

Betrayal at the Bay of Pigs, Part 1

In the morning of April 17, 1961, just three months after John F. Kennedy had been inaugurated as American president, 1400 Cuban exiles sent by the United States were wading toward disaster at a beach called Playa Girón, in a bay south of the central part of the Cuba –the Bay of Pigs. The first news about the invasion that appeared in the Soviet press reflected the general consensus that Castro's revolution was living its very last hours in the face of an American direct invasion.[1] But then, the Soviet leaders watched in disbelief how President Kennedy, with the power to command enough military force to destroy the world, did nothing as Fidel Castro's troops repelled the attack and captured prisoners off the beach.

CIA officials were privately assuring the Eisenhower and the Kennedy administrations that Cuba would become another Guatemala. But as early as March 1960, Castro had already begun telling the world that Cuba *would not* be another Guatemala.[2] CFR agents inside CIA must have been quite efficient informing Castro, for it was precisely in March, when President Eisenhower approved the invasion plan.[3]

The original invasion plan, on which the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the CIA had agreed, involved a one-shot confrontation of Castro's already formidable armed forces with a vest-pocket-sized force of Cuban exiles trained in regular WWII combat techniques rather than in guerrilla operations and political subversion. The plan amounted to asking the fifteen hundred patriots landed at the Bay of Pigs to seize control of the Island from over a hundred thousand relatively well trained, well armed Castroite soldiers and militia.[4]

It was clear beforehand that, in the event that the invasion

failed, Castro's prestige and strength were going to be greatly enhanced. Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles, who had heard of the plan, expressed precisely those concerns to Secretary of State Rusk.[5] With the benefit of hindsight, however, the evidence indicates that the whole operation had been planned to fail.

In the first place, the American government supplied the Cubans with obsolete aircraft and decrepit ships allegedly chosen with the idea that such equipment would not be identified with the ones used by American regular forces. That justification is unconvincing, because the Americans would never be able to hide their massive participation in the invasion, even if it was indirect.

Secondly, when President Kennedy approved the initial plan he had promised that the American forces would provide that air cover to the invasion. Two U.S. carriers were to stand by, within easy range, their decks loaded with armed fighter planes, to secure the vital air cover for the invasion. Confident in this assurance from the highest American levels of government that air support would be provided, the invaders disembarked.

Castro hurriedly sent his tanks and infantry, and the invasion force fought valiantly while waiting for the U.S. air support to arrive. But that very Sunday evening, following the advice of his CFR advisors, President Kennedy made the fateful decision to prohibit the U.S. planes from providing the vital air cover. Without that support, the invasion was doomed to fail.[6]

Several authors have popularized the notion that the failure of the invasion was not due to President Kennedy's order proscribing U.S. air cover, but because of lack of Cuban popular support to the invaders, a key assumption in the CIA's invasion plans.[7] The invasion failed, they conclude, because the people stood for Castro instead of turning to back the

invaders as expected.

These authors seem to forget, however, that because of the gross error of alerting Castro two days in advance by way of an ill planned and ineffective air attack on his planes on April 16, the Cuban dictator was put on alert. After the air raid Castro moved quickly, sending all potential enemies to jail to avoid any internal uprising.

But the most important thing they seem to ignore is that people usually support a *winning* invasion, not a failed one, and just a few hours after the invasion began it was evident that it had failed. As a matter of fact, in the first hours of the invasion some peasants of the region, including a few of Castro's militiamen, voluntarily joined the invading forces. Therefore, the invasion did not fail for lack of popular Cuban support; it failed because Kennedy's CFR advisors convinced him not to provide air support to the invasion.

A few months after the failed invasion attempt intriguing details on why the Bay of Pigs operation had failed began appearing through the dust clouds of official excuses, explanations and disinformation evidencing a massive cover-up. The controversy raged for several months over whether or not air cover was originally planned and later withdrawn from the invasion. Then, in the last months of 1961, Ambassador Whiting Willauer provided disturbing first-hand information in a testimony he gave to a U.S. Senate committee.

According to Willauer, an specialist in this type of military operations, on December 10, 1960, he was recalled from his ambassadorial post in Honduras and charged with planning an invasion of Cuba in conjunction with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the CIA. In his initial plan, air cover, both for low-level and high-level support, was to be provided by Cuban-flown B-26 bombers and by carrier-based Navy jets.[8]

Willauer's job began before President Kennedy took office in

the White House. He held the title of Special Assistant to Secretary of State Christian Herter, a CFR agent. After Kennedy's inauguration, CFR agent Dean Rusk asked him to continue in this capacity. But, within two weeks, he was left out of the loop, his CIA contacts were ordered to avoid him and he was completely ignored in the State Department. For 30 days, his immediate superior, CFR secret agent Chester Bowles, refused to see him. He was never debriefed by a successor for the useful information he could have passed on. After nearly two months in "isolation," Willauer received, on April 16, 1961, the day before the Bay of Pigs invasion, a telephone call dismissing him from the State Department [9]

Though the story was largely ignored by the CFR-controlled American mainstream press, the disturbing information provided by Willauer about the Bay of Pigs invasion was extremely important. But the invaders Castro has captured didn't need to hear Willauer's explanation. At the trial in Havana, some of the 1,179 captives of the failed operation had arrived at the same conclusion and reportedly said that false intelligence, presumably by the U.S., led them to disaster.[10] Some of them commented that the U.S. had betrayed them. They didn't know however, that it was not the U.S., but CFR agents infiltrated in the U.S. government the ones who betrayed them.

But the Bay of Pigs invaders were not the only ones who had been betrayed. At the time of the invasion, a strong anti-Castro urban underground movement already existed in most large Cuban cities. Plans for an uprising, coordinated with the invasion, had already been laid out, but were so mismanaged in their execution as to indicate deliberate sabotage. To be successful, even with air cover, such a small force had to be supported by uprisings all over Cuba.

But one of the main reasons why the uprisings never occurred was because the leaders of the underground movement were left in the dark about the landing date and did not know whether the Bay of Pigs operation was a real or a diversionary

invasion. The CIA's short wave broadcast station (Radio Swan) failed to broadcast the pre-arranged signals to trigger the waiting underground into action. Instead the station broadcasted a series of conflicting and false reports of uprisings in Cuba.[11]

In 1960 CFR agent Richard M. Bissell, Jr., a CIA Deputy Director, was made responsible for the unification of the exiled anti-Castro Cubans under a single leadership movement called the "Cuban Revolutionary Council." [12] Just before the invasion began, the coordinators of the Cuban Revolutionary Council, based in the U.S., and of nearly 100 underground anti-Castro organizations in Cuba, together with the invasion leaders, were rounded up by CIA agents and held incommunicado at a secluded spot in the Opa-locka military base near Miami. They were not alerted that the invasion had started until it had already failed and were in that way prevented from alerting their contacts in Cuba.[13]

In October 1959, Huber Matos, a Rebel Army major in charge of Camagüey province, was accused of treason and condemned to 20 years hard labor. The prosecution of Huber Matos stirred strong opposition among several anti-Communist leaders in Castro's own Rebel Army. Some months after Matos was sentenced, several anti-Communist clandestine groups became active in the cities and in the countryside. By mid 1961 the Escambray Mountains in the central part of Cuba were teeming with anti-Castro guerrilla rebels. For a while the Escambray guerrillas were a virtual focus of anti-Castro resistance, and they were desperately asking for military supplies.

But the CIA apparently had decided some months before the Bay of Pigs invasion that the guerrillas were not useful to advance the secret CFR objectives. At the beginning of the operations the CIA sabotaged the guerrillas by supplying them with 30.06 caliber ammunition, but with M-3's grease guns that fired .45 caliber bullets. In other areas the CIA supplied .45-caliber ammunition to accompany Browning Automatic Rifles

that shoot 30.06 caliber bullets. Finally, a few months before the invasion, the CIA stopped sending supplies and urged the rebel leaders to stop fighting and wait for the invasion that was about to take place. In this way the CIA paralyzed the ongoing guerrilla campaign and the spontaneous opposition against Castro's regime, bringing about the guerrilla's defeat.[14]

The Bay of Pigs invasion presented to any skeptical counterintelligence officer with an incredible collection of mistakes –perhaps too many to be the product of a coincidence.

First of all, the operation was one of the worst kept secrets in the recent military history of the United States. The CIA plans were exposed in the press more than a month before the actual invasion began. The leak started when Professor Ronald Hilton, editor of Stanford's authoritative *Hispanic American Report*, called attention to the anti-Castro bases in Guatemala. In due course the *New York Times*, *Time* magazine, *UPI* and *AP* were leading the press barrage about the coming invasion.

On April 15, 1961, rebel planes struck Havana and Santiago de Cuba. Some authors have rightly pointed out that the ineffective air strike two days before the invasion had only the effect of alerting Castro about the coming invasion.[15] But this does not seem to be the case. Early in November 1960, just six months before the invasion, Castro had carefully inspected the Bay of Pigs area –the very same place where the invasion later took place. Was this another coincidence?[16]

Among the most incredible blunders, the following were paramount: In an effort to avoid identifying the invasion force with the U.S. the CIA armed the 1400 men with weapons requiring 30 different types of ammunition. The invaders made the big mistake of placing most of the ammunition and communication equipment in a single ship, the *Houston*. By a strange coincidence (coincidence is *not* a scientific term) the

Houston was singled out as a priority target by Castro himself and sunk at the very beginning of the landing, and the vital communication and ammunition cargo in it was lost.

An aerial photograph of the Bay of Pigs taken from a U-2 plane at an altitude of more than 70,000 feet shows coral reefs clearly visible off the beaches. It is known that the photographs were used for intelligence purposes in the invasion operation. It is therefore difficult to explain how the photo analysts didn't detect the dangerous reefs and alert the invaders.[17] The invaders discovered the coral reef only after the bottoms of most of their landing crafts had been destroyed by it.

Contrary to the city of Trinidad, where in case of failure the invaders could easily have gained access to the Escambray Mountains to reorganize and begin a guerilla warfare operation, the Bay of Pigs was surrounded by a swamp with no ways of escape—a veritable mousetrap. Moreover, the choice of the Bay of Pigs for the landing was strange, because, unlike Trinidad, the region was known to be a hotbed of pro-Castroism. Author Hugh Thomas manifested his surprise when his remark, “It would have been hard indeed to have found a region in Cuba in which a rebellion could have been less easily inspired among the local people.”

On June 11, 1961, a New York congressman and Chairman of the Republican National Committee charged that the Bay of Pigs invasion had failed because Kennedy rescinded and revoked the Eisenhower plan to have the invaders protected by American air power. Almost two years later, in January 1963, Robert Kennedy denied the accusation in interviews with the *Miami Herald* and *U.S. News and World Report*. According to Robert Kennedy, his brother never withdrew U.S. air cover.[18] Admiral Arleigh Burke (not a CFR agent), however, believed that the invasion very nearly succeeded and probably would have if the President had not cancelled the second air strike. The invasion might have worked even without air support of any kind, the admiral

argued, if the first strike had not been scheduled two days in advance of the landing, eliminating the element of surprise.

More recent information, however, has shown the CFR's hands behind every single "mistake" that caused the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion. They were the ones who manipulated Kennedy to make the fateful decisions.

For example, both CIA Director Allen Dulles (CFR) and Deputy Director for Plans Richard Bissell (CFR) were so enthusiastic about the operation that Dulles told President Kennedy he was certain that "our Guatemalan operation would succeed," adding that the prospects for the invasion's plan to succeed were even better than they were for that one.[19] Kennedy assumed that Dulles's and Bissell's optimism about the success of the Cuban invasion was because the operation had "the Agency's full authority behind them." [20] Kennedy ignored, however, that both Dulles and Bissell had never informed the analysts working in CIA's Intelligence Directorate about the upcoming invasion.[21]

Other authors blame President Kennedy for giving the fateful order that changed the invasion's landing point. They don't tell, however, that Kennedy ordered the fateful change following the advice of McGeorge Bundy (CFR), Adlai Stevenson (CFR), and John McCloy (CFR) A few days later, on April 4, 1961, CIA's Richard Bissell (CFR), outlined an alternative plan for the invasion, with the Bay of Pigs instead of Trinidad as the landing place. The trap had been set.

It is also true that Kennedy ordered the cancellation of the rest of the planned air strikes previous to the invasion. As a result, some of Castro's fighter planes were left untouched. These were the planes that shoot down the invaders' planes and sank their ships, thus guaranteeing that the Bay of Pigs invasion failed. But Kennedy cancelled the air strikes only after McGeorge Bundy (CFR), Dean Rusk (CFR), and Adlai Stevenson (CFR), persuaded him to do so.

FootNotes:

1. Soviet consensus about Castro's revolution living its last hours, Prof. Mikhail Berstram in conversation with the author at his office in Stanford University.
2. Castro's warnings in Tad Szulc and Meyer, *The Cuban Invasion* (New York: Praeger, 1962), p. 74.
3. Eisenhower's approval of invasion plan in *ibid.*, p. 77.
4. Invasion plan in Philip Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro, and the United States* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971)p. 183.
5. Bowles concerns to Rusk in David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Crest Books, 1972), p. 85.
6. Details of invasion's failure in *U.S. News and World Report*, September 17, 1962.
7. CIA's assumptions about popular support for the invaders in Daniel M. Rohrer, Mark G. Arnold, and Roger L. Conner, *By Weight of Arms: American Military Policy* (Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Co., 1969), pp. 44-45.
8. Willauer's testimony in *Communist Threat to the U.S. Through the Caribbean*, 86th Congress, 1st Sess., Part. 3, Nov. 5, 1959, pp. 874-875.
9. Willauer "frozen out" and dismissed from State Department in *ibid.*, pp. 875-878
10. Invasion prisoners' report of false intelligence in *The New York Times*, April 1, 1962, p. 40.
11. Radio Swan's false reports in *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, April 22, p. 1961.
12. Bissell reunifies anti-Castro Cubans, in "Inside Story of the Cuban Fiasco," *U.S. News and World Report*, May 15, 1961.
13. Invasion leaders held incommunicado in *National Review*, August 13, 1963, p. 106.

14. For an interesting testimony on how the CIA left the anti-Castro guerrillas in the lurch, see Air Force Colonel Fred D. Stevens, "J.F.K. Muzzled Me," *The Miami Herald*, December 1, 1961.
15. Air strike alerting Castro in Peter Wyden, *The Bay of Pigs* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), p. 219.
16. Castro inspecting area in *ibid.*, p. 104.
17. Failure to detect coral reefs, in *ibid.*, p. 219.
18. Robert Kennedy denied accusation in Wise and Ross, *The Invisible Government* (New York: Bantam, 1962) pp. 201-202.
19. Theodore Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Haroer & Row, 1965), p. 296.
20. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days* (London: André Deutsch, 1965), p.
21. Christopher Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996), p. 261.