

A Perfect Failure: The Bay of Pigs

The Kennedy administration's Bay of Pigs decision ranks among the worst fiascos ever perpetrated by a responsible government. Planned by an overambitious, eager group of American intelligence officers who had little background or experience in military matters, the attempt to place a small brigade of Cuban exiles secretly on a beachhead in Cuba with the ultimate aim of overthrowing the government of Fidel Castro proved to be a "perfect failure." The group that made the basic decision to approve the invasion plan included some of the most intelligent men ever to participate in the councils of government. Yet all the major assumptions supporting the plan were so completely wrong that the venture began to founder at the outset and failed in its earliest stages.

The 'ill-starred adventure'

Ironically, the idea for the invasion was first suggested by John F. Kennedy's main political opponent, Richard M. Nixon. As Vice President during the Eisenhower administration, Nixon had proposed that the United States government secretly send a trained group of Cuban exiles to Cuba to fight against Castro. In March 1960, acting on Nixon's suggestion, President Dwight D. Eisenhower directed the Central Intelligence Agency to organize Cuban exiles in the United States into a unified political movement against the Castro regime and to give military training to those who were willing to return to their homeland to engage in guerrilla warfare. The CIA put a large number of its agents to work on this clandestine operation, and they soon evolved an elaborate plan for a military invasion. Apparently without informing President Eisenhower, the CIA began to assume in late 1960 that they could land a brigade of Cuban exiles not as a band of guerrilla infiltrators but as an armed force to carry out a full-scale invasion.

Two days after the inauguration in January 1961, President John F. Kennedy and several leading members of his new administration were given a detailed briefing about the proposed invasion by Allen Dulles, head of the CIA, and General Lyman Lemnitzer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During the next eighty days, a core group of presidential advisers repeatedly discussed this inherited plan informally and in the meetings of an advisory committee that included three Joint Chiefs of Staff. In early April 1961, at one of the meetings with the President, all the key advisers gave their approval to the CIA's invasion plan. Their deliberations led to a few modifications of details, such as the choice of the invasion site.

On April 17, 1961, the brigade of about fourteen hundred Cuban exiles, aided by the United States Navy, Air Force, and the CIA, invaded the swampy coast of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. Nothing went as planned. On the first day, not one of the four ships containing reserve ammunition and supplies arrived; the first two were sunk by a few planes in Castro's air force, and the other two promptly fled. By the second day, the brigade was completely surrounded by twenty thousand troops of Castro's well-equipped army. By the third day, about twelve hundred members of the brigade, comprising almost all who had not been killed, were captured and ignominiously led off to prison camps.

In giving their full approval, President Kennedy, Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, and other high-level policy-makers in the United States government had assumed that "use of the exile brigade would make possible the toppling of Castro without actual aggression by the United States." The President's main advisers certainly did not expect such an overwhelming military disaster. Nor did they anticipate that the United States government's attempts to disclaim responsibility for the initial air assault would be thoroughly discredited, that friendly Latin American countries would be outraged, that protest meetings would be held in the United States and throughout the world to denounce the United States for its illegal acts of aggression against a tiny neighbor, that intellectuals who had regarded the new administration with bright hopes would express disaffection in sarcastic telegrams ("Nixon or Kennedy: Does it make any difference?"), or that European allies and United Nations statesmen would join in condemnation. None of them guessed that the abortive invasion would encourage a military rapprochement between Castro and the Soviet leaders, culminating in a deal to set up installations only ninety miles from United States shores equipped with nuclear bombs and missiles and manned by more than five thousand Soviet troops, transforming Cuba within eighteen months into a powerful military base as a satellite of the Soviet Union. Had the President and his policy advisers imagined that this nightmarish scenario would materialize (or had they even considered such an outcome to be a calculated risk), they undoubtedly would have rejected the CIA's invasion plan.

We are given a vivid picture of the President's reactions in Sorensen's *Kennedy*, described by a *New York Times* reviewer as "the nearest thing we will ever have to the memoirs Kennedy intended to write." When the first

news reports revealed how wrong his expectations had been, President Kennedy was stunned. As the news grew worse during the next three days, he became angry and sick at heart. He realized that the plan he thought he had approved had little in common with the one he had in fact approved. "How could I have been so stupid to let them go ahead?" he asked. Sorensen wrote, "His anguish was doubly deepened by the knowledge that the rest of the world was asking the same question."

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in his authoritative history of the Kennedy administration, recalled that "Kennedy would sometimes refer incredulously to the Bay of Pigs, wondering how a rational and responsible government could ever have become involved in so ill-starred an adventure." "The policy advisers who participated in the deliberations felt much the same way, if not worse. Allen Dulles, for example, was 'still troubled and haggard' several days later and offered to resign as chief of the CIA. Secretary of Defense McNamara, when he left the government seven years later, publicly stated that he still felt personally responsible for having misadvised President Kennedy on the Bay of Pigs. All who participated in the Bay of Pigs decision were perturbed about the dangerous gap between their expectations and the realities they should have anticipated, which resulted, as Sorensen put it, in "a shocking number of errors in the whole decision-making process."

Qualifications of the core members of the advisory group

It seems improbable that the shocking number of errors can be attributed to lack of intellectual capability for making policy judgments. The core members of Kennedy's team who were briefed on the Cuban invasion plan included three cabinet members and three men on the White House staff, all of whom were well qualified to make objective analyses of the pros and cons of alternative courses of action on vital issues of government policy.

Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, had been recruited by John F. Kennedy from his high-level position as head of the Rockefeller Foundation because of his solid reputation as an experienced administrator who could be counted on to have good ideas and sound judgment. He had served in policy-making positions in the State Department under Dean Acheson, first as head of the office of political affairs and later as deputy undersecretary in charge of policy coordination. During the Truman administration, Rusk became a veteran policymaker and exerted a strong influence on a variety of important decisions concerning United States foreign policy in Asia.

Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defense, was an expert statistician who had worked his way up to the presidency of the Ford Motor Company. He enjoyed a towering reputation for his intellectual brilliance and cold logic combined with personal integrity. Early in his career he had been on the fac-

ulty of the Harvard Business School. Later he developed his expertise in the statistical control unit of the United States Air Force, where he helped to work out a successful system for surveillance and control to facilitate decision-making about the flow of materials and production. During his years at Ford Motor Company, McNamara had also devised new techniques for improving rational methods of decision-making.

Then, too, there was Robert Kennedy, the Attorney General, one of the most influential members of the President's team. According to his close associates in the government, the President's brother was a bright young man whose strengths far outweighed his weaknesses. The Attorney General had been briefed on the invasion plan from the beginning. He did not attend the entire series of formal meetings of the advisory committee but was brought in as an active participant about four or five days before the President made his final decision. During that week, according to his memorandum dictated six weeks later, "I attended some meetings at the White House. Afterwards I said to Jack that I thought that . . . based on the information that had been given to him . . . there really wasn't any alternative to accepting it." "On one occasion during that same crucial week, he used his personal influence to suppress opposition to the CIA plan.

Also on hand was McGeorge Bundy, the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, who had the rank of a cabinet member. A key man on Kennedy's White House team, Bundy was one of the leading intellectuals imported to Washington from Harvard University, where he had been Dean of Arts and Sciences. His background in decision-making was not limited to the problems of a great university; earlier in his career, as a scholar, he had made a close study of Secretary of State Acheson's decisions.

The White House staff also included Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., an outstanding Harvard historian whom the President asked to attend all the White House meetings on the invasion plan, and Richard Goodwin, another Harvard man "of uncommon intelligence." Goodwin did not attend the policy-making meetings but was informed about the invasion plan, discussed it frequently with Schlesinger, and conferred with Rusk and others during the weeks preceding the final decision.

The President asked five of the six members of this core group to join him at the White House meetings of the ad hoc advisory committee on the Cuban invasion plan. At these meetings, Kennedy's advisers found themselves face-to-face with three Joint Chiefs of Staff, in full, metaled regalia. These military men were carry-overs from the Eisenhower administration; throughout the deliberations, they remained quite detached from the Kennedy team. Also present at the meetings of the advisory committee were five others who had fairly close ties to the President and his main advisers. Two of the most active participants were the director and deputy director of the CIA, Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell. They, too, were carry-overs from the Eisenhower administration, but President Kennedy and his inner circle welcomed them as members of the new administration's team. According to



President Kennedy meeting in the Oval Office with two key members of his advisory group, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

Roger Hilsman (director of the intelligence branch of the State Department), Bissell "was a brilliant economist and government executive whom President Kennedy had known for years and so admired and respected that he would very probably have made him Director of the CIA when Dulles eventually retired." Bissell was the most active advocate of the CIA plan; his eloquent presentations did the main job of convincing the conferees to accept it.

Three others who participated in the White House meetings as members of the advisory committee were exceptionally well qualified to appraise the political consequences of the invasion: Thomas C. Mann, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs; Adolph A. Berle, Jr., chairman of the Latin American task force; and Paul Nitze, assistant secretary of defense, who had formerly been the director of the policy planning staff in the State Department.

The group that deliberated on the Bay of Pigs decision included men of considerable intellectual talent. Like the President, all the main advisers were shrewd thinkers, capable of objective, rational analysis, and accustomed to speaking their minds. But collectively they failed to detect the serious flaws in the invasion plan.

Six major miscalculations

The President and his key advisers approved the Bay of Pigs invasion plan on the basis of six assumptions, each of which was wrong. In retrospect, the President's advisers could see that even when they first began to discuss the plan, sufficient information was available to indicate that their assumptions were much too shaky. They could have obtained and used the crucial information beforehand to correct their false assumptions if at the group meetings they had been more critical and probing in fulfilling their advisory roles.

Assumption number 1: No one will know that the United States was responsible for the invasion of Cuba. Most people will believe the CIA cover story, and skeptics can easily be refuted.

When President Kennedy was first told about the plan by the CIA representatives, he laid down one firm stipulation: The United States armed forces would not overtly participate in an invasion of Cuba. He repeated this essential condition each time the matter was discussed. He would not consider accepting the CIA's plan to use the armed Cuban brigade unless it could be safely assumed that the United States government would not be held responsible for initiating a military attack against its small neighbor. On the assumption that this requirement could be met, the plan was seen as a golden opportunity to overthrow Castro. The Castro regime had been a source of irritation to the United States government, even though the President and his advisers did not consider it a direct threat to American security.

In response to the President's questions about the plan, Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell assured Kennedy and his advisory group that all the world would believe that Cuban dissidents were the sole initiators and executors of the invasion. They said that highly effective precautions would mask completely the fact that the United States was engineering the invasion. The brigade of Cuban exiles would be quietly and unspectacularly landed in their homeland. The only noisy part would be the preliminary air attacks against Cuban airfields, but these would be handled by a clever cover story. The United States would be able to deny all complicity in the bombing of Cuban bases. The planes used in the bombing raids would be B-26s of World War II vintage, without any United States markings. They would look like planes in Castro's air force and could plausibly be claimed to belong to Cuban defectors.

During the weeks preceding the invasion, it became increasingly apparent that the cover story would not work. The President's press secretary, Pierre Salinger, has called the plan "the least covert military operation in history." A week before the invasion, President Kennedy complained heatedly, "I can't believe what I'm reading! Castro doesn't need agents over here. All he has to do is read our papers. It's all laid out for him." American newsmen had gotten wind of the invasion plan. They were reporting "secret" details about what was going on in United States military training camps in Guatemala, where the Cubans were being readied for the invasion, and describing efforts being made in Miami to recruit more Cuban volunteers. Yet, according to Schlesinger, "somehow the idea took hold around the cabinet table that this would not much matter so long as United States soldiers did not take part in the actual fighting."

Thus, despite evidence at hand, the policy-makers ignored the old adage that one must expect any secret known to a large number of people to leak out. Apparently they never discussed the obvious danger that a secret act of military aggression against a neighboring country might be revealed by one or more insiders, particularly when the invasion plan was known to hundreds of Cuban exiles who were being recruited and trained to carry it out. It was also known to a large number of foreign politicians, who might have had their own reasons for revealing it. Leaders of the Cuban exiles' political movements (each of whom had his own ideas about what should be done), government officials in Guatemala (who had allowed the CIA to set up camps to train the Cuban brigade), and officials in Nicaragua (who had agreed to allow the United States to use Nicaraguan air bases to launch air attacks against Cuba)—all knew what was being planned. Furthermore, members of the policy-making group were warned on several occasions by Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and by other prestigious men that an invasion attempt would probably be attributed directly to the United States and would seriously damage United States relations with Latin American countries and European allies. Despite all warnings, the

members of Kennedy's advisory group failed to question the assumption that the secret would not be revealed. President Kennedy was so confident that he publicly promised at a press conference on April 12, 1961 (five days before the invasion), that "there will not be, under any conditions, any intervention in Cuba by United States armed forces, and this Government will do everything it possibly can . . . to make sure that there are no Americans involved in actions inside Cuba."

The world did not immediately learn that the first invaders to land on Cuban soil were, in fact, United States Navy frogmen (in violation of the President's orders), but the United States nevertheless was blamed for the invasion from the outset. The CIA's cover story was quickly torn to pieces by the world press. The credibility of Adlai Stevenson, the United States representative to the United Nations, was also sacrificed, despite President Kennedy's solemn statement to his intimates only a few days earlier that "the integrity and credibility of Adlai Stevenson constitute one of our great national assets. I don't want anything to be done [in handling the cover story] which might jeopardize that." The truth having been carefully withheld from him, Stevenson solemnly denied United States complicity in the bombings at a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly. His statements were immediately seen by foreign observers as inconsistent with news reports about the air attacks and were soon labeled outright lies when some of his alleged facts were disproved twenty-four hours later by authentic photographs. Stevenson later said that this was the most humiliating experience of his long years of public service.

Assumption number 2: The Cuban air force is so ineffectual that it can be knocked out completely just before the invasion begins.

The invasion plan called for a surprise attack by American bombers, which would destroy Castro's air force on the ground before the invaders moved in. The conferees at the White House thought that the obsolete B-26s used to do the job would be able to destroy Cuba's military planes. They did not make sufficient inquiries to find out that these lumbering old planes would have limited capabilities and would frequently develop engine trouble. The first attack was a surprise, but only a small percentage of Cuba's planes was destroyed. Consequently, the invasion plan went awry at the outset because the Cuban air force was able to assert air control over the landing site. Cuban jet training planes, which were fast and efficient, prevented the freighters containing ammunition and supplies from reaching their destination. The supposedly ineffective Cuban air force shot down half of the American B-26s attempting to protect the invaders and repeatedly bombed the ground troops as they arrived on shore.

A second air strike by United States planes was called off by President Kennedy because it would have revealed too clearly that the planes belonged to the United States and that the entire invasion was an unprovoked attack by

the United States. But even if the second air strike had been carried out, it would probably have been even less effective than the first, because there was no longer any element of surprise and the Cuban air force was well dispersed in hidden airfields.

Assumption number 3: The fourteen hundred men in the brigade of Cuban exiles have high morale and are willing to carry out the invasion without any support from United States ground troops.

In line with his firm policy of no direct intervention by the United States, President Kennedy explicitly asked the CIA planners if the members of the Cuban exile brigade were willing to risk their lives without United States military participation. The President and his advisers were given a strong affirmative answer, and Dulles and Bissell repeatedly assured them that morale in the brigade was superb. Had the conferees asked the CIA representatives to present evidence supporting this assurance, they might have discovered that they were relying on biased information. CIA agents in Guatemala were sending reports conveying a rosy overall picture to Dulles and Bissell without informing them about exactly what was going on. In order to build morale, the agents deliberately misled the men in the exile brigade by assuring them that they were only a small part of the invading force, that other Cuban brigades were being trained elsewhere for the same mission, that diversionary landings would draw most of Castro's troops away from their invasion site, and that the United States Marines would be participating in the invasion. Furthermore, one month before the invasion, when the policy-making group in Washington was being assured about the magnificent morale of the exile brigade, the men were actually bitterly discontent and beginning to revolt. They objected to being saddled with officers who had been in the army of the reactionary Batista regime and had been recruited and promoted because of their willingness to take orders from CIA agents. When discontent finally broke out in a full-scale mutiny, the CIA agents arrested a dozen of the ringleaders and confined them in a prison camp deep in the Guatemala jungle. Such was the high morale of the exile brigade.

Ironically, one of the most convincing "demonstrations" of high morale to President Kennedy and his advisers was the fact that sons of the political leaders of the Cuban exiles volunteered for the brigade. But both the fathers and the sons had been hoaxed by CIA agents into believing that the invasion would not be allowed to fail, that the United States government was committed to using armed forces to back them up.

When the invasion took place, the men in the brigade fought well, and their morale was sustained for a time by false hope. They thought that despite all the official "propaganda" put out by the United States government to the contrary, a large number of American troops would land to reinforce them. They had also been led to expect that American ships would bring them the supplies they so urgently needed and would remain offshore to rescue them if necessary.

Assumption number 4: Castro's army is so weak that the small Cuban brigade will be able to establish a well-protected beachhead.

Another question frequently discussed by President Kennedy and his advisers was whether the small exile brigade could achieve its initial goal of establishing a firm beachhead without United States military participation. Again, without looking into the evidence, the conferees accepted the optimistic picture presented by Dulles and Bissell, who described Castro's army as poorly equipped, poorly trained, riddled with dissension, and unable to cope with even a small-scale invasion. These assurances happened to be directly contrary to reports of Castro's military strength by experts in the State Department and in the British Intelligence Service. The CIA planners chose to ignore the experts' reports, and Kennedy's policy advisers did not pursue their questions far enough to become aware of the contradictory estimates, which would have revealed the shakiness of the CIA's assumptions.

As it turned out, Castro's army responded promptly and vigorously to the invasion, even though the invaders fought well. A militia patrol, guarding the coastline because of the invasion alert, was on hand to shoot at the vanguard of the invading force the Navy frogmen sent out to mark the landing site. Soon large numbers of well-equipped Cuban troops were shelling the beachhead with 122 mm howitzers, 37 mm cannons, and rocket-throwers. Cuban armored tanks began moving in within one day after the invaders landed. By the following day, the exile brigade was surrounded by twenty thousand well-equipped Cuban troops, backed up by more than two hundred thousand troops and militiamen who could have been brought to bear if needed.

Having grossly underestimated Castro's military capabilities, President Kennedy and his advisers belatedly realized that a successful beachhead could not be established in Cuba without a military force at least ten times larger than the one they had agreed to send in. According to Sorensen: "The President thought he was approving a plan rushed into execution on the grounds that Castro would later acquire the military capability to defeat it. Castro, in fact, already possessed that capability."

Assumption number 5: The invasion by the exile brigade will touch off sabotage by the Cuban underground and armed uprisings behind the lines that will effectively support the invaders and probably lead to the toppling of the Castro regime.

When first asked by President Kennedy to appraise the CIA's invasion plans, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asserted that the chances for successfully establishing a beachhead were favorable but that "ultimate success would depend on either a sizeable uprising inside the island or sizeable support from outside." Since American intervention was ruled out by the President, victory would depend on anti-Castro resistance and uprisings behind the lines. A second appraisal by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, just one month before the invasion, made this assumption explicit. Without the support of the Cuban resistance, they

reported, there would be no way to overcome the hundreds of thousands of men in Castro's army and militia.

Although skeptical at first about relying on mass insurrection against the Castro regime, President Kennedy was encouraged by his advisory group to set his doubts aside, and he ended up accepting the assumption. Shortly after the Bay of Pigs debacle, he told Sorensen that he had really thought there was a good chance that the landing of the exile brigade, without overt United States participation, would rally the Cuban people to revolt and oust Castro. According to Schlesinger, this view was shared by Kennedy's closest advisers: "We all in the White House considered uprisings behind the lines essential to the success of the operation; so, too, did the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and so, we thought, did the CIA."

Once again the CIA spokesmen had misled the other conferees in the White House by neglecting to say that they were aware of strong reasons for not going along with this assumption. As advocates of the CIA plan, Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell confined their remarks almost entirely to the positive side of the picture. They relayed the unsubstantiated reports of their secret agents claiming that more than twenty-five hundred people were in the resistance organization in Cuba, that at least twenty thousand more were sympathizers, and that CIA contacts inside Cuba were requesting a large number of arms drops.

Long after events had shown that the assumption of a Cuban uprising was completely mistaken, Allen Dulles revealed that from the beginning the CIA had not expected much support from the Cuban resistance. In fact, the CIA had no intelligence estimates that the landing would touch off widespread revolt in Cuba. The intelligence branch of the agency had not been asked to estimate the chances of an invasion's being supported by the resistance movement or by popular uprisings behind the lines. Nor were any of the experts on the Cuban desk of the State Department, who kept a daily surveillance of political activities in Cuba, asked for their judgments. Most of the participants in the White House meetings did not know this and simply assumed that the estimates mentioned by Dulles and Bissell had the full authority of the government's intelligence agency behind them.

Had the policy advisers asked more penetrating questions, some of the excluded experts might have been consulted. In the absence of impartial briefings by nonpartisan experts on Cuba, no one reminded the group of the results of a carefully conducted poll, reported in the preceding year, that had shown that the overwhelming majority of Cubans supported the Castro regime. These poll results had been circulated throughout the United States government and were generally believed to indicate relatively little hope of inducing widespread action against Castro inside Cuba. This evidence was either forgotten or ignored by the political experts in the advisory group.

Even a few skeptical questions put to Dulles or Bissell might have corrected gross misconceptions. The President and his advisers might have learned that the CIA planners realized (without mentioning it in their brief-

ings) that the pre-invasion air strike would allow Castro plenty of time to move against the underground and to round up political dissidents. This was a necessary sacrifice, the CIA men had decided, in order to knock out Castro's air force.

The lack of detailed questioning about these matters is remarkable when we consider that President Kennedy started off with strong misgivings about the amount of anti-Castro support that could be mustered on the island. His misgivings were shared by at least one other member of his White House staff. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in the memorandum he gave the President during the crucial week of decision, stated his doubts about uprisings behind the lines and argued that there was no convincing evidence that mass revolt would be touched off or that Castro's regime was so weak that it could be toppled by the exiles' landing. He warned that if the brigade established a secure foothold in Cuba, the operation would at best lead to a protracted civil war and then Congressmen and other influential politicians in the United States would demand that we intervene by sending in the Marines. Others, including a well-informed journalist just returned from Cuba who was invited to the White House, made similar pessimistic forecasts. Apparently none of these dissenting views was taken seriously enough by the President or his advisers to lead them to ask the intelligence community for an objective assessment of the effectiveness of the Cuban resistance.

Within twenty-four hours after the first air strikes, it became apparent that there would be no sabotage or rebellion and that Castro's regime had the domestic situation firmly in hand. Just as had been expected by the CIA (but not by the main body of the policy-making group), the Cuban police force was alerted by the initial air strike and moved swiftly against internal sources of resistance. In Havana alone, some two hundred thousand political suspects were promptly rounded up. Elsewhere in Cuba anyone suspected of having underground connections was jailed. Even organized resistance units that were already armed and waiting for a favorable opportunity to strike out against Castro's regime were ineffective, initiating only sporadic incidents of token resistance.

The Revolutionary Council composed of exiled political leaders of the Cuban resistance movement, who were supposed to set up the new democratic government after the beachhead was established, complained bitterly after the invasion that no effort had been made to coordinate the invasion with underground activities. They said that the CIA in Cuba had failed to provide supplies for organized resistance units, thus preventing them from executing long-standing plans to cut power lines and blow up factories. The CIA was also charged with gross negligence for ignoring the armed guerrillas in the Escambray Mountains, for not using the channels available for contacting underground groups throughout the island, and for sending in their own unknown agents, who succeeded only in confusing the entire underground movement. Sorensen concludes that there was no cooperation between the planners and the Cuban underground because the CIA mistrusted the exiled

left-wing leaders, just as the right-wing leaders supported by the CIA were mistrusted by most members of the underground. Consequently, "No coordinated uprising or underground effort was really planned or possible." The members of the White House advisory group might have found all this out in advance if they had been sufficiently vigilant to require the CIA representatives to present full details about their plans (or lack of plans) for mobilizing the resistance movement in Cuba.

Assumption number 6: If the Cuban brigade does not succeed in its prime military objective, the men can retreat to the Escambray Mountains and reinforce the guerrilla units holding out against the Castro regime.

A major reason for approving the CIA's plan was the decision-makers' expectation that even if the invasion failed to establish a new government in Cuba, there would still be a net gain. At worst, the invaders would join up with the rebels in the Escambray Mountains and strengthen the anti-Castro forces on the island; so in one way or another the Cuban exiles, who were already showing signs of unrest about getting back to their homeland in order to fight against the Castro regime, supposedly would be put to good use. Dulles and Bissell, when summarizing the CIA's plan, told the advisory group on more than one occasion that the entire operation was safe because the invaders could, if necessary, escape from the beaches into the mountains. President Kennedy and others in the group were greatly reassured by this argument.

Toward the end of their deliberations, any qualms the policy advisers may have had about the mission were put to rest. They believed the CIA was planning a small invasion (rather than a large-scale amphibious assault) that would enable the brigade of exiles to infiltrate the mountains. But they never had the most relevant information, which they could have obtained. The essential facts contradicted the reassuring view that was being conveyed to the group. Evidently none of the policy-makers at the White House meetings asked to be fully briefed.

After the fiasco was over, President Kennedy and his advisers learned for the first time that the CIA officers in charge of the operation in Guatemala had not planned for an escape to the mountains and had discontinued training for guerrilla warfare long before most of the Cuban exiles in the brigade had started their training. In any case, the escape to the Escambray Mountains was a realistic backstop only as long as the plan called for landing at Trinidad, near the foothills of the mountains. When, as a result of the deliberations of the White House advisory group, Trinidad was judged too conspicuous and was replaced by the Bay of Pigs, there was no possibility that the invaders could retreat to the mountains. Schlesinger acknowledges that he and the others attending the White House meetings simply overlooked the geography of Cuba: "I don't think we fully realized that the Escambray Mountains lay 80 miles from the Bay of Pigs, across a hopeless tangle of swamps and

jungle." This oversight might have been corrected if someone in the advisory group had taken the trouble to look at a map of Cuba, available in any atlas.

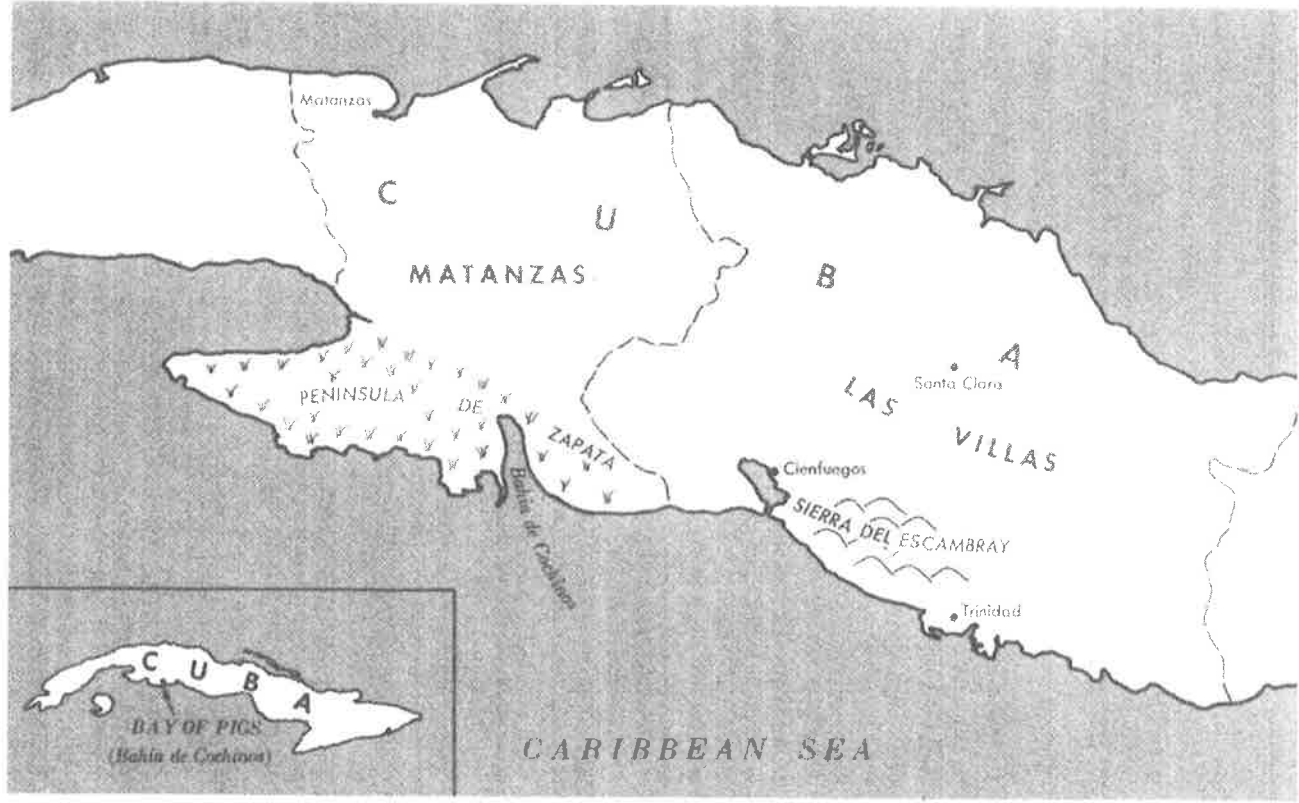
The cost of sending an invading force without an escape route soon became measurable in human lives as well as in dollars and cents. Within two days after landing on the shores of Cuba, the men in the brigade found themselves completely surrounded and learned for the first time that they had no option but to be killed or captured. Twenty months later, Castro struck a hard bargain with the United States State Department and allowed the twelve hundred men who had been imprisoned to be released for the ransom price of \$53 million in food and drugs.

The suffering of the twelve hundred imprisoned men and the ransom money were only part of the losses sustained because of the policy-makers' false assumption that the invaders could easily join guerrillas in the mountains. Had they learned beforehand that there would be no way of escaping from the beaches, President Kennedy's advisers might not have been so complacent about the net gain they were expecting, and they might have decided to drop the entire invasion plan.

Why did the advisory group fail?

Why so many miscalculations? Couldn't the six false assumptions have been avoided if the advisory group had sought fuller information and had taken it into account? Some of the grossest errors resulted from faulty planning and communication within the CIA.¹ The agency obviously had its own serious defects, but they do not concern us in the present inquiry. Nor are we going to try to unravel the complicated reasons for the Joint Chiefs' willingness to endorse the CIA's plan.² The central question is: Why did the President's main advisers, whom he had selected as core members of his team, fail to pursue the issues sufficiently to discover the shaky ground on which the six assumptions rested? Why didn't they pose a barrage of penetrating and embarrassing questions to the representatives of the CIA and the Joint Chiefs of Staff? Why were these men taken in by the incomplete and inconsistent answers they were given in response to the relatively few critical questions they raised? Schlesinger says that "for all the utter irrationality with which retrospect endowed the project, it had a certain queer logic at the time as it emerged from the bowels of government." Why did the President's policy advisers fail to evaluate the plan carefully enough to become aware of "its utter irrationality"? What was the source of the "queer logic" with which the plan was endowed?

Even with the apparently unqualified endorsement of the military sector of the United States government, the six assumptions behind the Bay of Pigs invasion were not so abstruse that military expertise was needed to evaluate



Prisoners captured by Castro's militia during the Bay of Pigs attempt to invade Cuba. These men were among twelve hundred prisoners taken by Castro's forces who were later ransomed by the United States government for \$53 million in food and drugs.

Even a schematic map of Cuba reveals that the Sierra del Escambray would not be an accessible place of retreat for invaders who land in the region of Bahía de Cochinos. (The symbols representing three blades of grass, shown throughout the Peninsula de Zapata, designate swamp lands.)

them realistically. Sorensen points out that a communication gap between the military and civilian sectors of Kennedy's administration led to a gap between the concept of the Cuban invasion and actuality:

With hindsight it is clear that what in fact [the President] had approved was diplomatically unwise and militarily doomed from the outset. What he thought he was approving appeared at the time to have diplomatic acceptability and little chance of outright failure. That so great a gap between concept and actuality should exist at so high a level on so dangerous a matter reflected a shocking number of errors in the whole decision-making process.

But why did the *civilian* policy advisers—especially the core group of key cabinet members and White House staff—fail to close the gaps by picking to pieces the faulty assumptions? They did not put Dulles and Bissell through the kind of cross-examination that would have required the two men to reveal the inadequacies of their estimates and to go back to their agency to seek out better information. They did not make adequate use of the military and political experts who sat with them on the advisory committee. The Joint Chiefs of Staff could have been encouraged to spell out the military pros and cons of the invasion plan and to state their misgivings; the three State Department officials could have been encouraged to do the same about the chances for armed uprisings inside Cuba and the prospects of a provisional government's mobilizing popular support for the overthrow of the Castro regime.

Schlesinger acknowledges that because no one voiced any opposition at the meetings of the advisory committee, the members of the White House staff—himself included—“failed in their job of protecting the President,” and “the representatives of the State Department failed in defending the diplomatic interests of the nation.”

The official explanation

Why did the brilliant, conscientious men on the Kennedy team fail so dismally? The answers given by Schlesinger, Sorensen, Salinger, Hilsman, and other knowledgeable insiders include four major factors, which evidently correspond closely with the reasons John F. Kennedy mentioned in post-mortem discussions with leading members of the government.

Factor number 1: political calculations

When presenting the invasion plan, the representatives of the CIA, knowingly or unknowingly, used a strong political appeal to persuade the Kennedy administration to take aggressive action against the Castro regime. The President was asked, in effect, whether he was as willing as the Republicans to help the Cuban exiles fight against the Communist leadership in Cuba. If he did nothing, the implication was that Castro was free to spread his brand of communism throughout Latin America.

The political consequences were especially obvious when the CIA representatives called attention to the so-called disposal question: What can we do with a trained brigade of Cuban exiles who are clamoring to get back to Cuba? The problem seemed particularly acute because the Guatemalan government had become embarrassed about the publicity the exiles were receiving and had asked that the men be removed. If we don't send them to invade Cuba, Allen Dulles in effect told the advisory committee, we will have to transfer them to the United States. He declared, “We can't have them wandering around the country telling everyone what they have been doing.” Obviously they would spread the word, loud and clear, that Kennedy had prevented them from trying to overthrow Castro's dictatorship, and Kennedy might be accused of being soft on communism when it became known that he scuttled an anti-Castro operation. Furthermore, Castro would soon receive jets from the Soviet Union, and Cuban pilots were being trained in Czechoslovakia to fly them. Once the new planes arrived, a successful amphibious landing by the exile brigade would no longer be possible. After June 1, 1961, according to the CIA, the massive power of the United States Marines and Air Force would be required for a successful invasion of Cuba. Anyhow, the invasion could not be postponed for long because the rainy season was coming. This was the last chance for a purely Cuban invasion, and if Kennedy postponed it he would be seen as hampering the anti-Communist exiles who wanted to return to their homeland to fight for a democratic Cuba.

Factor number 2: a new administration bottled in an old bureaucracy

Slightly less than three months elapsed between the day the ill-fated CIA plan was presented to the leading members of the new administration and the day the CIA operatives tried to carry it out. The pressures to arrive at a decision during those early months of the Kennedy administration came when the President and his senior advisers were still developing their decision-making procedures, before they were fully familiar with each other, with their respective roles, and with the ways of circumventing bureaucratic obstacles that make obtaining relevant information difficult. The new cabinet members and the White House staff had high esprit de corps but had not reached the point where they could talk frankly with each other without constant concern about protocol and deferential soft-pedaling of criticism. Kennedy himself did not yet know the strengths and weaknesses of his newly appointed advisers. For example, the President did not realize, as he did later, that the new Secretary of State was inclined to defer to the military experts and to withhold his objections to Defense Department toughness in order to avoid charges of State Department softness. Nor had he yet learned that it was wrong to assume, as he put it later, “that the military and intelligence people have some secret skill not available to ordinary mortals.”

Factor number 3: secrecy—to the point of excluding the experts

As happens with many other vital decisions involving military action, the clandestine nature of the plan to invade Cuba precluded using the usual government channels for shaping a foreign policy decision. Ordinarily, all relevant agencies would have been allowed to study the proposed course of action, suggest alternatives, and evaluate the pros and cons of each alternative. Bureaucratic requirements of secrecy are likely to exclude from decision-making many of the most relevant experts. When the Bay of Pigs invasion was being planned, at least two groups of experts in the United States government were not consulted—those in the Intelligence branch of the CIA and on the Cuban desk in the State Department. Schlesinger commented:

The same men . . . both planned the operation and judged its chances of success. . . . The "need-to-know" standard—i.e., that no one should be told about a project unless it becomes operationally necessary—thus had the idiotic effect of excluding much of the expertise of government at a time when every alert newspaper man knew something was afoot.

The requirements of secrecy even extended to the printed matter distributed to the inner circle of policy-makers. The memoranda handed out by the CIA and Joint Chiefs of Staff at the beginning of each session were collected at the end. This made it impossible for the participants to ponder over the arguments and to check out details by collecting information from resources available in their own offices. In short, the expert judgment of the policy-makers who participated in the Bay of Pigs decision was impaired by the secrecy imposed.

Factor number 4: threats to personal reputation and status

Government policy-makers, like most executives in other organizations, hesitate to object to a policy if they think their forthright stand might damage their personal status and political effectiveness. This is sometimes referred to as the effectiveness trap. In his account of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Schlesinger admits that he hesitated to bring up his objections while attending the White House meetings for fear that others would regard it as presumptuous for him, a college professor, to take issue with august heads of major government institutions.

Is the official explanation complete?

Do these four factors fully explain the miscalculations that produced the invasion decision? It seems to me that they do not. Because of a sense of incompleteness about the explanation, I looked for other causal factors in the

sphere of group dynamics. After studying Schlesinger's analysis of the Bay of Pigs fiasco and other authoritative accounts, I still felt that even all four factors operating at full force simultaneously could hardly have given rise to such a faulty decision. Perhaps the four-factor explanation would be plausible if the policy advisers had met hurriedly only once or twice and had had only a few days to make their decision. But they had the opportunity to meet many times and to think about the decision for almost three months.

Here are the main reasons for this judgment:

1. The political pressures mainly stemmed from the realization that the Kennedy administration might be accused of having prevented the Cuban exiles from carrying out an invasion against the pro-Communist government of Cuba. But if Kennedy and his advisers had examined the six assumptions carefully enough to see how faulty they were, wouldn't they have realized that permitting the Bay of Pigs fiasco to materialize would be at least as embarrassing, both at home and abroad? Moreover, even if the political pressure centering on disposing of the trained exile brigade was an overriding consideration, we are still left with a puzzling question: Why didn't the policy-makers explore some of the obvious alternatives for solving the disposal question without resorting to a full-scale invasion? They might have negotiated for another camp elsewhere in Central America and allowed the exile brigade to infiltrate Cuba in small groups, going to landing places where they could easily join up with the guerrilla units in the mountains. Evidently this solution to the disposal problem, which would have had less damaging political repercussions than the all-out versus all-off alternatives that were considered, was never seriously examined.

2. Although the Kennedy administration was indeed new, most of the men who participated in the decision were old hands at policy-making. How probable is it that R. Kennedy, Bundy, McNamara, Rusk, Berle, and Nitze would suppress their objections and risk allowing the nation to suffer a grave setback merely because they were uncertain about the proper way to behave? Moreover, isn't it improbable that all these men would share Kennedy's naive assumption—which he undoubtedly was expressing in greatly exaggerated form—that the military had special skill unavailable to other assessors of the invasion plan? Some of the false assumptions on which the plan was based—such as keeping United States involvement a secret—were more political than military, and the advisers knew that in these matters they had more expertise than the military men. Most likely, R. Kennedy, Bundy, McNamara, and the top State Department officials concluded that nothing really important was wrong with the invasion plan. Otherwise, regardless of their new roles and other considerations that might have made them hesitate to communicate their objections, at one of the many sessions in which the invasion plan was discussed they would undoubtedly have managed to call attention to the unacceptable grounds for the assumptions on which it rested.

3. Many experts in the government were certainly excluded in a futile effort to keep the plan secret. But wouldn't the President's key advisers have in-

sisted on consulting their own experts if they had carefully inspected the shaky grounds on which the CIA planners were basing their judgments? A few in-
 Castro's military and political strength might have quickly revealed that they were relying uninformed estimates made without consulting the intelligence experts in their own agency or in the State Department. Wouldn't the President and his advisers then have realized that there was "a need for them to know," and wouldn't experts have been asked to provide the policy-makers with an objective appraisal? With the experts excluded, outside criticism of the CIA's plan was kept to a minimum. But why was there so little criticism from inside the group of high-level government officials who were sufficiently expert to evaluate at least some, if not all, of the assumptions?

4. Even the highest government officials may become concerned about potential damage to their status and future effectiveness that might result from criticizing a plan proposed by the military. Still, it was by no means clear that agreeing to the plan would be more advantageous than calling attention to gaps in the CIA's rationale and raising valid objections. If any advisers had realized that the invasion was going to be a fiasco, wouldn't they also have realized that acquiescing would be much more damaging to their reputation than raising critical questions to force the others, however reluctantly, to reexamine their assumptions? Would the policy advisers remain silent at meeting after meeting if they thought the President was being misled into making a stupid decision, damaging to his administration and to the country as a whole? When given the responsibility of forming a judgment about vital matters of national policy, such men are not likely to be intimidated by vague threats of damage to their careers. Moreover, the four members of the Kennedy team who had worked with the President before and during the election campaign—Bundy, Schlesinger, Goodwin, and Robert Kennedy—would not have felt such constraints when they talked among themselves about the plan to invade Cuba. They knew the President well enough to realize that he valued fresh viewpoints and independent thinking, that he was ready to change his mind in response to strong arguments, and that he would support them against backbiting from anyone in the executive branch on whose toes they might be stepping.

Sensitized by my dissatisfaction with the four-factor explanation, I noticed in Schlesinger's account of what the policy-makers said to each other during and after the crucial sessions numerous signs of group dynamics in full operation. From studying this material I arrived at the groupthink hypothesis.

Groupthink does not replace the four-factor explanation of the faulty decision; rather, it supplements the four factors and perhaps gives each of them added cogency in the light of group dynamics. It seems to me that if groupthink had not been operating, the other four factors would not have been sufficiently powerful to hold sway during the months when the invasion decision was being discussed.³

Symptoms of groupthink among President Kennedy's advisers

According to the groupthink hypothesis, members of any small cohesive group tend to maintain esprit de corps by unconsciously developing a number of shared illusions and related norms that interfere with critical thinking and reality testing. If the available accounts describe the deliberations accurately, typical illusions can be discerned among the members of the Kennedy team during the period when they were deciding whether to approve the CIA's invasion plan.

The illusion of invulnerability

An important symptom of groupthink is the illusion of being invulnerable to the main dangers that might arise from a risky action in which the group is strongly tempted to engage. Essentially, the notion is that "If our leader and everyone else in our group decides that it is okay, the plan is bound to succeed. Even if it is quite risky, luck will be on our side." A sense of "unlimited confidence" was widespread among the "New Frontiersmen" as soon as they took over their high government posts, according to a Justice Department confidant, with whom Robert Kennedy discussed the secret CIA plan on the day it was launched:

It seemed that, with John Kennedy leading us and with all the talent he had assembled, *nothing could stop us*. We believed that if we faced up to the nation's problems and applied bold, new ideas with common sense and hard work, we would overcome whatever challenged us.

That this attitude was shared by the members of the President's inner circle is indicated by Schlesinger's statement that the men around Kennedy had enormous confidence in his ability and luck: "Everything had broken right for him since 1956. He had won the nomination and the election against all the odds in the book. Everyone around him thought he had the Midas touch and could not lose." Kennedy and his principal advisers were sophisticated and skeptical men, but they were, nevertheless, "affected by the euphoria of the new day." During the first three months after he took office—despite growing concerns created by the emerging crisis in Southeast Asia, the gold drain, and the Cuban exiles who were awaiting the go-ahead signal to invade Cuba—the dominant mood in the White House, according to Schlesinger, was "buoyant optimism." It was centered on the "promise of hope" held out by the President: "*Euphoria reigned; we thought for a moment that the world was plastic and the future unlimited.*"

All the characteristic manifestations of group euphoria—the buoyant optimism, the leader's great promise of hope, and the shared belief that the group's accomplishments could make "the future unlimited"—are strongly reminiscent of the thoughts and feelings that arise among members of many different types of groups during the phase when the members become

cohesive. At such a time, the members become somewhat euphoric about their newly acquired "we-feeling"; they share a sense of belonging to a powerful, protective group that in some vague way opens up new potentials for each of them. Often there is boundless admiration of the group leader.

Once this euphoric phase takes hold, decision-making for everyday activities, as well as long-range planning, is likely to be seriously impaired. The members of a cohesive group become very reluctant to carry out the unpleasant task of critically assessing the limits of their power and the real losses that could arise if their luck does not hold. They tend to examine each risk in black and white terms. If it does not seem overwhelmingly dangerous, they are inclined simply to forget about it, instead of developing contingency plans in case it materializes. The group members know that no one among them is a superman, but they feel that somehow the group is a supergroup, capable of surmounting all risks that stand in the way of carrying out any desired course of action: "Nothing can stop us!" Athletic teams and military combat units may often benefit from members' enthusiastic confidence in the power and luck of their group. But policy-making committees usually do not.

We would not expect sober government officials to experience such exuberant esprit de corps, but a subdued form of the same tendency may have been operating—inclining the President's advisers to become reluctant about examining the drawbacks of the invasion plan. In group meetings, this group-think tendency can operate like a low-level noise that prevents warning signals from being heeded. Everyone becomes somewhat biased in the direction of selectively attending to the messages that feed into the members' shared feelings of confidence and optimism, disregarding those that do not.

When a cohesive group of executives is planning a campaign directed against a rival or enemy group, their discussions are likely to contain two themes, which embody the groupthink tendency to regard the group as invulnerable: (1) "We are a strong group of good guys who will win in the end." (2) "Our opponents are stupid, weak, bad guys." It is impressive to see how closely the six false assumptions fit these two themes. The notion running through the assumptions is the overoptimistic expectation that "we can pull off this invasion, even though it is a long-shot gamble." The policy advisers were probably unaware of how much they were relying on shared rationalizations in order to appraise the highly risky venture as a safe one. Their overoptimistic outlook would have been rudely shaken if they had allowed their deliberations to focus on the potentially devastating consequences of the obvious drawbacks of the plan, such as the disparity in size between Castro's military forces of two hundred thousand and the small brigade of fourteen hundred exiles. In a sense, this difference made the odds against their long-shot gamble 200,000 to 1,400 (over 140 to 1).

When discussing the misconceptions that led to the decision to approve the CIA's plan, Schlesinger emphasizes the gross underestimation of the enemy. Castro was regarded as a weak "hysterical" leader whose army was ready to defect; he was considered so stupid that "although warned by air

strikes, he would do nothing to neutralize the Cuban underground." This is a stunning example of the classical stereotype of the enemy as weak and ineffectual.

In a concurrence-seeking group, there is relatively little healthy skepticism of the glib ideological formulas on which rational policy-makers, like many other people who share their nationalistic goals, generally rely in order to maintain self-confidence and cognitive mastery over the complexities of international politics. One of the symptoms of groupthink is the members' persistence in conveying to each other the cliché and oversimplified images of political enemies embodied in long-standing ideological stereotypes. Throughout their deliberations they use the same old stereotypes, instead of developing differentiated concepts derived from an open-minded inquiry enabling them to discern which of their original ideological assumptions, if any, apply to the foreign policy issue at hand. Except in unusual circumstances of crisis, the members of a concurrence-seeking group tend to view any antagonistic out-group against whom they are plotting not only as immoral but also as weak and stupid. These wishful beliefs continue to dominate their thinking until an unequivocal defeat proves otherwise, whereupon—like Kennedy and his advisers—they are shocked at the discrepancy between their stereotyped conceptions and actuality.

A subsidiary theme, which also involved a strong dose of wishful thinking, was contained in the Kennedy group's notion that "we can get away with our clever cover story." When the daily newspapers were already demonstrating that this certainly was not so, the undaunted members of the group evidently replaced the original assumption with the equally overoptimistic expectation that "anyhow, the non-Communist nations of the world will side with us. After all, we are the good guys."

Overoptimistic expectations about the power of their side and the weakness of the opponents probably enable members of a group to enjoy a sense of low vulnerability to the effects of any decision that entails risky action against an enemy. In order to maintain this complacent outlook, each member must think that everyone else in the group agrees that the risks can be safely ignored.⁴

The illusion of unanimity

When a group of people who respect each other's opinions arrive at a unanimous view, each member is likely to feel that the belief must be true. This reliance on consensual validation tends to replace individual critical thinking and reality-testing, unless there are clear-cut disagreements among the members. The members of a face-to-face group often become inclined, without quite realizing it, to prevent latent disagreements from surfacing when they are about to initiate a risky course of action. The group leader and the members support each other, playing up the areas of convergence in their thinking, at the expense of fully exploring divergences that might disrupt the

apparent unity of the group. Better to share a pleasant, balmy group atmosphere than to be battered in a storm.

This brings us to the second outstanding symptom of groupthink manifested by the Kennedy team—a shared illusion of unanimity. In the formal sessions dealing with the Cuban invasion plan, the group's consensus that the basic features of the CIA plan should be adopted was relatively free of disagreement.

According to Sorensen, "No strong voice of opposition was raised in any of the key meetings, and no realistic alternatives were presented." According to Schlesinger, "the massed and caparisoned authority of his senior officials in the realm of foreign policy and defense was unanimous for going ahead. . . . Had one senior advisor opposed the adventure, I believe that Kennedy would have canceled it. No one spoke against it."

Perhaps the most crucial of Schlesinger's observations is, "Our meetings took place in a *curious atmosphere of assumed consensus*." His additional comments clearly show that the assumed consensus was an illusion that could be maintained only because the major participants did not reveal their own reasoning or discuss their idiosyncratic assumptions and vague reservations. President Kennedy thought that prime consideration was being given to his prohibition of direct military intervention by the United States. He assumed that the operation had been pared down to a kind of unobtrusive infiltration that, if reported in the newspapers, would be buried in the inside pages. Rusk was certainly not on the same wavelength as the President, for at one point he suggested that it might be better to have the invaders fan out from the United States naval base at Guantánamo, rather than land at the Bay of Pigs, so that they could readily retreat to the base if necessary. Implicit in his suggestion was a lack of concern about revealing United States military support as well as implicit distrust in the assumption made by the others about the ease of escaping from the Bay of Pigs. But discussion of Rusk's strange proposal was evidently dropped long before he was induced to reveal whatever vague misgivings he may have had about the Bay of Pigs plan. At meetings in the State Department, according to Roger Hilsman, who worked closely with him, "Rusk asked penetrating questions that frequently caused us to re-examine our position." But at the White House meetings Rusk said little except to offer gentle warnings about avoiding excesses.

As usually happens in cohesive groups, the members assumed that "silence gives consent." Kennedy and the others supposed that Rusk was in substantial agreement with what the CIA representatives were saying about the soundness of the invasion plan. But about one week before the invasion was scheduled, when Schlesinger told Rusk in private about his objections to the plan, Rusk, surprisingly, offered no arguments against Schlesinger's objections. He said that he had been wanting for some time to draw up a balance sheet of the pros and cons and that he was annoyed at the Joint Chiefs because "they are perfectly willing to put the President's head on the block, but they recoil at doing anything which might risk Guantánamo." At that late date, he

evidently still preferred his suggestion to launch the invasion from the United States naval base in Cuba, even though doing so would violate President Kennedy's stricture against involving America's armed forces.

McNamara's assumptions about the invasion were quite different from both Rusk's and Kennedy's. McNamara thought that the main objective was to touch off a revolt of the Cuban people to overthrow Castro. The members of the group who knew something about Cuban politics and Castro's popular support must have had strong doubts about this assumption. Why did they fail to convey their misgivings at any of the meetings?

Suppression of personal doubts

The sense of group unity concerning the advisability of going ahead with the CIA's invasion plan appears to have been based on superficial appearances of complete concurrence, achieved at the cost of self-censorship of misgivings by several of the members. From post-mortem discussions with participants, Sorensen concluded that among the men in the State Department, as well as those on the White House staff, "doubts were entertained but never pressed, partly out of a fear of being labelled 'soft' or undaring in the eyes of their colleagues." Schlesinger was not at all hesitant about presenting his strong objections in a memorandum he gave to the President and the Secretary of State. But he became keenly aware of his tendency to suppress objections when he attended the White House meetings of the Kennedy team, with their atmosphere of assumed consensus:

In the months after the Bay of Pigs I bitterly reproached myself for having kept so silent during those crucial discussions in the Cabinet Room, though my feelings of guilt were tempered by the knowledge that a course of objection would have accomplished little save to *gain me a name as a nuisance*. I can only explain my failure to do more than raise a few timid questions by reporting that one's impulse to blow the whistle on this nonsense was simply undone by the *circumstances of the discussion*.

Whether or not his retrospective explanation includes all his real reasons for having remained silent, Schlesinger appears to have been quite aware of the need to refrain from saying anything that would create a nuisance by breaking down the assumed consensus.⁵

Participants in the White House meetings, like members of many other discussion groups, evidently felt reluctant to raise questions that might cast doubt on a plan that they thought was accepted by the consensus of the group, for fear of evoking disapproval from their associates. This type of fear is probably not the same as fear of losing one's effectiveness or damaging one's career. Many forthright men who are quite willing to speak their piece despite risks to their career become silent when faced with the possibility of losing the approval of fellow members of their primary work group. The discrepancy between Schlesinger's critical memoranda and his silent acquiescence during the meetings might be an example of this.

Schlesinger says that when the Cuban invasion plan was being presented to the group, "virile poses" were conveyed in the rhetoric used by the representatives of the CIA and Joint Chiefs of Staff. He thought the State Department representatives and others responded by becoming anxious to show that they were not softheaded idealists but really were just as tough as the military men. Schlesinger's references to the "virile" stance of the militant advocates of the invasion plan suggest that the members of Kennedy's in-group may have been concerned about protecting the leader from being embarrassed by their voicing "unvirile" concerns about the high risks of the venture.

At the meetings, the members of Kennedy's inner circle who wondered whether the military venture might prove to be a failure or whether the political consequences might be damaging to the United States must have had only mild misgivings, not strong enough to overcome the social obstacles that would make arguing openly against the plan slightly uncomfortable. By and large, each of them must have felt reasonably sure that the plan was a safe one, that at worst the United States would not lose anything from trying it. They contributed, by their silence, to the lack of critical thinking in the group's deliberations.

Self-appointed mindguards

Among the well-known phenomena of group dynamics is the alacrity with which members of a cohesive in-group suppress deviational points of view by putting social pressure on any member who begins to express a view that deviates from the dominant beliefs of the group, to make sure that he will not disrupt the consensus of the group as a whole. This pressure often takes the form of urging the dissident member to remain silent if he cannot match up his own beliefs with those of the rest of the group. At least one dramatic instance of this type of pressure occurred a few days after President Kennedy had said, "we seem now destined to go ahead on a quasi-minimum basis." This was still several days before the final decision was made.

At a large birthday party for his wife, Robert Kennedy, who had been constantly informed about the Cuban invasion plan, took Schlesinger aside and asked him why he was opposed. The President's brother listened coldly and then said, "You may be right or you may be wrong, but the President has made his mind up. Don't push it any further. Now is the time for everyone to help him all they can." Here is another symptom of groupthink, displayed by a highly intelligent man whose ethical code committed him to freedom of dissent. What he was saying, in effect, was, "You may well be right about the dangerous risks, but I don't give a damn about that; all of us should help our leader right now by not sounding any discordant notes that would interfere with the harmonious support he should have."

When Robert Kennedy told Schlesinger to lay off, he was functioning in a self-appointed role that I call being a "mindguard." Just as a bodyguard pro-

tecs the President and other high officials from injurious physical assaults, a mindguard protects them from thoughts that might damage their confidence in the soundness of the policies to which they are committed or to which they are about to commit themselves.

At least one other member of the Kennedy team, Secretary of State Rusk, also effectively functioned as a mindguard, protecting the leader and the members from unwelcome ideas that might set them to thinking about unfavorable consequences of their preferred course of action and that might lead to dissension instead of a comfortable consensus. Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles, who had attended a White House meeting at which he was given no opportunity to express his dissenting views, decided not to continue to remain silent about such a vital matter. He prepared a strong memorandum for Secretary Rusk opposing the CIA plan and, keeping well within the prescribed bureaucratic channels, requested Rusk's permission to present his case to the President. Rusk told Bowles that there was no need for any concern, that the invasion plan would be dropped in favor of a quiet little guerrilla infiltration. Rusk may have believed this at the time, but at subsequent White House meetings he must soon have learned otherwise. Had Rusk transmitted the undersecretary's memorandum, the urgent warnings it contained might have reinforced Schlesinger's memorandum and jolted some of Kennedy's in-group, if not Kennedy himself, to reconsider the decision. But Rusk kept Bowles' memorandum firmly buried in the State Department files.

Rusk may also have played a similar role in preventing Kennedy and the others from learning about the strong objections raised by Edward R. Murrow, whom the President had just appointed director of the United States Information Agency. In yet another instance, Rusk appears to have functioned as a dogged mindguard, protecting the group from the opposing ideas of a government official with access to information that could have enabled him to assess the political consequences of the Cuban invasion better than anyone present at the White House meetings could. As director of intelligence and research in the State Department, Roger Hilsman got wind of the invasion plan from his colleague Allen Dulles and strongly warned Secretary Rusk of the dangers. He asked Rusk for permission to allow the Cuban experts in his department to scrutinize thoroughly the assumptions relevant to their expertise. "I'm sorry," Rusk told him, "but I can't let you. This is being too tightly held." Rusk's reaction struck Hilsman as strange because all the relevant men in his department already had top security clearance. Hilsman assumed that Rusk turned down his urgent request because of pressure from Dulles and Bissell to adhere to the CIA's special security restrictions. But if so, why, when so much was at stake, did the Secretary of State fail to communicate to the President or to anyone else in the core group that his most trusted intelligence expert had grave doubts about the invasion plan and felt that it should be appraised by the Cuban specialists? As a result of Rusk's handling of Hilsman's request, the President and his advisers remained in the curious position, as Hilsman put it, of making an important political judgment

without the benefit of advice from the government's most relevant intelligence experts.

Taking account of the mindguard functions performed by the Attorney General and the Secretary of State, together with the President's failure to allow time for discussion of the few oppositional viewpoints that occasionally did filter into the meetings, we surmise that some form of collusion was going on. That is to say, it seems plausible to infer that the leading civilian members of the Kennedy team colluded—perhaps unwittingly—to protect the proposed plan from critical scrutiny by themselves and by any of the government's experts.

Docility fostered by suave leadership

The group pressures that help to maintain a group's illusions are sometimes fostered by various leadership practices, some of which involve subtle ways of making it difficult for those who question the initial consensus to suggest alternatives and to raise critical issues. The group's agenda can readily be manipulated by a suave leader, often with the tacit approval of the members, so that there is simply no opportunity to discuss the drawbacks of a seemingly satisfactory plan of action. This is one of the conditions that fosters group-think.

President Kennedy, as leader at the meetings in the White House, was probably more active than anyone else in raising skeptical questions; yet he seems to have encouraged the group's docility and uncritical acceptance of the defective arguments in favor of the CIA's plan. At each meeting, instead of opening up the agenda to permit a full airing of the opposing considerations, he allowed the CIA representatives to dominate the entire discussion. The President permitted them to refute immediately each tentative doubt that one of the others might express, instead of asking whether anyone else had the same doubt or wanted to pursue the implications of the new worrisome issue that had been raised.

Moreover, although the President went out of his way to bring to a crucial meeting an outsider who was an eloquent opponent of the invasion plan, his style of conducting the meeting presented no opportunity for discussion of the controversial issues that were raised. The visitor was Senator J. William Fulbright. The occasion was the climactic meeting of April 4, 1961, held at the State Department, at which the apparent consensus that had emerged in earlier meetings was seemingly confirmed by an open straw vote. The President invited Senator Fulbright after the Senator had made known his concern about newspaper stories forecasting a United States invasion of Cuba. At the meeting, Fulbright was given an opportunity to present his opposing views. In a "sensible and strong" speech Fulbright correctly predicted many of the damaging effects the invasion would have on United States foreign relations. The President did not open the floor to discussion of the questions raised in Fulbright's rousing speech. Instead, he returned to the procedure he had initiated earlier in the meeting; he had asked each person around the table to

state his final judgment and after Fulbright had taken his turn, he continued the straw vote around the table. McNamara said he approved the plan. Berle was also for it; his advice was to "let her rip." Mann, who had been on the fence, also spoke in favor of it.

Picking up a point mentioned by Berle, who had said he approved but did not insist on "a major production," President Kennedy changed the agenda by asking what could be done to make the infiltration more quiet. Following discussion of this question—quite remote from the fundamental moral and political issues raised by Senator Fulbright—the meeting ended. Schlesinger mentions that the meeting broke up before completion of the intended straw vote around the table. Thus, wittingly or unwittingly, the President conducted the meeting in such a way that not only was there no time to discuss the potential dangers to United States foreign relations raised by Senator Fulbright, but there was also no time to call upon Schlesinger, the one man present who the President knew strongly shared Senator Fulbright's misgivings.

Of course, one or more members of the group could have prevented this by-passing by suggesting that the group discuss Senator Fulbright's arguments and requesting that Schlesinger and the others who had not been called upon be given the opportunity to state their views. But no one made such a request.

The President's demand that each person, in turn, state his overall judgment, especially after having just heard an outsider oppose the group consensus, must have put the members on their mettle. These are exactly the conditions that most strongly foster docile conformity to a group's norms. After listening to an opinion leader (McNamara, for example) express his unequivocal acceptance, it becomes more difficult than ever for other members to state a different view. Open straw votes generally put pressure on each individual to agree with the apparent group consensus, as has been shown by well-known social psychological experiments.

A few days before the crucial meeting of April 4, another outsider who might have challenged some of the group's illusions attended one of the meetings but was never given the opportunity to speak his piece. At the earlier meeting, the outsider was the acting Secretary of State, Chester Bowles, attending in place of Secretary Rusk, who was abroad at a SEATO conference. Like Senator Fulbright, Bowles was incredulous and at times even "horrified" at the group's complacent acceptance of the CIA's invasion plans. However, President Kennedy had no idea what Bowles was thinking about the plan, and he probably felt that Bowles was there more in the role of a reporter to keep Rusk up to date on the deliberations than as a participant in the discussion. In any case, the President neglected to give the group the opportunity to hear the reactions of a fresh mind; he did not call upon Bowles at any time. Bowles sat through the meeting in complete silence. He felt he could not break with formal bureaucratic protocol, which prevents an undersecretary from volunteering his opinion unless directed to do so by his chief or by the President. Bowles behaved in the prescribed way and confined his

protestations to a State Department memorandum addressed to Rusk, which, as we have seen, was not communicated to the President.

An additional bit of information about Bowles' subsequent career seems to fit in with all of this, from the standpoint of group psychology. During the bitter weeks following the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Chester Bowles was the first man in the new administration to be fired by President Kennedy. Some of Bowles' friends had told the press that he had opposed the Cuban venture and had been right in his forecasts about the outcome. Evidently this news annoyed the President greatly. Bowles' opponents in the administration pointed out that even if Bowles had not leaked the story to the press, he had discussed the matter with his friends at a time when it would embarrass the White House. This may have contributed to the President's solution to the problem of what to do about the inept leadership of the inefficient State Department bureaucracy. He decided to shift Bowles out of his position as second-in-command, instead of replacing Rusk, whom he liked personally and wanted to keep as a central member of his team. "I can't do that to Rusk," Kennedy later said when someone suggested shifting Rusk to the United Nations. "He is such a nice man."

During the Bay of Pigs planning sessions, President Kennedy, probably unwittingly, allowed the one-sided CIA memoranda to monopolize the attention of the group by failing to circulate opposing statements that might have stimulated an intensive discussion of the drawbacks and might therefore have revealed the illusory nature of the group's consensus. Although the President read and privately discussed the strongly opposing memoranda prepared by Schlesinger and Senator Fulbright, he never distributed them to the policymakers whose critical judgment he was seeking. Kennedy also knew that Joseph Newman, a foreign correspondent who had just visited Cuba, had written a series of incisive articles that disagreed with forecasts concerning the ease of generating a revolt against Castro. But, although he invited Newman to the White House for a chat, he did not distribute Newman's impressive writings to the advisory group.

The members themselves, however, were partially responsible for the President's biased way of handling the meetings. They need not have been so acquiescent about it. Had anyone suggested to the President that it might be a good idea for the group to gain more perspective by studying statements of opposing points of view, Kennedy probably would have welcomed the suggestion and taken steps to correct his own-sided way of running the meetings.

The taboo against antagonizing valuable new members

It seems likely that one of the reasons the members of the core group accepted the President's restricted agenda and his extraordinarily indulgent treatment of the CIA representatives was that a kind of informal group norm had developed, producing a desire to avoid saying anything that could be con-

strued as an attack on the CIA's plan. The group apparently accepted a kind of taboo against voicing damaging criticisms. This may have been another important factor contributing to the group's tendency to indulge in groupthink.

How could such a norm come into being? Why would President Kennedy give preferential treatment to the two CIA representatives? Why would Bundy, McNamara, Rusk, and the others on his team fail to challenge this preferential treatment and accept a taboo against voicing critical opposition? A few clues permit some conjectures to be made, although we have much less evidence to go on than for delineating the pattern of preferential treatment itself.

It seems that Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell, despite being holdovers from the Eisenhower administration, were not considered outsiders by the inner core of the Kennedy team. President Kennedy and his closest associates did not place these two men in the same category as the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who were seen as members of an outside military clique established during the earlier administration, men whose primary loyalties belonged elsewhere and whose presence at the White House meetings was tolerated as a necessary requirement of governmental protocol. (Witness Secretary Rusk's unfriendly comments about the Joint Chiefs being more loyal to their military group in the Pentagon than to the President, when he was conversing privately with fellow in-group member Schlesinger.) President Kennedy and those in his inner circle admired Dulles and Bissell, regarded them as valuable new members of the Kennedy team, and were pleased to have them on board. Everyone in the group was keenly aware of the fact that Bissell had been devoting his talents with great intensity for over a year to developing the Cuban invasion project and that Dulles was also deeply committed to it. Whenever Bissell presented his arguments, "we all listened transfixed," Schlesinger informs us, "fascinated by the workings of this superbly clear, organized and articulate intelligence." Schlesinger reports that Bissell was regarded by the group as "a man of high character and remarkable intellectual gifts." In short, he was accepted as a highly prized member.

The sense of power of the core group was probably enhanced by the realization that the two potent bureaucrats who were in control of America's extensive intelligence network were affiliated with the Kennedy team. The core members of the team would certainly want to avoid antagonizing or alienating them. They would be inclined, therefore, to soft-pedal their criticisms of the CIA plan and perhaps even to suspend their critical judgment in evaluating it.

The way Dulles and Bissell were treated by President Kennedy and his associates after their plan had failed strongly suggests that both men continued to be fully accepted as members of the Kennedy team during the period of crisis generated by their unfortunate errors. According to Sorensen, Kennedy's regard for Richard Bissell did not change after the Bay of Pigs disaster, and he regretted having to accept Bissell's resignation. When Dulles submitted his resignation, President Kennedy urged him to postpone it and asked

him to join a special commission to investigate the causes of the fiasco. During the days following the defeat, Kennedy refrained from openly criticizing either Bissell or Dulles (this must have required considerable restraint). On one occasion when a mutual friend of Dulles and Kennedy told the President self-righteously that he was deliberately going to avoid seeing the CIA director, Kennedy went out of his way to support Dulles by inviting him for a drink and ostentatiously putting his arm around him in the presence of the would-be ostracizer. This is a typical way for a leader of a cohesive group to treat one of the members who is temporarily "in the dog house."

The picture we get, therefore, is that the two CIA representatives, both highly esteemed men who had recently joined the Kennedy team, were presenting their "baby" to the rest of the team. As protagonists, they had a big head start toward eliciting a favorable consensus. New in-group members would be listened to much more sympathetically and much less critically than outsiders representing an agency that might be trying to sell one of its own pet projects to the new President.

Hilsman, who also respected the two men, says that Dulles and Bissell "had become emotionally involved . . . so deeply involved in the development of the Cuban invasion plans that they were no longer able to see clearly or to judge soundly." He adds, "There was so deep a commitment, indeed, that there was an unconscious effort to confine consideration of the proposed operation to as small a number of people as possible, so as to avoid too harsh or thorough a scrutiny of the plans." If Hilsman is correct, it is reasonable to assume that the two men managed to convey to the other members of the Kennedy team their strong desire "to avoid too harsh or thorough a scrutiny."⁶

Whatever may have been the political or psychological reasons that motivated President Kennedy to give preferential treatment to the two CIA chiefs, he evidently succeeded in conveying to the other members of the core group, perhaps without realizing it, that the CIA's "baby" should not be treated harshly. His way of handling the meetings, particularly his adherence to the extraordinary procedure of allowing every critical comment to be immediately refuted by Dulles or Bissell without allowing the group a chance to mull over the potential objections, probably set the norm of going easy on the plan, which the two new members of the group obviously wanted the new administration to accept. Evidently the members of the group adopted this norm and sought concurrence by continually patching the original CIA plan, trying to find a better version, without looking too closely into the basic arguments for such a plan and without debating the questionable estimates sufficiently to discover that the whole idea ought to be thrown out.

Conclusion

Although the available evidence consists of fragmentary and somewhat biased accounts of the deliberations of the White House group, it nevertheless

reveals gross miscalculations and converges on the symptoms of groupthink. My tentative conclusion is that President Kennedy and the policy advisers who decided to accept the CIA's plan were victims of groupthink. If the facts I have culled from the accounts given by Schlesinger, Sorensen, and other observers are essentially accurate, the groupthink hypothesis makes more understandable the deficiencies in the government's decision-making that led to the enormous gap between conception and actuality.

The failure of Kennedy's inner circle to detect any of the false assumptions behind the Bay of Pigs invasion plan can be at least partially accounted for by the group's tendency to seek concurrence at the expense of seeking information, critical appraisal, and debate. The concurrence-seeking tendency was manifested by shared illusions and other symptoms, which helped the members to maintain a sense of group solidarity. Most crucial were the symptoms that contributed to complacent overconfidence in the face of vague uncertainties and explicit warnings that should have alerted the members to the risks of the clandestine military operation—an operation so ill conceived that among literate people all over the world the name of the invasion site has become the very symbol of perfect failure.