. By 17 May, the CIA had established a radio transmitter on Swan Island in the Caribbean to broadcast pre-invasion propaganda into Cuba. Following an 18 August progress report to the Special Group, Eisenhower authorized \$13 million to continue the effort.⁴ At that time, the stipulation was reiterated that no U S personnel were to be involved in the operation. Neither an armed invasion of Cuba nor U S participation in guerrilla operations were mentioned anywhere in the program.

CHIEFS, STAFFERS, INDIANS AND AD HOC PLAYERS

The drama's lengthy cast of characters were players in the national security policy game by virtue of their position in either the Eisenhower or the Kennedy administration. The *chiefs* included Eisenhower; Kennedy, CIA Director Allen Dulles, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (particularly Admiral Arleigh Burke), and the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, McGeorge Bundy.⁵ Richard Nixon, Eisenhower's vice president, would not normally qualify as a chief within the context of Allison's organizing concepts. As the Republican presidential nominee for the 1960 elections, however, his political ambitions made him a major actor in the pulling and hauling that is bureaucratic politics. Each

⁴Maxwell D. Taylor, *The Taylor Report*, 13 June 1961, Maxwell D. Taylor Papers, National Defense University Library, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. 2. The so-called Taylor Report is a remarkable document in several respects. Declassified in 1977, it was never published. Compiled as a series of four memorandums to Kennedy (narrative, immediate causes of failure, conclusions, and recommendations), it typifies the concise, lucid written expression for which the intellectual Taylor is famous. The other three members of the board (which called itself *The Green Study Group*) were Admiral Arleigh Burke, Robert Kennedy, and Allen Dulles. Originally classified as *Secret*, *Eyes Only*, and *Ultra-Sensitive*, only one copy was made. According to Wyden, that copy was personally carried to each of the Joint Chiefs by Brigadier General David W. Gray. Gray then sat with each of the Joint Chiefs while they read the report to make sure that no notes were taken. Taylor was subsequently recalled from retirement by Kennedy and appointed as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

⁵Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, *The National Security Council: An Organizational Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1993), 12. In contrast to previous National Security Advisors, Bundy emerged as an important executive directly responsible to the President. He became an active participant in policy making, although his performance during the Bay of Pigs served neither Kennedy's nor the nation's best interests.

chief had at least one lieutenant whose imprimatur was, in some cases, more prominent than that of the principal

Allison defines *staffers* as the immediate staff of each chief. Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles was strongly opposed to the plan. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Paul Nitze was "unhappy" with the planning but did not articulate his misgivings. General Charles P. Cabell, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, was faulted for his failure to exert more judgment and leadership as the operation unfolded. The CIA's Deputy Director for Plans (covert operations), Richard Mervin Bissell, Jr., was eventually fired (along with his boss, Allan Dulles) by Kennedy for his key role in the operation. Although Richard Helms' position as director of operations in the CIA's Plans Directorate would have qualified him as a staffer in Allison's context, he carefully distanced himself from what he considered to be a "hairbrained" operation from the outset.⁶

Robert Kennedy qualifies as one of his brother's staffers; he was a close personal confidant of the president and exerted considerable influence on the behavior of other actors. Kennedy press secretary Pierre Salinger could be considered a staffer, although he later maintained that he had been kept out of the loop until just prior to the actual landings. Arthur Schlesinger and Theodore Sorensen, as presidential advisors, fall into this group. Lyndon Johnson (curiously) did not play a major part. In addition to the staffers, an interesting assortment of *indians* was included on the players roster.

Indians include political appointees and permanent government officials within each of the departments and agencies. United Nations Ambassador Adlai Stevenson was, along with Salinger, kept in the dark.⁷ U.S. Information Agency Director Edward R. Murrow heard about the plan from a reporter. Although Murrow strongly opposed the plan, he was denied admission to

⁶Warden 33. Helms' career gamble not to become involved paid off. He was the Director of the CIA from 1966-1973 and he became a controversial figure during Watergate. In an effort to keep him in line, President Nixon repeatedly threatened to expose Bay of Pigs skeletons. Helms consistently maintained that he had no idea what Nixon was talking about. Apparently, neither did anyone else.

⁷Pierre Salinger *With Kennedy* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966) 147.

Kennedy's inner circle CIA field operatives included Tracy Barnes, Howard Hunt and Rolando Martinez (both of whom were later involved in Watergate), Robert K. Davis (who set up training bases in Guatemala), and David A. Phillips (who ran the propaganda shop). Marine Colonel Jack Hawkins was assigned as the operation's military commander and air operations were run by Air Force Colonel Stanley W. Beerli. Although neither officer participated in the landings, both helped shape the outcome. CIA agents Grayston Lynch and William Robertson actually accompanied Cuban assault troops to the beach and participated in combat operations ashore. Finally, the cast was rounded out with *ad hoc players*.

Within the context of Allison's model of bureaucratic politics, *ad hoc players* are actors in the wider government game, members of the press, congressional influentials, and spokesmen for important interest groups. Senator J. William Fulbright, an Arkansas Democrat and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, had been unaware of the plan until a few weeks before the landings. He was one of the few who vociferously denounced the initiative and unequivocally announced his opposition at every opportunity. The press had been aware that invasion preparations were in progress but, in the interest of national security, downplayed the stories. Cuban expatriates, particularly exiled political representatives in Miami to whom the CIA looked for unified rebel leadership, meet Allison's criteria for consideration as *ad hoc players*. Further examination of Allison's model and the interaction of the drama's characters suggests that the Bay of Pigs was more of a political outcome than a rational decision.

COMPROMISE, COALITION, COMPETITION, AND CONFUSION

Each player brought assorted parochial baggage to the table. Individual priorities, perceptions, and problems contributed to the pulling and hauling between the various government officials from which the Bay of Pigs evolved. Accordingly, the Cuban invasion was not a conscious policy decision by a unitary rational actor. It was an *outcome resulting from compromise, coalition,*

*competition, and confusion among government officials who see different faces of an issue*⁸ A review of key perceptions, interests, and actions helps to explain both the Bay of Pigs and Allison's model

The chiefs had less significant roles in determining the final outcome than some of their staffers and indians Eisenhower's endorsement and funding of the CIA's Cuban Program, for example, reflected no specific or implied intention to invade Cuba He was supportive, however, of attempts at Cuban destabilization Nixon urgently (but quietly) pushed for the Program's implementation in the fall of 1960 As the Republican presidential nominee, he fervently desired the political capital the Republicans stood to gain if Castro was toppled prior to the general elections Nixon had no designs, however, for an amphibious assault Inheriting the Program from Eisenhower, Kennedy was still struggling to get his hands on the levers of power at the time he gave final approval for what he thought would be a "quiet" landing He had not been nearly as confident in his own judgment during the run-up to the Bay of Pigs, therefore, as he was by the time he faced the missile crisis 18 months later

The paramilitary complexion of the Cuban Program began to change during the summer of 1960⁹ The CIA's Deputy Director for Plans, Richard M Bissell, was the most influential staffer among an impressive array of participating luminaries A former economist who had earned his Doctorate at Yale, Bissell was widely considered to be one of the brightest stars in Washington He enjoyed the full support of CIA Director Allen Dulles in his energetic efforts to expand the scope of the Cuban Program, and it had not been a secret that Bissell was Kennedy's selection as Dulles' eventual replacement Having been the architect of several unsuccessful assassination attempts on Castro, Bissell was intensely determined to personally engineer the overthrow of the Cuban government with an amphibious invasion¹⁰

⁸Allison 70-71

⁹Taylor 2

¹⁰Arthur M Schlesinger Jr. *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (New York: Greenwich House, 1983) 241 Schlesinger believes that by that time Bissell had become far more of an advocate than an analyst

Dulles briefed Eisenhower on the expanded plan on 29 November 1960 and the Special Group on 8 December. The assault force had grown to 600-750 Cubans with extraordinarily heavy firepower, and surplus B-26 aircraft had been used to form the nucleus of a tactical air force.¹¹ Original plans for a guerrilla infiltration had been all but scrapped. CIA operatives were training the Cubans at a secret airfield (constructed by the CIA expressly for the purpose) in Guatemala. The concept now called for preliminary air strikes which, although launched from Nicaragua, would be made to appear to have been launched from Cuba and flown by defectors from Castro's air force. The objective now was to conduct an amphibious landing and draw dissident Cuban elements to the landing force with the ultimate goal of triggering a general uprising. Marine Colonel Jack Hawkins, who had been designated the operation's military commander, and the CIA trainers in Guatemala were optimistic and enthusiastically recommended approval. Although Eisenhower neither formally approved nor disapproved, the CIA began to prepare a detailed operation order to support the modified concept.¹²

The weeks following the inauguration in January 1961 were eventful. Although he had first learned of the plan's existence in November 1960, Kennedy was formally briefed on the operation on 28 January 1961 at a meeting which included the Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Director of Central Intelligence, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and the National Security Advisor.¹³ Although Kennedy was skeptical about the operation's chances of success, he issued guidelines for continued planning. The operation was, for the first time, assigned to the Joint Chiefs for evaluation. Earlier in January the Joint Chiefs had submitted a recommendation that an interdepartmental group consider a consolidated plan for continued U.S. involvement in the operation. Although the recommendation reached the Secretary of Defense, it was never forwarded. No mention of the recommendation was made at the 28 January meeting.¹⁴

¹¹Taylor 4

¹²Taylor 5

¹³Taylor 6

¹⁴Taylor 7-10

Although they later contended that they were not supportive of the plan, the Joint Chiefs submitted the opinion that the operation had a fair chance of success *if the assault force was successful in inciting a general uprising*. The landing area had been changed to an area which, in contrast to the original landing site, did not present the advantage of nearby mountains where the assault force could revert to guerrilla operations if subsequent operations ashore were unsuccessful. This fact was never clearly communicated to Kennedy. Although opposed to the new landing area, the Joint Chiefs nevertheless evaluated the probability of success at the new landing area and included only a minor comment that reflected their preference for the former site. As the operation gained momentum, more last minute changes were made to the plan which reflected the parochial interests of organizations and individual players.

Kennedy and Rusk were concerned with the issue of national deniability and credibility (How anyone could seriously believe that the United States' fingerprints would not be all over the invasion, however, remains an unsolved riddle). Kennedy wanted a "quiet" landing, preferably at night. He subsequently canceled half of the scheduled preliminary air strikes just prior to the invasion. The strikes had been essential in order to destroy Castro's air force on the ground. The mission commander and CIA operatives were furious, but Bissell and Dulles readily accepted the terms in the interest of proceeding with the landings. The Cuban assault force was never told of the cancellation. Although Kennedy had consistently insisted that no U.S. military would be involved, the Cubans had been told that they could depend on U.S. intervention if the attack stalled. At about midday on D-1, 16 April 1961, Kennedy formally approved the landing plan. That night, less than six hours before the landings, Bundy called General Cabell at the CIA and relayed for Kennedy that the D-Day strikes could not be launched until an airstrip had been secured within the beachhead. From Kennedy's perspective, the political risks were inversely proportional to the military risks.

Dissenting voices had amounted to little more than cries in the wilderness. J. William Fulbright is the most notable example, but he was unable to convince the leadership of either the tactical deficiencies or the questionable morality associated with an attack on the legitimate government.

of a sovereign country Edward R. Murrow, Arthur Schlesinger, Paul Nitze, Chester Bowles and Adlai Stevenson were others ¹⁵ (Bowles believed his boss, Dean Rusk, had an orthopedic problem he was unable to put his foot down.) Their opinions were not seriously considered. Bobby Kennedy admonished at least one skeptic to be more of a team player and support the President. Admiral Burke argued forcefully but unsuccessfully for U.S. naval intervention in order to salvage the landings. The final catastrophic outcome was the resultant of the competition and confusion between the myriad of officials involved in the pulling and hauling of the bureaucratic process.

CONCLUSION

The Bay of Pigs landings, as the outcome of the bureaucratic process, was distinctly different from the expectations of any single actor or organization. As the central figure in the narrative, Kennedy's perception of the missed signals and broken plays merits consideration ¹⁶

First, Kennedy believed he had approved a quiet (although large scale) infiltration of fourteen hundred Cuban exiles back into their homeland. The CIA not only kept the press well informed, however, but actually sent battle communiques to a Madison Avenue public relations firm representing the Cuban political front in Miami. After accepting military limitations in the interest of reducing the U.S. signature, Kennedy believed that role was actually exaggerated by the CIA.

Second, Kennedy had believed that if the invasion failed, the exiles could conduct guerrilla operations from mountains in the vicinity of the beachhead. The nearest mountains were separated from the beachhead by eighty miles of swamps. The landing force had not been trained in guerrilla

¹⁵David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, (New York: Random House, 1972) 66. Commandant of the Marine Corps General David Shoup, opposed a Cuban invasion. A Medal of Honor recipient at Tarawa, Shoup overlaid a red dot on a map of Cuba during a White House briefing. He explained that the dot represented the size of Tarawa and that it had required three days and 18,000 Marines to take it. He eventually became Kennedy's favorite general.

¹⁶Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 302-304. Sorensen had been the Special Counsel to Kennedy but claims (along with Press Secretary Salinger and, to a lesser extent, Special Advisor Schlesinger) to have been left out of the inner circle during the run-up to the invasion. Sorensen delineates these five areas in which Kennedy felt that he had been particularly misinformed by the CIA and the Joint Chiefs.

operations. The CIA neither told Kennedy that retreat to the mountains was not an option nor informed the exiles of Kennedy's desires.

Third, Kennedy's prohibition of overt American support was never relayed to the assault force. The exiles had been led to believe that U.S. intervention in the form of additional assault troops and air cover would guarantee the invasion's success. Kennedy was not aware of the exiles' assumptions.

Fourth, the CIA's contention that the landings would be greeted with mass uprisings was unfounded. Public sentiment at that time, particularly in the Zapata area where the landings were conducted, was predominantly supportive of the Castro regime.

Fifth, Kennedy had been told that the invasion had to be conducted before Castro had time to acquire the military capability to defeat it. In fact, he had already had the capability. Further estimates regarding Castro's inability to respond to the Zapata area were false. Castro's response was effective and tactically sound.

Sorensen's points are valid, but his assessment is representative of the administration's perspective in its review of the failure. Each of the other actors also had their own unique assessment, depending on their position in the government. Explanations for failure were limited to tactical considerations and ignore last minute fiddling with the operation order by Kennedy, Rusk, and Bundy. Moral issues associated with an invasion of a sovereign state do not appear to have been examined. Kennedy's subsequent distrust of the Joint Chiefs (as well as other "experts") resulted in a style of White House micromanagement of military confrontations which has not always served the national interest.

The debate concerning the lessons of the Bay of Pigs continues. Examining the debate through the lens of Allison's bureaucratic political model presents an opportunity for better understanding of the invasion, the model, and the history of U.S. foreign policy.

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