

HUMAN EVENTS
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Why Blame the CIA For Our Failures in Will?

CPYRGHT

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This column does not accept the conspiracy theory of history. But it does think rather well of the contagion theory. This can involve conspiracy at the outset to float rumors, to slander characters, and to impute motives. The first thing you know everyone and his brother are saying something that is either witless or unprovable, or both.

At the present moment the "contagion" is spreading stories designed to discredit the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. A book has been written about the CIA called *The Invisible Government*, by David Wise and Thomas B. Ross. I don't want to defend or attack details in the book, for I hear conflicting stories about the CIA, and I don't know whether Wise and Ross have been guilty of compromising twenty-seven CIA agents by naming them. But what bothers me about the "contagion" that currently holds our Central Intelligence operatives to be a danger to democracy is that the butts of all the rumors can't in the nature of things stand up and defend themselves.

There is the case of Richard Bissell, for instance. Bissell had a lot to do with planning the Bay of Pigs operation which failed so lamentably when U.S. air cover failed to materialize over the beaches held by the anti-Castro Cuban invasion brigade. Bissell is the inferential goat of the recent book by Haynes Johnson called *The Bay of Pigs: the Leaders' Story of Brigade 2506*.

Maybe he deserves criticism. But the point is that he can't very well speak up in his own defense without involving others.

On the face of it both the CIA and the Pentagon did plan for an ineffective invasion of Cuba. The critics say that the underground was not alerted, that the maps of the Bay of Pigs coast did not reckon with the coral reefs that snagged some of the invasion boats, that the anti-Castro Cubans were misled by people who "gave them to understand" that the United States was totally committed to their success. But the real failure was one of will, and this cannot be held against Richard Bissell and the CIA.

Mr. Johnson's book, which is exciting in its descriptions of what happened after the unfortunate Arttime brigade of anti-Castro Cubans had been dumped on the beaches, is deficient when it comes to exploring the Washington angles of the affair. It suffers from our national obsession with the idea of academic "balance" in all things. And so it misses the big critical point—that the act of decision in anything is a conscious desertion of "balance." Action is by its nature provocative.

Mr. Johnson makes the CIA the goat in its failure to tell the late President Kennedy that control of the beaches by American air power might be necessary. Bissell, indeed, did ask for it after things began to go wrong. At this point Kennedy offered an "air umbrella" to protect the anti-Castro Cubans' own planes, a handful of B-26s based in Central America. But this, on its face, was ambiguous: were we behind the Cubans, or were we not? Who could have told?

In our national fear of anybody with positive convictions (they are "extreme," you know), the point was lost that when you plan to upset a status quo, you must will the means to do it. Bissell of the CIA had been told to upset the Castroite status quo in Cuba, and, however deficient his planning may have been in certain details, he finally asked for the means to make the Arttime invasion a success. Neither he nor the CIA should be pilloried because of a failure of national will.

We didn't lose at the Bay of Pigs because of technical failures. We lost because there was no will in Washington to win. If we had stood firm on the Monroe Doctrine and had accompanied the military planning of the CIA with an announcement that the human brutalities of the Castro regime could not be tolerated, the expedition would not have been allowed to fail.

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The CIA, as Wise and Ross say in their book, may be incompatible with the open discussion which is at the heart of democracy. But if it is an "invisible government" in itself, it is so only to the extent that we have no real government elsewhere. If the CIA operatives are told to march without being provided with marching orders, why blame them for anything they do?

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