

Washington, D.C. 20505

14 January 1985

Dear Earl,

Here's the article from the magazine, Diplomatic History which I promised to send you on Allen Dulles' private 200 page justification of the Bay of Pigs operation which, pursuant to his Will, was deposited in Princeton. There is also a current commentary on the matter by Dick Bissell who, as you recall, was his operating officer at the Bay of Pigs.

Best regards.

Yours,



William J. Casey

The Honorable Earl E. T. Smith

[Redacted address box]

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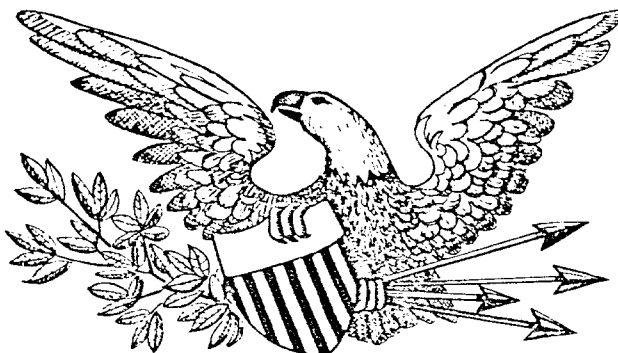
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# DIPLOMATIC HISTORY



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## The "Confessions" of Allen Dulles: New Evidence on the Bay of Pigs

LUCIEN S. VANDENBROUCKE\*

In November 1961 Allen W. Dulles resigned from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), ending a tenure as director that had spanned nearly a decade. On 17 April of that year, a brigade of Cuban exiles, armed and directed by the CIA, had landed at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba in an effort to topple the regime of Premier Fidel Castro. Within days, however, Castro's forces crushed the invasion, killing or capturing almost the entire brigade. Stunned by the disaster, newly elected President John F. Kennedy began to reconsider the advice that he had been receiving. Upon taking office from President Dwight D. Eisenhower only a few months before, Kennedy had asked Dulles, who had directed the CIA throughout the previous administration, to remain at the head of the agency. But in the wake of the Cuban debacle, Kennedy decided that it was time for the director of central intelligence (DCI) to go, and Dulles left quietly.<sup>1</sup>

In the following years, Dulles wrote and said little about the Cuban affair. His book *The Craft of Intelligence*, for instance, published in 1963, contained merely a few lines on the Bay of Pigs.<sup>2</sup> But the publication of separate accounts of the episode by former White House aides Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Theodore C. Sorensen in 1965 jolted Dulles out of his reserve. Deeply disturbed by writings that blamed the disaster primarily

\*The author wishes to thank Richard K. Betts of the Brookings Institution and Thomas G. Paterson of the University of Connecticut for their comments. Special thanks are due to J. Gary Clifford, also of the University of Connecticut, for help and advice. This article was written while the author was a research fellow at the Brookings Institution.

<sup>1</sup>Ralph G. Martin, *A Hero for Our Time: An Intimate Story of the Kennedy Years* (New York, 1983), p. 333.

<sup>2</sup>Allen W. Dulles, *The Craft of Intelligence* (New York, 1963). On occasion, however, Dulles confided in friendly journalists. See Hanson W. Baldwin Oral History, p. 679, United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland; and Walter Lippmann, diary entry, 13 May 1961, Box 329, Walter Lippmann Papers, Sterling Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. What Dulles said in these encounters is largely unknown.

on Kennedy's intelligence and military advisers, Dulles decided to reply.<sup>3</sup> For the next several months, he worked on an article entitled "My Answer to the Bay of Pigs," writing numerous drafts that total several hundred pages. Dulles worked carefully, using personal notes from the period and consulting former CIA associates, particularly Richard M. Bissell, who as the agency's deputy director for plans (clandestine action) in 1961 had been the chief architect of the operation.

As his manuscript neared completion, however, and despite *Harper's* desire to publish it, Dulles finally decided to maintain his silence. The reasons for his decision remain unclear. According to his widow, her husband chose not to publish the article, "because there was so much more in his favor he could have said, if he had been at liberty to do so, that the material [therein] was inadequate."<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt that Dulles felt seriously constrained in his reply. He believed strongly that former government officials should avoid discussing any aspect of an operation that remained classified. He also considered himself honor bound to respect the confidential nature of his communications with the late President Kennedy. As the former director emphasized in his final draft, "I have served under nine Presidents, from Woodrow Wilson to Lyndon Johnson, and under no circumstances would I feel justified in revealing Presidential confidences, or making public information which the government holds as classified."<sup>5</sup> Even though he ultimately decided against publication, Dulles nonetheless kept his manuscript and numerous drafts. Now filed among the Allen W. Dulles Papers at Princeton University's Seeley

<sup>3</sup>See Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "The Bay of Pigs: A Horribly Expensive Lesson," *Life* 59 (25 July 1965): 62-70; and Theodore C. Sorensen, "Kennedy's Worst Disaster: Bay of Pigs," *Look* 29 (10 August 1965): 43-50. Dulles's anger at these versions of the events is evident in a memorandum of a telephone conversation he had with former President Eisenhower shortly after the articles appeared: "Called and talked with Allen Dulles. Discussed falsity of Schlesinger and Sorensen articles and book . . . Mr. Dulles . . . said Sorensen completely misrepresented the talk we [Dulles and Eisenhower] had together about Guatemala . . . Mr. Dulles said they did not have the stomach for the plan. In talking about Mr. Kennedy Mr. Dulles said that he was very uncertain and surrounded by pessimists . . . Dulles said some of 'these people' are admirers of Castro." Calls and appointments, 23 August 1965, appointment books, Box 2, Dwight D. Eisenhower Post-Presidential Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

<sup>4</sup>Note signed by Mrs. A. W. Dulles, Box 138, Allen W. Dulles Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey (hereafter cited as Dulles Papers).

<sup>5</sup>Allen W. Dulles, "My Answer to the Bay of Pigs," (final), Box 244, p. 2, Dulles Papers. In keeping with his beliefs, Dulles almost never refers in his drafts to the White House official postmortem on the operation, despite the fact that he had been a member of the board of inquiry. The findings of this board, or "Taylor Report," remained officially classified at the time Dulles was writing, even though parts of the report had found their way into articles by other commentators on the event. Another reason why Dulles may have decided against publication was Kennedy's assumption afterward of full responsibility for the fiasco, and his instructions to the White House and government agencies involved to refrain from controversy over the operation. Kennedy maintained this stance, in public at least, until his death. Dulles admired this attitude and thus was reluctant to contravene the deceased president's instructions. *Ibid.*, Box 244, pp. 3-5.

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G. Mudd Library, these documents provide invaluable new insights into the Bay of Pigs affair.<sup>6</sup>

Least surprising is Dulles's final draft. For the most part it answers Schlesinger and Sorensen's charge that the intelligence advisers misled the president about key features of the plan. Dulles insists that the CIA planners never told the president that the mere landing of an exile force in Cuba was likely to trigger massive uprisings throughout the island and bring down the Castro regime. According to the former DCI, the planners believed that the invasion might prompt anti-Castro revolts, but only after the brigade had proved its staying power by seizing control of a solid beachhead. Likewise, Dulles continues, he never assured the president that the plan had an excellent chance of success. Instead, Kennedy was told that the exiles had a "good fighting chance, and no more."<sup>7</sup>

According to this draft, then, it is simply untrue that the Cuban venture failed because the intelligence advisers misled Kennedy into approving an ill-conceived plan. Instead, the real cause of the disaster was the White House's lack of "determination to succeed." Fearing "some unpleasant political repercussion" from the invasion, Dulles explains, the president consistently strove to reduce the visibility of the undertaking. Therefore, rather than authorize whatever effort was required to succeed, Kennedy "whittled away" the scale of military operations, in the end fatally weakening an otherwise sound plan.<sup>8</sup> Dulles's final manuscript therefore mostly repeats the familiar arguments of those who remain skeptical of the Kennedy administration's version of the affair and instead place much of the blame for the fiasco on timidity in the White House.<sup>9</sup>

Far more interesting and revealing, however, are Dulles's drafts and notes. These pages, often handwritten and sometimes coffee-stained, bear the mark of strong emotions as well. Here Dulles freely vented his anger and frustration; he also wrote more candidly, at times making startling admissions.

Kennedy's ambivalent feelings about the Cuban invasion emerge clearly from these notes. While some observers have argued that the president found the plan appealing,<sup>10</sup> Dulles confirms that Kennedy and many of his close advisers had grave misgivings about it, but believed that they could not stop an operation that was practically under way. "It was a sort of orphan child JFK had adopted (from the Republicans)—he had no real love and affection for it. [He] proceeded uncertainly toward defeat—unable to turn back—only half sold on the vital necessity of what he was doing, surrounded by doubting

<sup>6</sup>Dulles's drafts, background material, and correspondence related to the article are in Boxes 138 and 244, Dulles Papers.

<sup>7</sup>"My Answer to the Bay of Pigs," (final), Box 138, pp. 15–16, 22–25, Dulles Papers.

<sup>8</sup>"My Answer to the Bay of Pigs," (galleys), Box 244, pp. 49–52, Dulles Papers.

<sup>9</sup>For similar views, see Hanson W. Baldwin, "The Cuban Invasion," parts 1 and 2, *The New York Times*, 31 July and 1 August 1961; Richard Nixon, off-the-record press briefing, 21 April 1961, in staff memoranda, Arthur Schlesinger file (5/61–6/61), Box 65, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>10</sup>See for example Hugh Sidey, *John F. Kennedy, President* (New York, 1963), p. 127.

Thomases among his best friends."<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere, Dulles adds: "Among the Pres[idential] advisors there were enough doubting Thomases to dull the attack, but not enough to bring about its cancellation."<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, in his earlier drafts Dulles acknowledges that the White House had serious misconceptions about the plan. Kennedy, the former DCI explains, "had views of [the plan] that were not consistent with the realities of the situation."<sup>13</sup> Dulles notes, for instance, that when the president, concerned about the operation's visibility, decided against the original landing place by the coastal town of Trinidad in favor of the CIA's alternative site at the Bay of Pigs, he failed to appreciate the implications of the change. In particular, Kennedy continued to believe that, should the brigade run into unexpected trouble, the exiles could always evade defeat by seeking refuge in the mountains and pursuing their struggle as guerrillas. Nor did the president perceive how the new landing site would affect the likelihood of rebellions within Cuba. As Dulles writes:

The preferred landing site at Trinidad had been changed . . . *without a full realization at the top* that this greatly reduced the "guerrilla" alternative since it was far removed from the area in the Escambray, the best guerrilla territory, and also by being a mere quiet landing reduced the chance of bringing about a revolt or defections to the landing places. In fact the [invasion] required a well-publicized landing so that the people of Cuba . . . could have a clear knowledge of what was in progress.<sup>14</sup>

Dulles also suggests that the White House failed to realize the importance in the plan of protecting the invasion force from enemy air attack: "I didn't see to it," he writes, "that everyone understood beyond [undecipherable word] of a doubt, that air cover for the landing was an 'absolute' prerequisite."<sup>15</sup>

How Kennedy could have been so mistaken about key aspects of the plan remains to this day a matter for debate. A mere glance at a map, for instance, would have revealed that the change in landing site had all but ruled out any "guerrilla option." While the Escambray mountains, Cuba's traditional insurgent stronghold, were close by the Trinidad landing site, eighty miles of often impassable swamp separated the Bay of Pigs from the mountain

<sup>11</sup>Dulles, handwritten notes, Box 244, p. 2, Dulles Papers.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., Dulles, handwritten notes, Box 244, A.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., Dulles, handwritten notes, "Conclusion," Box 244.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., Dulles, handwritten notes, "Conclusion," Box 244, d-e (emphasis added).

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., Dulles, handwritten notes, "Disclosures," Box 244. As Dulles readied his manuscript for publication, however, he progressively downplayed some of Kennedy's misperceptions about the plan. In his earliest and most spontaneous handwritten notes, Dulles concedes that the president misunderstood the importance of air cover. But in subsequent drafts, he becomes more circumspect. One typed draft states more vaguely that "[the need] for protection of the brigade's flotilla from hostile air attack *should have been quite obvious* to everyone involved in making the final decisions." Eventually, Dulles changed this to "[the need] for protection . . . *was quite obvious*," the phrasing that appears in the final draft. Ibid., "My Answer to the Bay of Pigs," Box 138, p. 27 (emphasis added).

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refuge. No doubt the imprecision of the planners' oral briefings, the inadequacies of the new administration's procedures for considering national security affairs, and the president's inattention to details and unwillingness to face uncomfortable realities all contributed to the White House's misconceptions.<sup>16</sup> Dulles himself, however, suggests an additional explanation for Kennedy's confusion: apparently, the DCI and other key intelligence advisers opted not to dispel several of Kennedy's illusions.

Indeed, the former director indicates that unlike White House decision-makers, the intelligence operatives were aware of the negative effect of the change in landing site on the "guerrilla alternative" and the prospects for a revolt of the Cuban people. Most of the planners also seemed to realize that the operation had ballooned to the point where Kennedy's belief that it could be "quiet" and covert and that U.S. involvement could be concealed had no basis in fact.<sup>17</sup> It appears, however, that the planners chose not to dispel the president's misconceptions on most of these scores. As Dulles explains with remarkable frankness:

[We] never raised objections to repeated emphasis [by the President] that the operation: a) must be carried through without any "combat" action by U.S.A. military forces; b) must remain quiet [and] disavowable by [the] U.S. gov[ernment]; c) must be a quiet operation yet must rouse internal revolt vs. Castro and create a center to which anticastroites will defect.<sup>18</sup>

Dulles then explains why he and key associates preferred not to alert the president to "the realities of the situation"—particularly the contradiction between a discreet landing and the expectation of revolts, as well as the implausibility of denying that the United States had engineered the invasion:

*[We] did not want to raise these issues—in an [undecipherable word] discussion—which might only harden the decision against the type of action we required. We felt that when the chips were down—when the crisis arose in reality, any action required for success would be authorized rather than permit the enterprise to fail.*

In a sense we were right. If only half the military help had been made available to get the brigade and its equipment safely ashore, that was later shown in trying to rescue and later liberate the brigade, there would have been a good chance of success.

<sup>16</sup>On these points, see for instance Paul L. Kesaris, ed., *Operation Zapata: The "Ultra-sensitive" Report and Testimony of the Board of Inquiry on the Bay of Pigs* (Frederick, MD, 1981), pp. 16-39; and Lucien S. Vandenbroucke, "Anatomy of a Failure: The Decision to Land at the Bay of Pigs," forthcoming in the *Political Science Quarterly*.

<sup>17</sup>Commenting on Kennedy's insistence that the Cuban operation be "a quiet penetration yet [cause] an uprising [and] mass defections," Dulles writes: "but the very fact of a *quiet* landing rendered both impossible. Revolt and defection required the utmost possible 'noise' to the people of Cuba." Handwritten notes, "Conclusion," Box 244, Dulles Papers. Dulles also notes that "even after wide publicity had deprived the operation of much of its covert character [and] the USA interest in it was disclosed, there was no lifting of the restrictions imposed on the planners." *Ibid.*, handwritten notes, Box 244.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, Dulles, handwritten notes, Box 244, x (emphasis added).

We believed that in a time of crisis we would gain what we might lose if we provoked an argument.<sup>19</sup>

From the standpoint of the intelligence advisers who were vigorously promoting a plan they were anxious to see proceed, it made sense to avoid fanning the president's fears by pessimistic arguments about the prospects for rebellion and plausible denial. As things stood, Kennedy already had grave misgivings about the plan. At times he seemed ready to stop it, and he had explicitly reserved the right to call it off up to the last minute. Had the planners provided the president with additional reasons for concern, his doubts might have grown to the point where he canceled the operation altogether.<sup>20</sup>

There may well have been, however, yet another reason why Dulles and other senior planners ignored some of the president's misconceptions. The intelligence advisers had learned long before that no matter how carefully plans were drawn up prior to the event, once a covert operation was under way it often took on a life of its own. As Dulles comments in his draft: "I have seen good many operations which started out like the B of P—insistence on complete secrecy—non involvement of the U.S.—initial reluctance to authorize supporting actions. This limitation tends to disappear as the needs of the operation become clarified."<sup>21</sup> Moreover, as noted above, the former spymaster raised no objections to the limits Kennedy sought to place on the Cuban operation because he was convinced that once the invasion began the president would end up approving anything required for success. Such evidence suggests that Dulles and key associates may well have had an additional cause to disregard Kennedy's misunderstanding of the plan presented to him, with, for instance, its careful exclusion of direct U.S. military participation. Indeed, the plan submitted to the White House for approval may not have been the scheme these intelligence advisers actually expected to carry out once the operation had been approved and the dynamics of the invasion started to unfold.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Ibid. (emphasis added). While conceding that the planners let the president delude himself about the chances for rebellion and the covert nature of the operation, Dulles writes that the intelligence advisers made it clear on the other hand that the change in landing sites would severely affect the brigade's ability to escape as guerrillas. Ibid., "My Answer to the Bay of Pigs," (final draft), Box 244, p. 7. Dulles's deputy Richard Bissell, on the other hand, acknowledges that "the implications for the 'guerrilla option' of the shift from Trinidad to the Bay of Pigs were never made clear to the president." Richard M. Bissell, Jr., "Reflections on the Bay of Pigs," *Strategic Review* 12 (Winter 1984): 69-70. Bissell's statement is corroborated by the Taylor Report. Kesaris, *Operation Zapata*, pp. 18, 41-42.

<sup>20</sup>Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston, 1965), pp. 243-59.

<sup>21</sup>Dulles, handwritten notes, Box 244, Dulles Papers.

<sup>22</sup>Interestingly, quite a few others besides the CIA's top leaders appear to have viewed the plan the president approved as less than binding. Agents in the field displayed an initiative of their own. Political officers in Miami long ignored the plan's emphasis on broadening the Cuban Frente, the coalition of Cuban exile groups the United States intended to recognize as the legitimate government of Cuba in the early days of the invasion. Instead, the field officers deliberately favored right-wing exile leaders and excluded liberal groups. Tad Szulc and Karl



At best then, by consciously allowing Kennedy to ignore central weaknesses of the invasion plan, Dulles and other key intelligence advisers sought to steer past him a project he deeply mistrusted, but that they nonetheless wished to carry out. At worst, these advisers may have hoped to draw the president into a situation where he would be forced to abandon the policy limits he had been so eager to preserve, granting the covert operators instead the latitude to conduct the operation as *they* saw fit, in order to succeed. Whatever the intelligence advisers' exact intentions, it seems clear that they failed to perform their responsibility of giving the president their candid and best advice. Instead, they appear to have assumed the unauthorized role of de facto policymakers, acting as if, in the covert war against Castro and communism, key decisions rested with them rather than with the nation's elected leaders.

Without a doubt, such behavior was wrong. In the context of the early 1960s, however, it was understandable. Throughout the previous decade the agency's clandestine service had grown accustomed to operating with limited outside control. Eisenhower used covert action extensively as an instrument of American foreign policy. Most often, however, he chose to ignore many of the details of such operations so that he could deny more easily any knowledge of the venture if the necessity arose. Nor did the presidential Board of Consultants on Foreign Intelligence Activities or Congress exert any great degree of control.<sup>23</sup> The result, in the words of a 1956 study mandated by the Board of Consultants, was: "the increased mingling in the internal affairs of other nations of bright, highly graded young men who must be doing something all the time to justify their reason for being. . . . Busy, moneyed and privileged, [the CIA] likes its 'king making' responsibility." The report went on to say, with some dismay: "No one, other than those in the CIA immediately concerned with [the] day to day operations [of covert operations] has any detailed knowledge of what is going on."<sup>24</sup>

The clandestine operatives, moreover, had no difficulty justifying to themselves their ventures into quasi-autonomous policymaking. Locked in a constant, secret war against Communist forces, they found it easy to believe that they understood better than any outsider the special requirements of this

E. Meyer, *The Cuban Invasion: The Chronicle of a Disaster* (New York, 1962), pp. 92-106. Later, American trainers of the brigade's air wing flew combat missions over Cuba, in violation of orders. And, unknown to the White House or the agency, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Arleigh A. Burke quietly positioned two battalions of Marines on ships cruising off Cuba, anticipating that U.S. forces might be ordered into Cuba to salvage a botched invasion. Arleigh A. Burke, interview with author, 1 October 1983, Bethesda, Maryland; Cuba files, Reference Section, Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, DC.

<sup>23</sup>Dillon Anderson Oral History, pp. 109-10, Eisenhower Library; L. K. Truscott, memorandum to General Taylor, "Points to Consider in a Review of Paramilitary, Guerrilla and Intelligence Capabilities," 18 May 1961, Walter Bedell Smith Papers, Box 26, Eisenhower Library.

<sup>24</sup>David Bruce and Robert Lovett, "Covert Operations," report to the president's Board of Consultants on Foreign Intelligence Activities, quoted in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (Boston, 1978), pp. 455-56.

war in the shadows. By the start of the 1960s, covert operations had thrown leftist forces off balance on enough occasions—Greece in 1948, the Philippines in 1952–53, Iran in 1953, and Guatemala the following year, to mention only the better-publicized episodes—to give the clandestine service high confidence in its own effectiveness.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, the Cuban situation gave the covert operators cause for concern. The intelligence experts had followed with alarm Castro's efforts to export his revolution throughout the hemisphere. Intelligence officials were convinced that he had directed insurrections against the pro-American regimes of Panama, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti in 1959. And in January 1961 the CIA's Latin American specialists were somberly predicting that "eight countries may go like Castro in the next few months."<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, in the eyes of Dulles and the clandestine operatives, the national interest dictated Castro's removal. Thus they were certainly pleased by the 1960 presidential election, in which the Democratic candidate had bitterly denounced Castro and called for American support of Cuban "freedom fighters"—precisely the policy they were eager to carry out.<sup>27</sup> When Kennedy subsequently proved reluctant to sanction in deed what he had called for in words, the intelligence advisers probably attributed his hesitancy to his youth and inexperience and his intimidation by the difficult decisions required in his new role. Thus they probably felt justified in subtly steering past him the project they believed was necessary, confident that in the end he would realize the wisdom of the policy.

The intelligence advisers also had historical reasons not to feel bound by the careful limitations Kennedy sought to place on their plan, particularly the ban on any combat role for U.S. forces. For eight years they had worked under a president who relied heavily on clandestine operations, seeking to manipulate the internal politics of key foreign countries while avoiding the condemnation that overt meddling inevitably aroused. Eisenhower's priorities were clear, however. If during a covert operation it became necessary to choose between making the American will prevail and preserving the fiction of U.S. noninvolvement, he had few hesitations. As he explained during the

<sup>25</sup>In a private letter to former President Harry S Truman, for instance, Dulles commented: "Over the years since 1948 when this program [of covert operations] was initiated by you there has been a whole series of quiet successes." Dulles to Harry S Truman (undated), H. S. Truman file 1963, Box 117, p. 5, Dulles Papers.

<sup>26</sup>INR/ONE Report, "Facts, Estimates and Projections," Annex 1, 2 May 1961, Box 4, p. 2, Vice-Presidential Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas; diary file, 19 January 1961, Adolf A. Berle Diary, Box 220, Adolf A. Berle Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, New York. Dulles himself had no doubt that Castro was "a tool of the Kremlin." "My Answer to the Bay of Pigs," (outline, Communism and Cuba), Box 244, Dulles Papers.

<sup>27</sup>On Cuba in the 1960 presidential contest, see Kent M. Beck's "Necessary Lies, Hidden Truths: Cuba in the 1960 Campaign," *Diplomatic History* 8 (Winter 1984): 37–59.

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CIA's 1954 intervention in Guatemala: "when you commit the flag, you commit it to win."<sup>28</sup>

Later in this operation, Eisenhower gave ample proof of his determination to succeed. When the CIA originally dispatched an exile force into Guatemala to overthrow the leftist regime of Jacobo Arbenz, careful precautions were taken to conceal American participation. But when the invasion seemed on the verge of collapse, the president cast aside his scruples about revealing U.S. involvement. Overruling the strong objections of advisers who feared this would betray the American role, Eisenhower rushed last minute aircraft reinforcements to the rebels, who, bolstered by this support, ultimately prevailed.<sup>29</sup>

Accustomed for almost a decade to a president who placed such a high value upon success, the intelligence advisers persuaded themselves that any president, when put to the test, would share the same concern. Thus they naturally assumed that once the Cuban invasion began, if faced with the choice of revealing the American hand or allowing the enterprise to fail, Kennedy would agree that "you [have] to pay some price for victory. But [isn't] it better than defeat?"<sup>30</sup>

In conclusion, Dulles's papers provide good reason to believe that in the Bay of Pigs the intelligence advisers fell short of the candor that Kennedy was entitled to expect. Yet, given the context of the period and the manner in which the clandestine service had been allowed to operate for almost a decade, this behavior is not altogether surprising.

<sup>28</sup>"Damn Good and Sure," *Newsweek* 59 (4 March 1963): 19. On Eisenhower and covert operations, see Stephen E. Ambrose with Richard H. Immerman, *Ike's Spies: Eisenhower and the Espionage Establishment* (Garden City, NY, 1981); and Blanche Wiesen Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower: A Divided Legacy* (Garden City, NY, 1981).

<sup>29</sup>Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change 1953-56* (Garden City, NY, 1963), p. 426; Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin, TX, 1982), pp. 167-68; Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Garden City, NY, 1983), pp. 173-78.

<sup>30</sup>Dulles, handwritten notes, Box 244, Dulles Papers. Interestingly, the scenario of the Cuban invasion had first been explored late in the Eisenhower presidency, which passed the concept, along with a CIA-sponsored force of several hundred Cuban exiles training in Guatemala, on to the Kennedy administration in January 1961. As the outgoing administration refined the scenario that became the Bay of Pigs plan, the priorities of the Eisenhower presidency again seem to have been very clear. Having evaluated the plan, the Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the State Department's Bureau for American Republics Affairs concluded that the plan "might not succeed in the objective of overthrowing the Castro regime." They therefore "assumed that final operations under the December 6 plan (i.e., air attack and covert landing, etc.) would not be triggered unless the U.S. government were prepared to do everything else needed overtly or covertly in the light of the existing evaluation in order to guarantee success." Memo, Ambassador Whiting Willauer to Undersecretary Livingston Merchant, "The Suggested Program for Cuba Contained in the Memorandum to You Dated December 6, 1960," 18 January 1961, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Special Assistant Series, Presidential Subseries, 1960 meetings with the president, Volume 2 (2), Box 5, Eisenhower Library (emphasis in original).

At least as significant, however, is another conclusion that can be drawn from the Dulles material. Throughout the last twenty years, our knowledge of the Bay of Pigs has steadily increased. A series of memoirs by participants and several after-the-event investigations by journalists provided valuable early insights into the Cuban affair.<sup>31</sup> More recently, the declassification of certain relevant government documents, particularly key portions of the Kennedy administration's postmortem on the fiasco, the Taylor Report, and the publication of Peter Wyden's *Bay of Pigs* have shed much new light on the episode.<sup>32</sup> Despite the importance of the Bay of Pigs for contemporary American foreign relations, in which clandestine operations have played an increasingly significant role, our knowledge of the event remains incomplete. Nowhere, for instance, does the Taylor Report mention the clandestine operatives' innermost thoughts and hidden agenda.

In addition, there remain important unresolved questions. These include, for example, whether at the time of the 1960 campaign, in which Cuba became a significant issue, presidential candidate John F. Kennedy had any knowledge of the CIA's invasion plans. Equally unclear is why at the last minute the White House called off the air strikes the exiles planned to conduct against Castro's airfields on the morning of the landing, and thereby prevented the invaders from gaining the control of the Cuban sky that they had expected to achieve. Similarly, it remains unknown whether key White House decision-makers were aware that the assassination of Castro was an integral part of the invasion plan.<sup>33</sup> The major part of the government documents relating to

<sup>31</sup>The memoirs of Schlesinger and Sorensen offer the most detailed accounts of the Bay of Pigs by members of the Kennedy administration. See Schlesinger, *Thousand Days*, pp. 226-97; and Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York, 1965), pp. 291-309. Some of the better early journalistic writing on the Bay of Pigs, often based on carefully managed leaks by participants in the Cuban affair, include Hanson Baldwin, "The Cuban Invasion," *The New York Times*, 31 July and 1 August 1961; Charles V. J. Murphy, "Cuba: The Record Set Straight," *Fortune Magazine* 64 (September 1961): 92-97+; Haynes Johnson, *The Bay of Pigs: The Leaders' Story of Brigade 2506* (New York, 1964); and Meyer and Szulc, *The Chronicle of a Disaster*.

<sup>32</sup>The declassified portions of the Taylor Report have been published in Kesaris, *Operation Zapata*. While less detailed, the minutes of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's executive sessions on the Bay of Pigs, declassified in the spring of 1984, also contain interesting information. U.S., Congress, Senate, Foreign Relations Committee, *Executive Sessions of the Foreign Relations Committee*, Historical Series, vol. 13, pt. 1, 87th Cong., 1st sess., 1961. Peter Wyden's *Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story* (New York, 1979), based on the Taylor Report, oral histories, and extensive interviewing, also provides much new information. Wyden, however, made limited use of available archival material other than the Taylor Report. In addition, it is often impossible to determine the precise sources for much of the new information that he provides.

<sup>33</sup>In late 1960 and early 1961, the CIA was actively involved in plots against the lives of Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba and Cuba's Castro. See for example Madeleine G. Kalb, *The Congo Cables: The Cold War in Africa—From Eisenhower to Kennedy* (New York, 1982); and Warren Hinckle and William Turner, *The Fish is Red: The Story of the Secret War Against Castro* (New York, 1981), pp. 26-95. Richard M. Bissell, who at the time of the Bay of Pigs was the CIA's deputy director for plans (covert operations), recently confirmed that the plotting against Castro's life was "intended to parallel" the Cuban invasion project. According to Bissell, "assassination was intended to reinforce the plan. There was the thought that Castro would be dead before the landing. Very few, however, knew of this aspect of the plan." Richard M. Bissell, interview with author, Farmington, CT, 18 May 1984.

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the invasion remains either classified or buried in private collections, and scholars and policymakers alike must continue to wait before additional details of the Cuban episode come to light.

**Response to Lucien S. Vandembroucke,  
"The 'Confessions' of Allen Dulles:  
New Evidence on the Bay of Pigs"**

RICHARD M. BISSELL, JR.

In "The 'Confessions' of Allen Dulles: New Evidence on the Bay of Pigs," Lucien Vandembroucke has performed a scholarly service. He describes and analyzes successive drafts, which he unearthed from the former CIA director's papers in Princeton, of what was to be a magazine article defending the agency's conduct of that operation. Vandembroucke's analysis of this fascinating material is focused on the question of what President Kennedy was led to understand during his first three months in office by his intelligence and military advisers about the nature of and the prospects for the impending operation and whether he was misled by them, deliberately or not, in an effort on their part "to steer past" him a project he deeply mistrusted. Essentially, the writer concludes that he was. The thesis is that the promoters of the operation deliberately allowed Kennedy and his senior political advisers to ignore major weaknesses in the invasion plan by making no effort to dispel serious misconceptions about it which became current in the White House and contributed to wrong decisions about whether to proceed and how the operation was to be conducted. At least four major misconceptions held in varying degrees and at different times by the president and some, or all, of his advisers are identified.

The first, most pervasive, and, I would argue, most damaging was that the covert character of the operation could be maintained; in other words, that it could be planned and conducted in such a way as to involve no observable action or event for which the U.S. government could not plausibly deny responsibility. It was this misconception that gave rise to a whole sequence of requirements and limitations on operational flexibility in the interest of preserving the impression of the operation as a strictly Cuban affair. Thus, there was to be no use made of facilities, personnel, or up-to-date equipment which could have been made available only by the U.S. government and would, if revealed or captured, constitute proof of official U.S. sponsorship. The second misconception was a failure, in some degree at least, on the part of the president and some of his cabinet-level advisers to understand the

absolute essentiality of air command and of effective air cover for the success of an amphibious operation. The third failure was the belief that, if the brigade encountered heavier conventional military opposition than it could handle after a landing, it had the option of retreating to the Escambray mountains, or other suitable terrain, and undertaking guerrilla operations. The fourth and most discussed alleged misconception was the expectation that a successful landing would promptly detonate internal revolts within Cuba on a useful scale, and that these would facilitate consolidation of the beachhead and ultimate overthrow of the regime.

To what extent were these beliefs, all mistaken as the event proved and as could have been foreseen at the time, a result of presentations and representations by those in charge of the operation which at least passively misled the president and other senior policymakers by "deliberately allowing them to ignore major weaknesses in the invasion plan," as charged by Vandembroucke?

With respect to disclaimability, it is amazing in hindsight that none of those concerned with planning and decision making ever said "the king has no clothes on" or ever recognized as purely wishful thinking the assumption that official denials of responsibility by Washington would be plausible to anyone, least of all the U.S. press, given the character and scale of the invasion. The hope persisted despite the growing volume of both news and rumor in the press and the conviction in both Miami and Havana that something big was going to happen soon. Disclaimability, in a technical sense meaning the suppression of hard evidence of U.S. government sponsorship, was taken seriously by all concerned and insisted upon as a policy at a significant cost in operational effectiveness. It was not appreciated that the operation was bound to be universally attributed to the U.S. government, regardless of hard evidence, and that all efforts to maintain technical disclaimability would buy little or nothing in the form of political advantage or more favorable world opinion. That this was a major mistake is evident, but it was not a mistake put over on policymakers by operators. Anyone reading the *New York Times* should have known better.

That powerful and effective air cover was an absolute prerequisite for success was clearly understood by the project staff in the CIA, by the three JCS representatives who worked closely with the project organization, and most keenly of all by the marine colonel who was the senior military commander. Moreover, this position was repeatedly presented to the president and the senior policymakers involved at the successive White House review meetings. It obviously did not carry complete conviction, a failure for which there were several explanations. At least one cabinet member, drawing on his World War II experience, believed that even a major infiltration might be feasible without air cover. There was on the part of the president himself and his political advisers a strong desire not to have the landing look like a miniature World War II action but to appear instead as a more unobtrusive guerrillalike undertaking. As the process of whittling away the authorization for strategic air attacks continued during the planning phase, it was difficult

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for the operators to specify the exact minimum level of activity that would be adequate but below which cancellation of the project should be recommended. The inherent margin of error and uncertainty is much too large to permit such a black or white operational judgment. In the event, the project's military commander believed after the D-2 strike that the attempt was worth making, with the one additional full-strength strike planned and authorized until late on D-1 for D-day. By the time it was canceled, the brigade was already entering the Bay of Pigs. The Taylor Committee report was probably correct in concluding that Cabell and Bissell were negligent in failing to make a last attempt to persuade the president by telephone to reverse his decision. Be that as it may, it can hardly be claimed that those in charge of the operation either suffered from this particular misconception or tolerated it in policy discussions. They thought themselves overruled on the basis of political considerations.

The CIA, and more specifically those in charge of the operation, has more responsibility for the undoubted misunderstanding about the guerrilla option. So long as a landing was contemplated near Trinidad on the south coast, it was realistic to plan for a retreat into the neighboring Escambray mountains in the event of an impending or actual defeat by Castro's regular forces. With the change of locale to the Bay of Pigs, this became completely unrealistic; in any scenario in which the brigade could not hold that beachhead, there was no possibility that it could reach the Escambray area. It was rather lightheartedly assumed by the CIA that the swampy regions around the Bay of Pigs, while utterly different geographically from the mountains near Trinidad, could support guerrilla operations. (There was even some historical evidence from Spanish days to support this view.) The unsatisfactory handling of this problem reflected a basic deficiency in the operational planning: the absence of a fallback plan for the contingency of an inability to stabilize the beachhead. Neither the guerrilla option in the swamps nor possibilities of exfiltration were carefully explored. The president was thus left with an impression that a less than disastrous option would be available in the event of an initial lack of success.

As to the fourth misconception about the prospects for, and probable timing of, widespread internal rebellion, the evidence is clear. As Allen Dulles has stated more than once, in other places as well as in his draft of a magazine article, it was neither his expectation nor that of those in charge of the operation that extensive internal resistance or uprising was to be expected until a beachhead had been seized, consolidated, held against attack by conventional forces, and endured whatever siege Castro could mount for at least some days. What was contemplated was a period in which the brigade's aircraft would totally dominate Cuban airspace, operating out of the strip on the beachhead, and would be used against strategic military targets (any remaining aircraft and armor), telecommunications (the telephone system relied heavily on microwave towers), and transportation. Radio transmissions from the beachhead would be used both to create confusion and to advertise Castro's inability to recapture it. Small diversionary landings would be made at remote locations



on the island. Only after a week or more of this treatment was it anticipated that internal resistance might begin to materialize, probably more in the form of guerrilla action than of an uprising. The president, or other policymakers, may have formed an exaggerated impression of the contribution to be expected from spontaneous rebellion on the island, but there is no support in the record for the view that the CIA indulged in or promulgated such unrealistic optimism.

The thrust of these comments up to this point has been that there was no negligent failure by the intelligence and military advisers to inform President Kennedy and other senior policymakers about weaknesses in the invasion plan, with the exception of the absence of a contingency plan for an initial defeat. There were, to be sure, assumptions which turned out to be inaccurate but nevertheless represented the best honest judgment of those in charge of the operation. For instance, the president was never told that the brigade's air arm was potentially inadequate for its task, but this was because the project planners' analysis was defective, to their ruin, and not because either facts or judgments were being concealed. The overriding example was the failure of the agency to call attention to the absurdity of attempting to maintain plausible disclaimability, which the policymakers should have been able to judge for themselves, or the costs in terms of operational effectiveness that this policy imposed. In short, it has been argued here that the only clear case of misleading by negligence concerned the guerrilla option.

Vandenbroucke suggests, however, that a much more serious charge than negligence should perhaps be leveled at the "intelligence advisers" to the effect that they lobbied for the invasion in the expectation that after it was launched, operational restrictions laid down by the president would in the stress of threatened failure be relaxed, and that they did so with the deliberate intent of drawing the president into a situation where he would be forced to abandon the policy limits he had been so eager to preserve.

This is an allegation about motives. As such, it can be neither proved nor disproved, especially since most of the people involved have left the scene, but one remark will be ventured here by way of commentary. Many of us, like Dulles himself, believed there was a possibility that, in the event of trouble, restrictions would be relaxed, possibly even on the use of U.S. aircraft. The profound hope and the expectation in the CIA was that there would not be a crisis which would call for such a drastic policy change. There was never any trace of a conspiratorial alternative operational plan based on the assumption that the president's hand would be forced.

Vandenbroucke is entirely correct, however, in pointing out that an eager operational group, presenting a plan of action, can and must be expected to put on its best face. If there are to be operational plans in government, or elsewhere, there have to be enthusiastic people to conceive them, develop them, submit them for approval, and become advocates in the process. For these people to put their best foot forward in policy discussion, so long as the facts and the assumptions on which projections rest are honestly and accurately presented, does not constitute the willful misleading of the policymakers who must finally decide whether the plans are to be carried out.