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Ships in the Night: The CIA, the White House and the Bay of Pigs*

PIERO GLEIJESES

Abstract A comprehensive study of the available documents about the Bay of Pigs, including many that have been declassified within the last eighteen months, and extensive interviews with the protagonists in the CIA, the White House and the State Department lead me to conclude that the disastrous operation was launched not simply because Kennedy was poorly served by his young staff and was the captive of his campaign rhetoric, nor simply because of the hubris of the CIA. Rather, the Bay of Pigs was approved because the CIA and the White House assumed they were speaking the same language when, in fact, they were speaking in utterly different tongues.

As I interviewed Richard Bissell about PBSUCCESS – the CIA-sponsored overthrow of President Arbenz of Guatemala in 1954 – I kept wondering how this highly intelligent, professional and even sensitive man could have been responsible for the wild idea of overthrowing Castro with 1,400 exiles.¹ It was this fiasco, the Bay of Pigs, that destroyed his career, for he had been President John Kennedy's likely choice to replace Allen Dulles as Director of Central Intelligence.² I also wondered how the Kennedy administration could have agreed to the bizarre plan. The more I learned, the more sceptical I became of the explanations of the Bay of Pigs that stress the hubris of CIA officials or their gross lack of information about reality in Cuba. Certainly hubris was not lacking, but neither was realism, and the CIA's understanding of the situation in Cuba was not as faulty as has been assumed.³

* I owe particular thanks to the following individuals who read an earlier draft of this essay and gave me the benefit of their comments: Richard Bissell, Richard Helms, Jack Esterline, Stanley Beerli, Andrew Goodpaster, and McGeorge Bundy.

I would also like to thank the John F. Kennedy Library and the Social Science Research Council for helping to support this research.

¹ I interviewed Bissell about PBSUCCESS on 10 Nov. 1983 and 24 May 1989 in Farmington, CT.

² On Kennedy and Bissell before the fiasco, see Bundy, Memorandum for the President, 25 Feb. 1961, President's Office Files (hereafter POF), box 62, John F. Kennedy Library (hereafter JFKL); Walt Rostow, *Oral History* (hereafter OH) (JFKL, 1964), p. 39; Chester Bowles, OH (JFKL, 1965), pp. 62–3.

³ The best studies of the Bay of Pigs are Lucien Vandenbroucke, *Perilous Options: Special Operations As An Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, 1993), pp. 9–50, 184–96;

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My questions led me to ferret through the documents in the Kennedy Library in Boston and the Eisenhower Library in Abilene.⁴ But the documents cannot tell the whole story, not only because much remains to be declassified, but also because there is much that was never consigned to paper.⁵ Therefore, I went to the protagonists – to former officials in the CIA, the White House and the State Department.

This research led me to focus on the inner workings of the CIA, particularly the task force that ran the operation. It led me to understand the crucial importance of the miscommunication between the CIA and the White House, and it also led me to a fuller appreciation of the many real choices Kennedy faced in the months before the plan was implemented. Given his campaign rhetoric, it would have been politically costly for Kennedy to have aborted the operation. But this can be overstated: when Kennedy was first briefed, planning was rudimentary and fluid; it was under his watch that decisive choices were made. My research has led me to conclude that the Bay of Pigs was launched not simply because Kennedy was poorly served by his young staff and was the captive of his campaign rhetoric, nor simply because of the hubris of the CIA. Rather, the Bay of Pigs was approved because the CIA and the White House assumed they were speaking the same language when, in fact, they were speaking in utterly different tongues.

Peter Wyden, *Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story* (New York, 1979); Trumbull Higgins, *The Perfect Failure: Kennedy, Eisenhower, and the CIA at the Bay of Pigs* (New York, 1987); Jacques-François Bonaldi, *L'Empire U.S. contre Cuba* (Paris, 1989), vol. 2. The most comprehensive account by a US participant is Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston, 1965), esp. pp. 233–97. For the exiles' testimony, see Haynes Johnson et al., *The Bay of Pigs: The Leaders' Story of Brigade 2506* (New York, 1964) and Edward Ferrer, *Operation Puma: The Air Battle of the Bay of Pigs* (Miami, 1982). The best journalistic work remains Karl E. Meyer and Tad Szulc, *The Cuban Invasion: The Chronicle of a Disaster* (New York, 1962).

⁴ The Kennedy Library includes the minutes of the Taylor Committee, the board of inquiry presided over by General Maxwell Taylor that was appointed by President Kennedy to conduct a postmortem of the operation. A second postmortem, also on the president's orders, was conducted by Lyman Kirkpatrick, the Inspector General of CIA. Kirkpatrick's report remains classified. In addition to the Eisenhower and the Kennedy Libraries, some useful material is located in the Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University (hereafter Mudd Library).

⁵ As Dean Rusk has noted, the intense secrecy that surrounded the operation 'has also made it difficult for historians to reconstruct [it]...because very little was put on paper.' (Rusk, *As I Saw It* [New York, 1991], p. 214). Several participants made this same point: interviews with Richard Bissell (Farmington, CT, 8 Nov. 1991), Jack Esterline (Hendersonville, NC, 18–19 Nov. 1992), McGeorge Bundy (New York, 29 Oct. 1992), and Stanley Beerli (telephone interview, 27 May 1994). See also 'Narrative of the Anti-Castro Cuban Operation Zapata', memorandum no. 1, 13 June 1961, p. 13, enclosed in Taylor to President, 13 June 1961, National Security Files [hereafter NSF], box 61A, JFKL [hereafter 'Narrative'].)

The genesis of the Bay of Pigs was in late 1959. At a National Security Council Meeting on 14 January 1960, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Livingston Merchant noted that the State Department 'had been working with CIA on Cuban problems', and went on to say that 'our present objective was to adjust all our actions in such a way as to accelerate the development of an opposition in Cuba which would bring about... a new government favorable to U.S. interests'. Then, at Merchant's request, the Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, Roy Rubottom, summarised the evolution of US-Cuban relations since January 1959:

He said the period from January to March might be characterized as the honeymoon period of the Castro government. In April a downward trend in U.S.-Cuban relations had been evident... In June we had reached the decision that it was not possible to achieve our objectives with Castro in power and had agreed to undertake the program referred to by Mr. Merchant. In July and August we had been busy drawing up a program to replace Castro. However some U.S. companies reported to us during this time that they were making some progress in negotiations, a factor that caused us to slow the implementation of our program. The hope expressed by these companies did not materialize. October was a period of clarification... On October 31, in agreement with CIA, the Department had recommended to the President approval of a program along the lines referred to by Mr. Merchant. The approved program authorized us to support elements in Cuba opposed to the Castro government while making Castro's downfall seem to be the result of his own mistakes.⁶

It was probably as part of this program that Cuban exiles mounted seaborne raids against Cuba from US territory, and that unidentified planes attacked economic targets in Cuba, provoking the US Embassy to warn that the population was 'becoming aroused' against the United States ('particularly [by] those raids in which incendiaries have been dropped resulting in burning of sizeable quantities of sugar cane').⁷ And it was as part of this programme that Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles 'asked for a meeting with the President' in early January 1960. 'In this meeting Mr Dulles presented an Agency proposal for sabotage of

⁶ 'Discussion at the 432nd Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, January 14, 1960', 31 March 1960, pp. 8-9, Whitman File (hereafter WF), National Security Council (hereafter NSC) Ser., box 12, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (hereafter DDEL).

⁷ Braddock (Havana) to Secretary of State, no. 1844, 1 Feb. 1960, White House Office (hereafter WHO), Office of the Staff Secretary, International Ser., box 4, DDEL. The following exchange is instructive: 'Mr. Gray said the Attorney General had frequently wondered what our policy was with respect to stopping anti-Castro elements preparing some action against Cuba from American territory. The President said it was perhaps better not to discuss this subject. The anti-Castro agents who should be left alone were being indicated.' ('Discussion at the 432nd Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, January 14, 1960', 31 March 1960, p. 12, WF, NSC Ser., box 12, DDEL)

sugar refineries of Cuba', writes Gordon Gray, Eisenhower's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, who was present.

I remember the schematic drawings which he brought to the meeting and which he used to show how the activity was to be carried out. At the conclusion of the presentation, the President said that he didn't object to such an undertaking and, indeed, thought something like this was timely. However, he felt that any program should be much more ambitious, and it was probably now the time to move against Castro in a positive and aggressive way which went beyond pure harassment. He asked Mr. Dulles to come back with an enlarged program.⁸

As a result, a task force, WH/4 (Branch 4 of the Western Hemisphere Division), was established within the CIA,⁹ and Jack Esterline, the CIA station chief in Caracas, was summoned back to Washington. 'We have an interesting assignment for you', J. C. King, head of CIA's Western Hemisphere Division, told Esterline: he would head WH/4.¹⁰

In the following weeks 'A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime' was prepared by WH/4. It was approved by Eisenhower on 17 March 1960 at a meeting attended by Vice-President Richard Nixon and a select group from the State Department (Secretary Christian Herter, Merchant and Rubottom), the Treasury Department (Secretary Robert Anderson), the Pentagon (Assistant Secretary John Irwin and Admiral Arleigh Burke from the JCS), the CIA (Dulles, Bissell and King), and the White House staff (Gray, Eisenhower's Staff Secretary General Andrew Goodpaster, and Assistant Staff Secretary John Eisenhower).¹¹ This programme 'contemplates four major courses of action', the CIA documented stated:

a. The first requirement is the creation of a responsible, appealing and unified Cuban opposition...outside of Cuba...[to] serve as a magnet for the loyalties of the Cubans....

b. So that the opposition may be heard and Castro's basis of popular support undermined, it is necessary to develop...a long and short wave gray broadcasting facility....

⁸ Gray to Don Wilson (Assistant Director, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library), 3 Dec. 1974, p. 1, Gray Papers, box 2, DDEL.

⁹ See 'Chief of the WH/4 Branch in CIA', nd, p. 1, NSF, box 61A, JFKL (hereafter 'Chief WH/4').

¹⁰ Interview with Esterline. Born in 1920, Esterline had joined the Office of Strategic Services in World War II, and had been parachuted into Burma behind enemy lines in 1944. He joined the CIA in 1950. He had participated in PBSUCCESS and became Chief of Station in Guatemala after the fall of Arbenz. His next assignment was as Chief of Station in Caracas, where he arrived in January 1958. (Interview with Esterline)

I owe special thanks to Janet Weiniger, the daughter of Thomas Willard Ray, one of the four American pilots killed during the Bay of Pigs, who helped me track down the elusive Esterline.

¹¹ 'Memorandum of Conference with the President 2:30 PM, March 17, 1960', 18 March 1960, WHO, Office of the Staff Secretary, Subject Ser., Alphabetical Subser., box 15, DDEL.

c. Work is already in progress in the creation of a covert intelligence and action organization within Cuba...

d. Preparations have already been made for the development of an adequate paramilitary force outside of Cuba.¹²

The essence of this plan, therefore, was a combination of guerrilla infiltration and psychological warfare. It would be complemented both by 'a program for economic pressures against Castro' and by an effort to make the Organisation of American States (OAS) impose sanctions on Cuba. 'I would like to inform you', Secretary Herter had written that same day to the president, 'that the [State] Department, CIA and USIA [United States Information Agency] are engaged in an accelerated program to prepare Latin American public and governmental opinion to support the United States in possible OAS action under the Caracas anti-Communist Resolution and/or a number of other avenues open to us through the OAS.'¹³

Eisenhower was pleased. 'The President said that he knows of no better plan for dealing with this situation', the minutes of the 17 March meeting record. 'The great problem is leakage and breach of security. Everyone must be prepared to swear that he has not heard of it.' After months of groping, Eisenhower finally had a plan. 'The president said that at the next meeting he would want to know what is the sequence of events by which we see the situation developing – specifically what actions are we to take. He said our hand should not show in anything that is done. In the meantime, State should be working on what we can do in and out of the OAS.'¹⁴

The CIA set to work to train 300 guerrillas. Initially based in the United States and the Canal Zone, the training shifted to Guatemala after an accord had been reached with President Miguel Ydígoras in June.¹⁵

¹² 'A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime', 16 March 1960, WHO, Office of the Staff Secretary, International Ser., box 4, DDEL. (Another copy is in NSF, box 61A, JFKL, but is more heavily sanitised.)

¹³ Herter, Memorandum for the President, 17 March 1960, WHO, Office of the Staff Secretary, International Ser., box 4, DDEL. (Another copy, in WF, Dulles/Herter Ser., box 12, DDEL, is sanitised.) The programme of economic pressures had been approved by Eisenhower on 14 March. (See 'Questions Concerning the Program of Economic Pressures Against Castro', 27 June 1960, WHO, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, NSC Ser., Briefing Notes Subser., box 6, DDEL.)

¹⁴ 'Memorandum of Conference with the President 2:30 PM, March 17, 1960', 18 March 1960, quotations pp. 1, 3, WHO, Office of the Staff Secretary, Subject Ser., Alphabetical Subser., box 15, DDEL.

¹⁵ See Memorandum for the Record, 'First Meeting of General Maxwell Taylor's Board of Inquiry on Cuban Operations Conducted by CIA', 23 April 1961, NSF, box 61A, JFKL (hereafter 'First Meeting'), pp. 5–6 and 'Chief WH/4', pp. 4–5. 'There was', notes Bissell, 'a grave political objection by the State Department to doing any of the training or any significant amount of it on U.S. territory.' (Bissell, *OH* [JFKL, 1967],

Meanwhile, a powerful radio station was installed by the CIA on Greater Swan Island, ninety-seven miles off the coast of Honduras. Tiny and practically uninhabited, the island had served the CIA well in 1954, when Radio Swan had been installed to broadcast against Arbenz as part of PBSUCCESS. It had ceased operating after the fall of Arbenz, but some equipment had been left behind.¹⁶ In March 1960, the CIA sprang into action: 'within sixty days, equipment had been brought in... a landing strip was cleared on the island, and the station was able to go on the air on 17 May, precisely on schedule'.¹⁷ ('We received tremendous support from the Navy', observed Esterline.)¹⁸ Transmitting to 'the whole Caribbean area at night and nearby areas in the daytime',¹⁹ Radio Swan became 'the symbol of the anti-Castro effort'. There were, however, problems: its broadcasts, the CIA later complained, reflected 'the selfish interests of the Cuban groups producing the various programs' and included blatant lies. (For example, 'one of the announcers stated that there were 3,000 Russians in a park in Santiago de Cuba – the residents had only to walk to the park to see that this was untrue'.)²⁰

Finally, in June, 'We formed', recalled a CIA official, 'the *Frente Revolucionario Democrático*', the Cuban junta that was supposed to serve as a magnet for the Cuban people. As had been the case for PBSUCCESS, here too the native leadership was selected by the CIA. And, as in the case of PBSUCCESS, it had been no easy task; as Dulles told Eisenhower, 'there had been at one time or another 184 different groups'.²¹ In Bissell's

p. 25) Some training continued, however, on US soil, despite the objections of the State Department. Finally, on 12 April 1961, Kennedy 'stressed the necessity for non-association with the US and directed that all training activities being conducted within the US should stop'. ('Summary of White House Meetings', 9 May 1961, p. 4, Annex 16, NSF, box 61A, JFKL. See also 'Memorandum of Meeting with the President (Tuesday, November 29, 1960 at 11:00 a.m.)', 5 Dec. 1960, WHO, Special Assistant Ser., Presidential Subser., box 5, DDEL; 'Memorandum of Meeting with the President (Tuesday, January 3 at 9:30 a.m.)', 9 Jan. 1961, p. 5, *ibid.*; Memorandum for the Record, 'Second Meeting of the Green Study Group', 24 April 1961, NSF, box 61A, JFKL [hereafter 'Second Meeting'], p. 11; Memorandum for Record, Paramilitary Study Group Meeting [hereafter PMSGM], 2 May 1961, p. 12, *ibid.*; 'Chart of Command Organization for Plans and Training', Annex 5, *ibid.*).

¹⁶ Telephone interview with Bissell, 17 June 1992.

¹⁷ 'Brief History of Radio Swan', p. 1, Annex 2, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.

¹⁸ XXX [Esterline] in 'Chief WH/4', p. 4.

¹⁹ Dulles, in 'Discussion at the 445th Meeting of the National Security Council, Tuesday, May 24, 1960', 25 May 1960, p. 22, WF, NSC Ser., box 12, DDEL. See also *New York Times*, 9 Sept. 1960, p. 1.

²⁰ 'Brief History of Radio Swan', pp. 2–3, Annex 2, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.

²¹ Quotations from XXX [Esterline], in 'Chief WH/4', p. 2 and 'Memorandum of Meeting with the President (Tuesday, November 29, 1960 at 11:00 a.m.)', 5 Dec. 1960, p. 2, WHO, Special Assistant Ser., Presidential Subser., box 5, DDEL.

words, 'during that period it was found less and less possible to rely on the Cuban politicians'.²² This was a problem that would continue to bedevil the operation.

The similarities between the Guatemalan and the Cuban operations went beyond the selection of the native leadership. From an institutional point of view as well, the parallels are striking. In both cases, the Directorate of Intelligence was totally excluded.²³ In both cases, a task force was created within the Directorate of Plans. In both cases the Deputy Director for Plans closely oversaw the operation and was consumed by it. Thus throughout the life of PBSUCCESS, approximately ten months, the Deputy Director for Plans, Frank Wisner, had focused on it with such intensity that he left his deputy, Richard Helms, 'more or less in charge of all other things. PBSUCCESS became Wisner's project'. Bissell's role in the Cuban operation was like Wisner's had been in PBSUCCESS ('a fairly precise counterpart').²⁴

Thus Bissell was the head of the operation and reported to Allen Dulles, but the briefings were not intensive or detailed.²⁵ (Dulles, 'while accepting full responsibility for the operation, generally did not inject himself into military operational matters'.²⁶) The involvement of the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, General Charles Cabell, was marginal, except in 'the air side of the operation'.²⁷ Sandwiched between the head of WH/4 and the over-eager Deputy Director for Plans, the head of the Western Hemisphere Division of CIA, J. C. King, 'ceased to be in the chain of command', just as in PBSUCCESS.²⁸ (His main role would

²² Bissell, in 'First Meeting', p. 4.

²³ 'If I had been captured by Arbenz and tortured to death, I would not have been able to tell them anything that could have done me any good', Robert Amory, the Deputy Director for Intelligence has observed to underline his ignorance of PBSUCCESS. (Interview with Amory, Washington DC, 17 Oct. 1983 His comments on the Bay of Pigs are similar (see Amory, *OH*, [JFKL, 1966], pp. 23-8).

²⁴ Interviews with Bissell (quoted) and Richard Helms (Washington DC, 6 April 1993). On PBSUCCESS, see also Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton, 1991); Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin, 1982); Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Garden City, N.Y., 1982).

²⁵ Unless otherwise stated, this paragraph is based on interviews with Bissell, Esterline, and Beerli. See also 'Chart of Command Organization for Plans and Training', Annex 5, NSF, box 61A, JFKL and 'Chart of Command Organization for Operations', Annex 6, *ibid*.

²⁶ 'Narrative', p. 4. 'Maybe I delegated too much in this particular operation.' (Dulles in PMSGM, 30 May 1961, p. 11, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.)

²⁷ 'I had asked General Cabell as a high Air Force officer... to follow closely the air side of the operation.' (Dulles in PMSGM, 30 May 1961, p. 5, NSF, box 61A, JFKL)

²⁸ Interview with Bissell.

be liaison with the State Department.) The person immediately responsible for the development of the plan was the Chief of the WH/4 Branch, Jack Esterline. He was one of Bissell's three key subordinates. The other two were Bissell's military aide, Col. Jack Hawkins ('Bissell's military brain'²⁹) and Col. Stanley Beerli, who was in charge of air operations.³⁰ Esterline, Hawkins and Beerli were the three officers who reported directly to Bissell, although King was present in a consultative role during most of the discussions.³¹

According to the official story of the operation, during the early months of the development of the plan the DCI looked to the Special Group for guidance and approval.³² (The Special Group consisted of the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the DCI, and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs. It met weekly under the authority of NSC 5412/2 to consider CIA covert operations, and was frequently referred to as the 5412 Committee.)³³ In addition, King stressed, he himself kept in close touch with the State Department: 'Each week on the political action side I met with Assistant

²⁹ Bundy, Memorandum for the President, 15 March 1961, p. 1, NSF, box 35, JFKL.

³⁰ Both Hawkins and Beerli were military officers on assignment to the CIA. But whereas Hawkins had been loaned to the agency specifically for the Bay of Pigs, Beerli 'had not been brought into it for that purpose, but really had been in charge of the U-2 operation and of the Agency's air operations generally'. (Bissell, *OH* [JFKL, 1967], p. 17)

³¹ According to Esterline, Hawkins headed a group of eight senior staff people who worked directly under him. (This group included the notorious Howard Hunt and Jerry Droller.) In the organisational chart of the operation, however, Beerli, Esterline and Hawkins are placed at the same level (see 'Chart of Command Organization for Plans and Training', Annex 5, NSF, box 61A, JFKL and 'Chart of Command Organization for Operations', Annex 6, *ibid.*) Whether Hawkins was indeed Esterline's deputy or his equal, they seem to have worked together closely and well.

A name that recurs often in documents dealing with the operation is that of Tracy Barnes, the Assistant Deputy for Plans. Barnes was brought into the Cuban operation at Dulles's suggestion, and he was given the same role that he had had in PBSUCCESS, that is, second in command. But he had been assigned to the operation late; Esterline, Hawkins and Beerli already reported to Bissell. Barnes therefore became an adviser rather than second in command, and represented the CIA in meetings with other agencies and at the White House. 'Allen Dulles was always putting Tracy Barnes in', remarked Helms. 'Sadly, Barnes didn't contribute anything. But Allen was fond of him and was always pushing him on someone. Barnes was not a fellow who carried much weight. He was very debonnaire.' (Interview with Helms)

³² 'Narrative', p. 2.

³³ On the Special Group see Gray, 'Memorandum of Meeting With the President', 27 Jan. 1960, WHO, Special Assistant Ser., Presidential Subser., box 4, DDEL; Gray, 'Memorandum of Meeting With the President', 17 May 1960, *ibid.*; PMSGM, 8 May 1961, pp. 1-2, NSF, box 61A, JFKL; US Senate, Select Committee To Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders* (Washington DC, 1975), p. 10.

Secretary Rubottom and later on with [his successor] Tom Mann, so State knew every move that was made.³⁴

Bissell, Rubottom and Mann tell a different story. 'The CIA kept me informed in a very general way', observed Rubottom. 'I met weekly with King. I was generally aware of the plan; but I wasn't involved in any of the details and I didn't know how they intended to proceed. A lot of my discussions with King had to do with the creation of a junta of anti-Communist Cubans. My knowledge and my participation were fragmentary, compartmentalized.'³⁵

Mann agreed: 'I do recall that [upon replacing Rubottom] I was informed (principally by King) of what came to be called the Bay of Pigs, though in very general terms.' The CIA, he added, played its cards close to its chest, and he himself did not want to know.³⁶

'The Special Group', Bissell noted, 'always had an advisory role. After October 1960, its members were very much aware of their lame duck status, and so their role faded a lot.'³⁷ In fact, it had been quite minor throughout, and not only in the case of the Cuban operation. In Goodpaster's words,

The CIA people were always very resistant to this 5412 review process, trying to keep the discussion very general and to see that 5412 did not have a fully authoritative grasp of these covert operations. There was always tension between the 5412 people and the CIA. I recall Bob Cutler, [Dillon] Anderson and Gordon Gray [who were involved, sequentially, with 5412 in the Eisenhower years] saying 'it's very difficult to get hold of these things.'³⁸

On 18 August, a small group gathered in Eisenhower's office to listen to the CIA progress report on 'the implementation of planning he [Eisenhower] had approved in March'. Those present included Nixon, Acting Secretary of State Douglas Dillon, the secretaries of Treasury and Defense, Acting Chairman of the JCS General Lyman Lemnitzer, and, for the CIA, Dulles and Bissell. It was at this meeting that Eisenhower approved a budget of some \$13 million for the operation, 'as well as the use of the Department of Defense personnel and equipment. However, it

³⁴ King in 'Chief WH/4,' p. 2.

³⁵ Telephone interview with Rubottom, 29 July 1992.

³⁶ Mann, letter to the author, 13 May 1992 (quoted), and interview with Mann, Austin, TX, 21 April 1992.

³⁷ Interview with Bissell.

³⁸ Interview with Goodpaster, Washington DC, 7 April 1993. Goodpaster is well qualified to address these matters. His responsibilities at the White House included 'handling with the President "all matters of day to day operations" in the foreign affairs and national security field, including the activities of the CIA'. Gray and Goodpaster served as the channels between the CIA and President. (US Senate, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, p. 112)

was specified at this time that no United States military personnel were to be used in a combat status.³⁹

In the late summer, Bissell later noted, the concept began to change from 'a 300-man force broken up into small teams for infiltration'⁴⁰ to an amphibious attack. 'When we moved from guerrilla to amphibious operation', recalled Esterline, 'I told Bissell this is not my kind of capability. That's why Hawkins came in.' Colonel Hawkins joined WH/4 in September 1960 and took the lead in the military planning.⁴¹

On 31 October, CIA Headquarters sent a cable to the senior agency officer in Guatemala. Drafted by either Hawkins or Esterline (with Bissell's approval), it stated:

1. Plan employ not over 60 men for inf[iltration] teams....
2. Assault force will consist one or more infantry battalions each having about 600 men....
3. Mission of assault force: to seize and defend lodgement in target by amphibious and airborne assault and establish base for further ops. Automatic sea and air resupply will be provided.
4. Assault force to receive conventional military training....
6. Possibility of using U.S. Army Special Forces training cadres for assault force being pursued. Will advise....
12. Assault of size now planned cannot be readied before several months. Do not plan strike with less than about 1500 men.

The cable concluded: 'Tentative approval pending. Will advise.'⁴² From that time on, notes a later enquiry, 'there is no evidence that the members of the assault force received any further preparation for guerrilla-type operations. The men became deeply imbued with the importance of the landing operation and its superiority over any form of guerrilla action to the point that it would have been difficult to persuade them to return to a guerrilla-type mission.'⁴³

This change in the concept is of crucial importance. It is necessary to investigate the reasons for it and the manner in which it was approved.

In a February 1961 memo, Bissell explained why the CIA had abandoned the guerrilla concept in favour of amphibious invasion: the infiltration of guerrilla groups would fall short of the required 'minimum

³⁹ Quotations from 'Memorandum of Meeting with the President', 22 Aug. 1960, p. 1, WHO, Special Assistant Ser., Presidential Subser., box 5, DDEL and 'Narrative', p. 2. ⁴⁰ Bissell in 'Second Meeting', p. 2.

⁴¹ Interviews with Esterline (quoted) and Bissell; XXX [Hawkins] in 'Second Meeting', p. 6.

⁴² XXX to XXX, 31 Oct. 1960, Annex 4, NSF, box 61A, JFKL. The information on the authorship of the cable and the level of approval is provided by interview with Bissell. In 'Chief WH/4', pp. 5-6, the document is incorrectly dated 4 November.

⁴³ 'Narrative', p. 3; see also 'What briefing, if any, was given the Brigade or the Brigade's staff on going guerrilla', 31 May 1961, Annex 17, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.

critical mass', he argued. That is, it 'would not produce a psychological effect sufficient to precipitate general uprisings or wide-spread revolt among disaffected elements of Castro's armed forces'. To achieve this, a 'minimum critical mass', was required, which meant the amphibious landing of the battalion 'presently undergoing unit training'.⁴⁴ Time and again, the explanation was that the amphibious attack would serve as 'a catalyst to a general uprising', a 'shock action'.⁴⁵

After reading the above paragraph, Bissell remarked:

The real reason for the shift from infiltration to amphibious invasion is that by October we had made a major effort at infiltration and resupply, and those efforts had been unsuccessful. My conviction was that we simply would not be able to organize a secure movement in Cuba. We had made, I think, at least five infiltrations by small boats and in each case the people had been picked up in a day or two. We had also made several air drops of supplies, but in most cases there was always a delay of several days between the request for resupply and the actual drop, and several times during that gap of time the people who originally made the request had moved. We had no direct radio communication with the small rebel groups. We may have made one or two infiltrations of men by air, but the majority entered by sea. Therefore we simply had to give up the effort to build a safe underground with communications and command and control.⁴⁶

As Bissell pointed out, these two reasons – the need for a 'catalyst' and the weakness of the guerrillas in Cuba – were complementary.

As to when the shift in concept was approved, the record is clear. The first approval came with the 31 October cable to Guatemala, and it came from Bissell, not from the president or the Special Group. In Bissell's words, 'by early November the change of plan was internally approved (that is, by Bissell and probably less explicitly by Dulles); not yet by the Special Group and Eisenhower'. The Special Group, noted King, 'was informed of what we were doing' on the 8th or 9th of November and 'there was no approval or disapproval'.⁴⁷ After reading King's statement,

⁴⁴ Bissell, 'Cuba', 17 Feb. 1961, p. 4, enclosed in Bundy, 'Memorandum for the President', 18 Feb. 1961, NSF, box 35, JFKL.

⁴⁵ Quotations from Taylor in 'Second Meeting', p. 17 and from XXX in PMSGM, 26 April 1961, p. 3, NSF, box 61A, JFKL. See also: Gray in 'Second Meeting', p. 19 ('catalyst for uprising'); Dulles in 'Memorandum for Record of the Taylor Committee', 24 April 1961, p. 15, NSF, box 61A, JFKL ('a shock treatment'); Decker in PMSGM, 8 May 1961, p. 32, *ibid.* ('a catalyst for uprising'); Lemnitzer in PMSGM, 18 May 1961, p. 3, *ibid.* ('a catalyst'); 'Military Evaluation of Para-Military Plan', p. 4, enclosed in Lemnitzer to Secretary of Defense, 3 Feb. 1961, Annex 9, *ibid.* ('a catalyst for uprisings'); Lemnitzer to Secretary of Defense, 'Evaluation of the CIA Cuban Volunteer Task Force', 10 March 1961, p. 2, Annex 10, *ibid.* ('a catalyst').

⁴⁶ Telephone interview with Bissell. See also Bissell, *OH* (JFKL, 1967), pp. 28–31.

⁴⁷ Quotations from telephone interview with Bissell and King in 'Chief WH/4', p. 6. See also XXX [Esterline] in *ibid.*

Esterline commented, 'This really summarises the limbo in which we were operating.'⁴⁸

It was on 29 November that the president, three White House aides (Gray, Goodpaster and General Wilton Persons), Treasury Secretary Anderson, a contingent from the Defense Department (General Lemnitzer, Secretary Thomas Gates and an aide), Dillon and Merchant from the State Department, and Dulles and Bissell for the CIA, assembled in Eisenhower's office to consider the CIA's new concept. The president was irritable. Frustrated by Castro's resilience in Cuba, and by the spread of Castroism in Latin America, Eisenhower 'wondered whether the situation did not have the appearance of beginning to get out of hand'. He challenged the assembled dignitaries. 'The President then said he wished to ask two questions: (1) Are we being sufficiently imaginative and bold, subject to not letting our hand appear; and (2) are we doing the things we are doing effectively.'⁴⁹

No one, including Eisenhower, objected to the CIA's new concept. (The State Department even felt that 'perhaps we should have two or three thousand' in the invasion force.) Acting Secretary Dillon had only one reservation: 'the State concern was the operation was no longer secret but is known all over Latin America'. Eisenhower dismissed this. 'Even if the operation were known, the main thing was not to let the U.S.' hand show', he countered. While stressing that the final decision would be Kennedy's ('He intended to speak with Senator Kennedy and would hope that the response would be that he would follow the general line'), he sought to impart vigour to his troops: 'The President said he does not share the State Department concern about "shooting from the hip" as he thinks that we should be prepared to take more chances and be more aggressive.'⁵⁰

It was only after Eisenhower's approval that the new paramilitary concept 'was formally presented to the Special Group' on 8 December 1960.⁵¹ However, 'to General [Maxwell] Taylor's query as to whether this shift was covered by a formal paper, Mr. Bissell replied that there was no formal recording of the shift'.⁵² Nor was there a formal draft of the concept. This was consistent with the tendency to consign very little to paper.

While the passive role of the Special Group fits the pattern, Eisenhower's role deserves some elaboration. The record indicates that

⁴⁸ Interview with Esterline.

⁴⁹ 'Memorandum of Meeting with the President (Tuesday, November 29, 1960 at 11:00 a.m.)', 5 Dec. 1960, p. 2, WHO, Special Assistant Ser., Presidential Subser., box 5, DDEL.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁵¹ 'Narrative', p. 4. See also 'First Meeting', p. 7.

⁵² Bissell, 'Second Meeting', p. 2.

the CIA gave Eisenhower three major briefings on the Cuban operation: on 17 March, 18 August and 28 November. On each occasion, the President made a key decision: on 17 March, he approved the plan; on 18 August, he approved the budget; on 28 November, he approved the shift from guerrilla operation to invasion. In between these meetings, the President received briefings from Gray, who as Special Assistant for National Security Affairs was a member of the Special Group. This degree of consultation was consistent with that of PBSUCCESS in 1953–4.⁵³ And it was consistent with Eisenhower's style of management: the President did not follow the planning of a covert operation closely; he wanted only to be informed at critical moments, and he reserved, of course, the right to cancel the operation. This is how Goodpaster describes Eisenhower's *modus operandi*:

The covert operations were reviewed by the Special Group and then the President's assistant (Cutler, Anderson or Gordon Gray) would report to Eisenhower and unless Eisenhower was opposed, the CIA was free to go ahead. It was very unusual for Eisenhower to be briefed directly on a particular covert operation by the CIA. This was done to keep plausible denial, to have a buffer between the CIA and the President. The exception to this *modus operandi* was the U-2. Given the extreme sensitivity of the matter, Eisenhower reviewed each flight.⁵⁴

Eisenhower had heartily approved the change in concept from guerrilla infiltration to amphibious invasion. But by the time the CIA provided its first detailed plan of the new concept, he was gone. After the *débâcle*, he stressed that he 'had done nothing' beyond training some hundred exiles in small units. 'While we had done all sorts of speculating, there were no plans yet based upon a particular area, particular numbers, or particular support.'⁵⁵

During the campaign, Kennedy had been briefed about the covert operation against Cuba.⁵⁶ On 18 November 1960, when Dulles and Bissell

⁵³ 'Eisenhower's involvement in the Cuban operation was the same as with PBSUCCESS' (interview with Bissell). For the Special Assistant's role as the link between the Special Group and Eisenhower, see the series of 'Memorandum of Meeting with the President' by Gray on '5412 Matters' in WHO, Special Assistant Ser., Presidential Subser., boxes 4 and 5, DDEL.

⁵⁴ Interview with Goodpaster. For his part, when asked whether the Special Group 'would take any new proposals to the President directly?' Dulles stated: 'If it was of the consequence that the Secretary of State or Gordon Gray thought it should go to the President. Often we would pass on an operation without going to the President.' (PMSGM, 8 May 1961, p. 2, NSF, box 61A, JFKL)

⁵⁵ Eisenhower, draft of Oral History, 8 Nov. 1966, pp. 7–8, enclosed in Malcolm Moos to Eisenhower, 5 Oct. 1967, DDE: Papers, Post Presidential, Augusta–Walter Reed Ser., box 1, DDEL.

⁵⁶ In March 1962, Nixon claimed that as a presidential candidate in 1960 Kennedy had been briefed about the planned CIA operation against Castro and that his criticism of

paid him a visit at Palm Beach, the President-elect was told of the new plan to overthrow Castro. But if Kennedy was 'astonished at the scope of what was going on', he nonetheless kept his peace. 'Kennedy was briefed, and he didn't say anything against the operation. So the morale of the Task Force was good, and we went on', recalled Esterline.⁵⁷ In fact, Kennedy was in no hurry to get involved, as Assistant Secretary Mann soon learned. In his memoirs, Mann writes:

Finding myself again in charge of Inter-American affairs during the months between election and inauguration days, I tried to interest officials of the incoming administration in studying the Plan. I was informed that it had been decided that there would be no discussion of policy matters between Eisenhower and Kennedy people 'at the working level'. And I was unable to find anyone of authority in the incoming administration willing to discuss it.⁵⁸

Actually, one may wonder how many in the incoming administration were told about the covert operation. Certainly not Secretary of State designate Dean Rusk, who was briefed only after he had assumed office.⁵⁹ In Allen

the Eisenhower administration's passivity towards Cuba had therefore been disingenuous and self-serving (*New York Times*, 20 March 1962, p. 1). It is true that, at Eisenhower's request, Kennedy had been briefed by Dulles on intelligence matters on 23 July and 19 Sept. 1960, but he responded to Nixon's accusation with an indignant denial, and he was supported by Allen Dulles, who released a statement saying that the 'briefings were intelligence briefings on the world situation. They did not cover our own Government's plans or programs for action overt or covert.' (*New York Times*, 21 March 1962, p. 10. See also 22 March 1962, pp. 16, 17; 25 March, p. 49; 26 March, p. 14; 29 March, p. 22.)

But the truth was, as McGeorge Bundy told the President, 'more complicated'. Dulles privately had informed Bundy 'that his notes for a July briefing do indicate that he was prepared to tell you that CIA was training Cuban exiles as guerrilla leaders and recruiting from refugees for more such training.... Thus it appears that you had only sketchy and fragmentary information about covert relations to Cuban exiles and no briefing at all on any specific plan for an invasion.' Logically so, since the invasion plan was hatched only after Kennedy's two briefings. 'The difficulty', Bundy went on gently, 'is that the notes that Dulles has would give some support to Nixon's stated position.' (Bundy to President, 'Nixon's Comments on Your Briefing on Cuba Before the Election', 14 March 1962, NSF, box 36, JFKL)

In a memo to Eisenhower, Dulles reported that on 23 July he had briefed Kennedy on Cuba and other matters for over two hours. Kennedy, he noted, had been 'particularly interested in developments that might arise during the campaign, particularly with regard to Berlin, Cuba and the Congo'. (Dulles, Memorandum for the President, 3 Aug. 1960, WF, Administrative Ser., box 13, DDEL.)

⁵⁷ Quotations from Bundy to President, 'Nixon's Comments on Your Briefing on Cuba Before the Election', 14 March 1962, p. 1 (quoting Bissell), NSF, box 36, JFKL and from interview with Esterline. See also Bissell, *OH* (JFKL, 1967), p. 3.

⁵⁸ Mann, unpubl. memoirs, p. 146. Mann had doubts about the new concept. See 'Memorandum of Meeting With The President (Tuesday, January 3 at 9:30 a.m.)', 9 Jan. 1961, esp. p. 5, WHO, Special Assistant Ser., Presidential Subser., box 5, DDEL.

⁵⁹ Rusk, *As I Saw It*, p. 208.

Dulles's words, 'There was a period of two months before President Kennedy took office. During this time neither he nor his advisers contacted us for further information.'⁶⁰

Three decades later, Mann mused: 'This was a major mistake. Kennedy had no time after the inauguration to get his ducks in a row, to think before making a decision on the operation. It was stupid – like it would go away if they didn't look at it. Kennedy tried to ignore its existence when he had all those months to think about what he wanted to do.'⁶¹

Mann's comment is all the more apt since the operation was still relatively modest when Kennedy was briefed on it. (By 20 November, for example, the Cuban Expeditionary Force [CEF] had only 'about 420 members'.⁶²) It was only after Eisenhower's approval on 29 November that steps were taken to implement the new concept: thus it was only in early December that 'officers from the Special Forces for the training of the [exile] Strike Force were authorized, [and] the use of an air strip at Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua was approved'.⁶³

Meanwhile an unforeseen development had thrown the CIA into confusion and crippled the growth of the exile force (creating more breathing space for Kennedy, had he seized it). On 13 November, young officers had revolted in Guatemala, and one of their major grievances was the presence of the CEF in their country, which was by then an open secret. The revolt threatened to topple the government.⁶⁴ Never a brave man, President Ydígoras turned at once to the United States.

'We were concerned about the possibility of losing our bases', the senior CIA operative in Guatemala explained. 'President Ydígoras requested that we make an airborne landing, which we did. I was in

⁶⁰ Allen W. Dulles, 'My Answer on the Bay of Pigs', unpubl. ms, second draft, master copy, [1965], p. 20, Allen W. Dulles Papers, box 244, Mudd Library. See also 'Article by Allen W. Dulles, to be Published By and To Be Released', [1965], p. 2 (handwritten comment in the margin), *ibid.*

⁶¹ Interview with Mann. See also Mann, *OH* (JFKL, 1968), pp. 16–17.

⁶² XXX (Operations Officer for the Project), in PMSGM, 1 May, 1961, p. 3, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.

⁶³ Bissell in 'First Meeting', p. 7.

⁶⁴ Major (Ret.) Carlos Paz Tejada had denounced the Cubans' presence in Guatemala in 'Aclaración y denuncia', *Prensa Libre* (Guatemala City), 5 Oct. 1960, p. 19. On the revolt, and on the grievances of the rebels, interviews with Paz Tejada (Mexico City, 3 Sept. 1991) and Col. Ricardo Peralta Méndez (Washington DC, 4 March 1986) were helpful; see also John Muccio (US Ambassador to Guatemala), *OH* (JFKL, 1971), pp. 3–6; Adolfo Gilly, 'The Guerrilla Movement in Guatemala', *Monthly Review*, no. 17 (May 1965), pp. 13–14; Alan Howard, 'With the Guerrillas in Guatemala', *New York Times Magazine*, 21 June 1966, esp. p. 18; Richard Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America* (Garden City, NY, 1972), pp. 44–8; *New York Times*, 14–18 Nov. 1960; *El Imparcial* (Guatemala City), 14–18 Nov. 1960. The following US embassy reports are also useful: Amembassy Guatemala to Department of State, no. 183, 14 Oct. 1960; *Joint Weeka*, no. 46, 18 Nov. 1960; Amembassy Guatemala to Department of State, no. 269, 25 Nov. 1960. (All FOIA.)

command of the outfit. Washington gave us permission.’⁶⁵ Bissell was involved immediately. ‘I remember being called one night by our base commander in Guatemala. They wanted authorization to use the Brigade against the rebels. As it happened, they only had to use some of them.’⁶⁶ A few brigade planes strafed the rebels. ‘It had a tremendous psychological effect; it scared them’, mused Esterline. ‘It was over even before I learned of it. I thought, “Oh Christ, what if the State Department comes after me on this!” I was sitting on needles. But State said nothing.’⁶⁷ The State Department was in no mood to complain. Secretary Herter called Eisenhower to report that he had ‘been in a huddle with Allen Dulles and our Latin American experts on Guatemala’. The situation looked ‘very serious’.⁶⁸ It was, the President was told, ‘the most serious threat’ that Ydígoras had faced in his three years in office.⁶⁹

‘The revolt emphasized the instability in Guatemala’, noted Bissell.⁷⁰ Dulles stressed the same point: ‘Ydígoras, while he has suppressed this revolt for the present, cannot be sure to keep the top on the Guatemalan political volcano’, he told the National Security Council.⁷¹ ‘We feared we would lose [the] Guatemala bases and recruiting stopped, and we looked around for other bases’, recalled Hawkins.⁷² ‘Consideration was being given to the possibility of moving [the] Cuban troops out of there entirely and no one knew where they could be moved to. The United States was considered and Saipan was considered, and so on.’⁷³ For several weeks following the revolt only a trickle of recruits reached Guatemala, and by the end of the year there were only some 500 Cubans in the CEF.⁷⁴ Once it was decided to remain in Guatemala, the operation shifted into high gear. ‘About 1 January 1961, recruiting was greatly stepped up.’⁷⁵ (More

⁶⁵ XXX (Operations Officer for the Project) in PMSGM, 1 May 1961, p. 3, NSF, box 61A, JFKL. ⁶⁶ Interview with Bissell. ⁶⁷ Interview with Esterline.

⁶⁸ ‘Memorandum of Telephone Conversation with the President, 14 Nov. 1960, 9:45 a.m.’, Herter Papers, box 10, DDEL.

⁶⁹ ‘Intelligence Items Reported to the President’, 14 Nov. 1960, p. 2, WF, DDE Diary Ser., box 54, DDEL. See also ‘Telephone Calls, Monday, November 14, 1960’, Herter Papers, box 13, DDEL; MVK to Herter, 14 Nov. 1960, *ibid.*; ‘Memorandum of Telephone Conversation with Secretary Gates’, 14 Nov. 1960, *ibid.*; Herter, ‘Memorandum for the President’, 16 Nov. 1960, *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Interview with Bissell.

⁷¹ Dulles, ‘Discussion at the 467th Meeting of the National Security Council, in Atlanta, Georgia on Thursday, November 17, 1960’, 21 Nov. 1960, p. 1, WF, NSC Ser., box 13, DDEL. ⁷² XXX [Hawkins] in ‘Second Meeting’, p. 6.

⁷³ XXX in PMSGM, 27 May 1961, p. 1, NSF, box 61A, JFKL; see also ‘Memorandum of Meeting with the President (Tuesday, Nov. 29, 1960 at 11:00 a.m.)’, 5 Dec. 1960, p. 1, WHO, Special Assistant Ser., Presidential Subser., box 5, DDEL and Bissell, *OH* (Columbia University, 1973), p. 31.

⁷⁴ See ‘Memorandum of Meeting with the President (Tuesday, January 3 at 9:30 a.m.)’, 9 Jan. 1961, p. 6, WHO, Special Assistant Ser., Presidential Subser., box 5, DDEL.

⁷⁵ Bissell in ‘First Meeting’, p. 7.

than six weeks, that is, after Kennedy had been briefed.) ‘After that we were pouring people through Opa Locka into Guatemala to build the force to 2,000 men’, recalled Esterline. ‘They were first screened by our Miami station (which was, in effect, our Havana station in exile).’⁷⁶ It was on 12 January 1961, that the Special Forces trainers arrived in Guatemala, and ‘the character of the training changed’.⁷⁷

It was also during this interlude that the most interesting of the available documents dealing with the operation was written. On 4 January 1961, senior CIA officials jotted down their views – and their hopes – in a formal paper:

The concept envisages the seizure of a small lodgement on Cuban soil by an all-Cuban amphibious/airborne force of about 750 men. The landings in Cuba will be preceded by a tactical air preparation, beginning at dawn of D-1 Day.... Close air support will be provided to the invasion force on D-Day and thereafter as long as the force is engaged in combat. The primary targets during this time will be opposing military formations in the field. Particular efforts will be made to interdict opposing troop movements against the lodgement.

The initial mission of the invasion force will be to seize and defend a small area, which under the ideal conditions will include an airfield and access to the sea for logistical support. Plans must provide, however, for the eventuality that the force will be driven into a tight defensive formation which will preclude supply by sea or control of an airfield. Under such circumstances supply would have to be provided entirely by air drop. The primary objective of the force will be to survive and maintain its integrity on Cuban soil. There will be no early attempt to break out of the lodgement for further offensive operations unless and until there is a general uprising against the Castro regime or overt military intervention by United States forces has taken place.

It is expected that these operations will precipitate a general uprising throughout Cuba and cause the revolt of large segments of the Cuban Army and Militia. The lodgement, it is hoped, will serve as a rallying point for the thousands who are ready for overt resistance to Castro but who hesitate to act until they can feel some assurance of success. A general revolt in Cuba, if one is successfully triggered by our operations, may serve to topple the Castro regime within a period of weeks.

If matters do not eventuate as predicted above, the lodgement established by our force can be used as the site for establishment of a provisional government which can be recognized by the United States, and hopefully by other American states, and given overt military assistance. The way will then be paved for United States military intervention aimed at pacification of Cuba, and this will result in the prompt overthrow of the Castro Government.

⁷⁶ As a result of the break in diplomatic relations with Cuba, on 3 January 1961, the CIA station there had moved from Havana to Miami where it continued to operate as the Havana station. (Interview with Esterline)

⁷⁷ Bissell, in ‘Second Meeting’, p. 2. Ultimately there would be 44 US trainers in Guatemala (PMSGM, 1 May 1961, p. 6, NSF, box 61A, JFKL).

While this paper is directed to the subject of strike operations, it should not be presumed that other paramilitary programs will be suspended or abandoned... They include the supply by air and sea of guerrilla elements in Cuba, the conduct of sabotage operations, the introduction of specially trained paramilitary teams, and the expansion of our agent networks throughout the island.⁷⁸

The key points of this plan were: (a) continuous massive air superiority would be used against Cuban troops; (b) uprisings against Castro should occur within weeks of the landing; and (c) should these uprisings not occur or should they fail, the United States would intervene militarily and overtly in response to the appeals of a provisional government established in the lodgement. The possibility that the invaders would turn into a guerrilla force if they found they were losing was not even mentioned.

This seems the most realistic of all the plans, certainly far more so than Trinidad and, above all, Zapata, except for the fact that it assumed that only 750 men would be required. The stress on air power is appropriate:

The question has been raised in some quarters as to whether the amphibious/airborne operation could not be mounted without tactical air preparation or support or with minimal air support... Since our invasion force is very small in comparison to forces which may be thrown against it, we must compensate for numerical inferiority by effective tactical air support not only during the landing but thereafter as long as the force remains in combat. It is essential that opposing military targets such as artillery parks, tank parks, supply dumps, military convoys and troops in the field be brought under effective and continuing air attack. Psychological considerations also make such attacks essential. The spectacular aspects of air operations will go far toward producing the uprising in Cuba that we seek.⁷⁹

In fact, if the CEF was to have any hope of holding the lodgement, it would only be through the massive use of air power. The airstrikes would come whether or not the CEF held an airport, and the plan even suggested

⁷⁸ 'Memorandum for: Chief, WH/4', 4 Jan. 1961, pp. 1-2, Annex 14, NSF, box 61A, JFKL. Upon reading this document, Bissell remarked 'I would kind of guess it was written by Hawkins to Esterline; they were in full agreement on all the points in this memorandum and I guess Esterline said, "Why don't we draft a memorandum with all the points and circulate it?" Presumably the role of the paper was to stimulate me and Dulles to try to seek some of the political decisions that are suggested in it. In many cases their suggestions would also reflect my views. I am sure I would have accepted these views.' (Interview with Bissell.) Esterline confirmed that the memorandum had been written by Hawkins and that he had agreed with its contents. He had sent the memorandum to Barnes and Bissell. (Interview with Esterline.) Bissell said that 'the paper did not go much further than his office'. (Bissell in 'Second Meeting', p. 9) Hawkins confirmed that he and Esterline had sent it to Bissell and Barnes. (Hawkins, in *ibid.*, pp. 7, 9.)

⁷⁹ 'Memorandum for: Chief, WH/4', 4 Jan. 1961, p. 6, Annex 14, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.

the use of airforce bases in south Florida. Obviously this 4 January document accepted that it might be necessary to discard the figleaf. But the figleaf was a joke anyway, and the response to PBSUCCESS in 1954 gave reason to be optimistic about the forbearance of friendly countries. In any case, here too the paper was more realistic than what eventually transpired: it recommended that 'the operation be abandoned if policy does not provide for use of adequate tactical air support'.⁸⁰ That is, it provided the decisionmakers with clear military requirements on which to base their policy decisions.

The document also pointed out that 'The question of whether the incoming administration of President-elect Kennedy will concur in the conduct of the strike operations outlined above needs to be resolved at the earliest possible time.'⁸¹

The first effect of the change in administration was to enhance the roles of the Defense and State Departments in the covert operation. Under Eisenhower the State Department had not opposed the operation, but it had stressed the importance of maintaining deniability. As for the Defense Department, its role through 1960 has been aptly summarised by Bissell:

For the first eight months or so of the whole activity, which took it up almost to the change of administration, the military had been involved, as they are or have been in a number of CIA operations. There were military personnel assigned to the CIA to work as part of the CIA staff. This was the source of the men who did most of the military training, of course.... Then we had made some use of various military facilities: We got our B-26's, as I remember it, by release from the National Guard; we got some National Guard Pilots or air crews to volunteer primarily for training purposes; we used the ex-military base at Miami [Opa Locka] as a logistics base.... All this involvement... comes under the heading of support by the Department of Defense to CIA activities.⁸²

Thus its role in the operation had been thoroughly routine. 'Our job was primarily one of support', pointed out General Graves Erskine, who headed a special unit that worked regularly with the CIA on covert operations. 'We were not shown the plans or the recommendations.'⁸³ The Joint Chiefs had been represented at the three meetings in which Eisenhower had approved or reviewed the operation (17 March, 18 August and 29 November) and had expressed no reservations. But they had been asked neither to review the CIA plans nor to assess the quality of the exiles' training. The operation had been closely held within the CIA.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* Noting the lack of a sufficient number of Cuban pilots, the plan also demanded the use of contract American pilots to fly combat missions (as had been done for PBSUCCESS). ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4. ⁸² Bissell, *OH* (JFKL, 1967), p. 10.

⁸³ Erskine in PMSGM, 27 April 1961, p. 1, NSF, box 61A, JFKL. See also PMSGM, 2 May 1961, p. 12, *ibid.*

'I would say that the most decisive change in the role of the Joint Chiefs', said Bissell, 'came early in the [Kennedy] administration. I can't remember just how soon, but I do know that the very first time this was discussed in a policy meeting in the White House, the President said, "Have the Joint Chiefs done a careful evaluation of this operation?"' The answer was negative. And he said, "I want that done as the very next step."⁸⁴

Kennedy received his first briefing as President on the Cuban operation on 28 January. Some of those who gathered in the President's office had discussed the operation with Eisenhower: Dulles and Barnes for the CIA, Assistant Secretary Mann, and General Lemnitzer. The new participants were Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, Secretary of State Rusk, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, and Assistant Secretary of International Security Paul Nitze. The minutes of the meeting note that the representatives of the Defense and State Departments expressed reservations about the CIA plan, which contemplated the landing of an exile force of 1,000 men, who would have control of the air, on a beachhead that would include the small city of Trinidad. After considerable discussion, Kennedy authorised the following:

1. A continuation and accentuation of current activities of the Central Intelligence Agency, including increased propaganda, increased political action and increased sabotage....
2. The Defense Department, with CIA, will review proposals for the active deployment of anti-Castro Cuban forces on Cuban territory, and the results of this analysis will be promptly reported to the President.
3. The Department of State will prepare a concrete proposal for action with other Latin American countries to isolate the Castro regime and to bring against it the judgement of the Organization of American States.⁸⁵

'It is my understanding', Kennedy wrote to Bundy on 4 February, 'that there is a sharp difference of opinion... Can you find out if the differences of view have been settled, or if they continue I believe we should have an opportunity to have them placed before me and have them argued out again. Would you let me know right away on this?'⁸⁶ Two days later, Kennedy wrote again: 'Has the policy for Cuba been coordinated between Defense, CIA (Bissell), Mann and Berle? Have we determined what we are going to do about Cuba? What approaches are we going to make to the Latin American governments on this matter? If there is a difference of

⁸⁴ Bissell, *OH* (JFKL, 1967), p. 10.

⁸⁵ Bundy, 'Memorandum of Discussion on Cuba, Cabinet Room, January 28, 1961', 28 Jan. 1961, Annex 8, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.

⁸⁶ The President to Bundy, 4 Feb. 1961, POF, box 62, JFKL.

opinion between the agencies I think they should be brought to my attention.’⁸⁴

On 8 February, Bundy spelled out these differences in a memo to the President that also expressed his scepticism about the operation:

When you have your meeting this afternoon on Cuba, I think you will find that there is a divergence of view between State on the one hand and CIA and Defense on the other. Defense and CIA now feel quite enthusiastic about the invasion from Guatemala – at worst they think the invaders would get into the mountains, *and at best they think they might get a full-fledged civil war in which we could then back the anti-Castro forces openly*. State Department takes a much cooler view, primarily because of its belief that the political consequences would be very grave both in the United Nations and in Latin America. I think they will urge careful and extended diplomatic discussions with other American states, looking toward an increasing diplomatic isolation of Cuba and the Dominican Republic before any drastic action is taken. This divergence of view has not been openly and plainly considered in recent task force discussions, as I understand it. Therefore, you are quite likely to hear it in quite fresh form this afternoon. [White House aide] Dick Goodwin has been in on most of the Cuban discussions, and he and I join in believing that there should certainly not be an invasion adventure without careful diplomatic soundings. We also think it almost certain that such soundings would confirm the judgement you are likely to hear from State.⁸⁸

The meeting with the President took place on the afternoon of 8 February. By this time, following Kennedy’s 28 January instructions, a Working Group of the Joint Staff had evaluated the ‘CIA Para-Military Plan, Cuba’. On 3 February, the JCS had approved the ‘Military Evaluation of Para-Military Plan’ and forwarded it to McNamara.⁸⁹ The JCS’s assessment of the military aspects of the operation had become

⁸⁷ Kennedy, ‘Memorandum for Mr. Bundy’, 6 Feb. 1961, NSF, Meetings and Memoranda, box 328, JFKL.

⁸⁸ Bundy, ‘Memorandum for the President’, 8 Feb. 1961, POF, box 115, JFKL (emphasis added). Another copy of this document is in NSF, box 35, JFKL but some words are sanitised.

There are scattered references in the available documents to US soundings of Latin American governments for support of the operation against Cuba. This was probably the reason Berle went as a presidential envoy to South America in February 1961. Thus, when General White of the JCS stated, ‘I was told that someone briefed many Latin American governments about this forthcoming operation to get their views and met with almost unanimous disapproval’, a member of the Taylor Board of Inquiry commented ‘I believe this was Mr. Berle’s mission down south’. (PMSGM, 8 May 1961, p. 26, NSF, box 61A, JFKL; see also ‘Second Meeting’, p. 16 and John Moors Cabot, *OH* [JFKL, 1971], pp. 4–5.) McNamara noted that ‘The Latin American countries had indicated they would not support this operation’. (McNamara, in PMSGM, 3 May 1961, p. 10, NSF, box 61A, JFKL). See also the tantalising references to former President José Figueres of Costa Rica and ‘early recognition’ in the notes of Ambassador Whiting Willauer (handwritten notes, unpaginated, Whiting Willauer Papers, box 4, Mudd Library).

⁸⁹ Enclosed in Lemnitzer to Secretary of Defense, 3 Feb. 1961, Annex 9, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.

positive, with the reservation ‘that assessment of the combat worth of assault forces is based upon second and third hand reports’.⁹⁰ (To remedy this, a team of three Army, Navy and Air Force officers from the Joint Staff was sent to Guatemala on 24 February and spent two days in the training area. Their report was positive.⁹¹)

Among those present at the 8 February meeting were NSC adviser McGeorge Bundy, Rusk, Charles Bohlen, Berle and Mann from the State Department, McNamara, William Bundy, Haydn Williams and Nitze from Defense, Dulles, Bissell and Barnes from the CIA. Bissell, presenting the view of the CIA, began by reporting that the JCS believed that the plan ‘had a fair chance of success – “success” meaning ability to survive, hold ground, and attract growing support from Cubans. At worst, the invaders should be able to fight their way to the Escambray and go into guerrilla action.’ Rusk and Berle countered that ‘without careful – and successful – diplomatic preparation such an operation could have grave effects upon the U.S. position in Latin America and at the U.N.’ At the meeting, no decision was made: Kennedy ‘pressed for alternatives to a full-fledged “invasion,” supported by U.S. planes, ships and supplies. While CIA doubted that other really satisfactory uses of the troops in Guatemala could be found, it was agreed that the matter should be carefully studied. Could not such a force be landed carefully and quietly and make its first major military efforts from the mountains – then taking shape as a Cuban force within Cuba, not as an invasion force sent by the Yankees?’⁹² At the same meeting, Kennedy also requested ‘all concerned...to search for concrete ways of demonstrating quickly in Latin America that this administration stands squarely for reform and progress in the Americas’.⁹³

On 17 February, Kennedy presided over yet another meeting, attended by Rusk, Mann, and Berle for the State Department, Dulles, Bissell and Barnes for the CIA, a representative of the JCS, ‘and possibly others’. According to Bissell, ‘At this February meeting, we felt a sense of urgency as the military plan called for D-Day of 5 March...[but] it became clear that there would be no immediate decision and that the plan would have to “slip” by one month.’⁹⁴ A summary of the meeting adds:

Mr. Bissell discussed the status of planning and preparations...Mr. Rusk

⁹⁰ Lemnitzer to Secretary of Defense, 3 Feb. 1961, p. 3, *ibid.*

⁹¹ See ‘Evaluation of CIA Task Force’, enclosed in Lemnitzer to Secretary of Defense, 10 March 1961, Annex 10, *ibid.*

⁹² [Bundy?], ‘Memorandum of Meeting with the President on Cuba – February 8, 1961’, 9 Feb. 1961, NSF, box 35, JFKL; see also Bundy, ‘Memorandum of Discussion on Cuba. Cabinet Room, February 8, 1961’, 9 Feb. 1961, *ibid.*

⁹³ Bundy, ‘Memorandum of Discussion on Cuba. Cabinet Room, February 8, 1961’, 9 Feb. 1961, *ibid.* ⁹⁴ Bissell in ‘Second Meeting’, p. 3.

discussed the fact that it would be much better to delay any action and to attempt to build up OAS support. . . . Mr. Berle believed that support could be generated in Latin America, but not by March 31. . . . Mr. Bohlen expressed the view that Russia would not react if the operation was finished quickly but . . . [illegible] if it dragged on. The President indicated that he would be in favor of a more moderate approach to the problem such as mass infiltration. No definite decision was reached at this meeting.⁹⁵

The next day, McGeorge Bundy presented Kennedy with a five-page memo by Mann and an eight-page memo by Bissell. 'Here, in sharp form are the issues on Cuba', he wrote in the cover letter. 'Bissell and Mann are the real antagonists at the staff level. Since I think you lean to Mann's view, I have put Bissell on top.'⁹⁶

'The Joint Chiefs of Staff have evaluated the military aspects of the plan for a landing by the Cuban opposition', Bissell wrote.

They have concluded that 'this plan has a fair chance of ultimate success' (that is of detonating a major and ultimately successful revolt against Castro) and that, if ultimate success is not achieved there is every likelihood that the landing can be the means of establishing in favorable terrain a powerful guerrilla force which could be sustained almost indefinitely. The latter outcome would not be (and need not appear as) a serious defeat. It would be the means of exerting continuing pressure on the regime and would be a continuing demonstration of inability of the regime to establish order. It could create an opportunity for an OAS intervention to impose a cease-fire and hold elections.

a. Any evaluation of the chances of success of the assault force should be realistic about the fighting qualities of the militia. No definitive conclusions can be advanced but it must be remembered that the majority of the militia are not fighters by instinct or background and are not militiamen by their own choice. Their training has been slight and they have never been exposed to actual fire (particularly any heavy fire power) nor to air attack. Moreover, the instabilities within Cuba are such that if the tide shifts against the regime, the chances are strong that substantial numbers will desert or change sides.

b. There is no doubt that the paramilitary forces would be widely assumed to be U.S. supported. Nevertheless, this conclusion would be difficult to prove and the scale of its activity would not be inconsistent with the potentialities for support by private Cuban and American groups. . . . It must be emphasized, moreover, that this . . . would be a force of dissident Cubans with Cuban political and military leadership.

c. There would be adverse political repercussions to a landing in force but it is not clear how serious these would be. Most Latin American governments would at least privately approve of unobtrusive U.S. support for such an opposition move, especially if the political coloration of the opposition were left-of-center. The reaction of the rest of the free world, it is estimated, would be minimal in the case of unobtrusive U.S. support for such an attempt. It might produce a good deal of cynicism throughout the world about the U.S. role but

⁹⁵ 'Summary of White House Meetings', 9 May 1961, p. 1, Annex 16, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.

⁹⁶ Bundy, 'Memorandum for the President', 18 Feb. 1961, NSF, box 35, JFKL.

if quickly successful little lasting reaction. Generally speaking it is believed that the political cost would be low in the event of a fairly quick success.⁹⁷

Mann disagreed. 'My conclusions regarding this proposal are as follows', he wrote:

(1) The military evaluation of this proposal is that 'ultimate success will depend upon political factors, i.e., a sizeable popular uprising or substantial follow-on forces.' It is unlikely that a popular uprising would promptly take place in Cuba of a scale and kind which would make it impossible for the Castro regime to oppose the brigade with superior numbers of well armed troops.

(2) It therefore appears possible, even probable, that we would be faced with the alternative of a) abandoning the brigade to its fate, which would cost us dearly in prestige and respect or b) attempting execution of the plan to move the brigade into the mountains as guerrillas, which would pose a prolonged problem of air drops or supplies or c) overt U.S. military intervention...

(3) Execution of the proposed plan would be in violation of...the Charter of the United Nations,...of the Charter of the Organization of American States, and...of the Rio Treaty....The chances of promptly presenting both international organizations [the UN and the OAS] with a *fait accompli* are, in my opinion, virtually nil.

(4) ...a majority of the people of Latin America would oppose the operation, and we would expect that the Communists and Castroites would organize and lead demonstrations designed to bring about the overthrow of governments friendly to us. At best, our moral posture throughout the hemisphere would be impaired. At worst, the effect on our position of hemispheric leadership would be catastrophic.⁹⁸

The two papers defined the scope of the debate. The key agreement was that the operation would not succeed unless it was followed by uprisings or large scale desertations. Mann thought this unlikely, so he believed the operation would fail. Bissell thought the opposite, so the operation stood a very good chance of success; moreover, he stressed, if the uprisings failed to materialise, the invaders could melt into the countryside and establish a powerful guerrilla force.

In the middle was Kennedy. It was a very uncomfortable position. Sensing the mood of the American people ('No foreign issue since Korea has provoked so much anxiety', James Reston had noted⁹⁹), Kennedy had lashed out at the Eisenhower administration during the 1960 campaign for permitting 'a Communist menace...to arise only ninety miles from the shores of the United States'.¹⁰⁰ Pouring scorn on the administration's timidity ('If you can't stand up to Castro, how can you be expected to

⁹⁷ Bissell, 'Cuba', 17 Feb. 1961, pp. 5-6, enclosed in Bundy, 'Memorandum for the President,' 18 Feb. 1961, *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Mann, 'List of Conclusions', enclosed in Mann to Secretary of State, 15 Feb. 1961, pp. 1-2, enclosed in Bundy, 'Memorandum for the President', 18 Feb. 1961, *ibid.*

⁹⁹ James Reston, 'Nixon and Cuba', *New York Times*, 25 Oct. 1960, p. 26.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 7 Oct. 1960, p. 20.

stand up to Khrushchev?'¹⁰¹) he had offered the nation the reassuring alternative of his own resolve. 'We must attempt to strengthen the non-Batista democratic anti-Castro forces in exile, and in Cuba itself, who offer eventual hope of overthrowing Castro. Thus far these fighters for freedom have had virtually no support from our Government.'¹⁰²

Senator Kennedy's call for US aid in overthrowing Castro, a friendly commentator had observed in October 1960, would help him to 'win the battle for votes'. But his inflammatory language, and his reference to 'things that could well be left unsaid',¹⁰³ came back to haunt President Kennedy. It limited his options by raising the political cost of scuttling the operation once he was in office. 'If he hadn't gone ahead with it', said Robert Kennedy, 'everybody would have said it showed that he had no courage. Eisenhower trained these people, it was Eisenhower's plan; Eisenhower's people all said it would succeed – and we turned it down.'¹⁰⁴

Kennedy would have preferred gradual infiltration into Cuba to a full fledged invasion – to return, that is, to the plan as it had been until the fall of 1960. Time and again, he expressed this preference clearly. Time and again, the CIA told him that it was no longer possible. And the CIA was right: by the spring of 1961 the Cubans would not have accepted the shift. The senior CIA official in Guatemala harboured no illusions on this score:

Question: 'What would have been the consequences if, just before this invasion was launched, the men had been directed to conduct guerrilla type operations?'

Answer: 'They probably would have revolted.'

Question: 'But I understood that they initially wanted to go in as guerrillas?'

Answer: 'Yes, but we showed them the advantages of mass firepower, and I believe that they were convinced that the shock action against Castro's force in meeting this firepower would cause the militia to break and run, and spark mass defections.'¹⁰⁵

For the exiles, the frontal attack meant a fast victory and the certainty that the United States would be behind them all the way. McGeorge Bundy put it succinctly: 'They were certainly told not to expect direct U.S. intervention, but we must suppose that they did not deeply accept this warning.' The Inspector General of the CIA, who conducted a postmortem of the operation, put it bluntly:

One of the aspects of the postoperation inspection was specifically directed to the question of whether any of the U.S. personnel told the Cubans that U.S. military

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 16 Oct. 1960, p. 52.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 21 Oct. 1960, p. 18.

¹⁰³ Reston, 'Nixon and Cuba', *Ibid.*, 25 Oct. 1960, p. 26.

¹⁰⁴ Edwin O. Guthman and Jeffrey Shulman, eds., *Robert Kennedy in His Own Words: The Unpublished Recollections of the Kennedy Years* (New York, 1989), p. 247.

¹⁰⁵ XXX (Operations Officer for the Project) in PMSGM, 1 May 1961, p. 7, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.

forces would back them up. That...is an almost impossible question to answer... The best available evidence indicated that no U.S. national who was involved in training, assisting, or direction of the Cubans ever promised U.S. military assistance, but obviously they were not discouraging the Cubans. On the other hand, the Cubans to a man as well as the Cuban Revolutionary Council [which had replaced the *Frente Revolucionario Democrático*], expected that should the brigade falter, U.S. Marines would pour out of Guantanamo, airborne units would be dropped, and it would be over about like that.¹⁰⁶

To be told at the last moment that they had to return to the slower and more painful guerrilla approach would have signalled that Washington was not fully behind them.

And so Kennedy was caught in a vice. He fully sympathised with the aim of the operation and had no qualms about the right of the United States to overthrow Castro. He was not, however, persuaded by the CIA plan; he had reservations both about its chances of success and about its political cost. The CIA insisted that his favoured alternative – infiltration – was not possible. Calling the operation off, however, would have exposed him to other dangers. As Bundy has pointed out, ‘If we didn’t do it [i.e., the operation], the Republicans would have said: “We were all set to beat Castro, and this chicken, this antsy-pantsy bunch of liberals”... There would have been a political risk in not going through with the operation. Saying no would have brought all the hawks out of the woodwork.’¹⁰⁷

It is surprising, under the circumstances, that ‘no one asked Eisenhower about his views’, mused Bundy.¹⁰⁸ Eisenhower had endorsed the operation in his two private meetings with President-elect Kennedy on 6 December 1960 and 19 January 1961.¹⁰⁹ But over the next months, while the size of the operation grew and Kennedy agonised over what he should do, no one in the administration seems to have thought of contacting

¹⁰⁶ Quotations from Bundy, ‘Some Preliminary Administrative Lessons of the Cuban Expedition’, 24 April 1961, p. 3, NSF, box 35, JFKL and Lyman B. Kirkpatrick, ‘Paramilitary Case Study: The Bay of Pigs’, *Naval War College Review*, Nov.–Dec. 1972, p. 37. According to the well connected Howard Handleman of *US News and World Report*, when asked how ‘they were going to beat the vastly superior forces of Castro’, the exiles replied ‘in terms of a mass uprising behind the lines, defections from the Militia, etc. But their real belief... is that the logic of the situation will require the US to send in Marines to make sure that the invasion is a success.’ (Arthur Schlesinger, Memorandum for the President, ‘Howard Handleman on Cuba’, p. 1, 31 March 1961, POF, box 114A, JFKL)

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Bundy.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Bundy.

¹⁰⁹ See Eisenhower, ‘Account of My December 6th, 1960 Meeting with President-elect Kennedy’, n.d., WF, DDE Diary Ser., box 55, DDEL and Eisenhower, account of 19 Jan. 1961 meeting with Kennedy [p. 1 missing], DDE: Papers, Post Presidential, Augusta–Walter Reed Ser., box 1, DDEL.

Eisenhower. 'I don't fully understand why not', noted Bundy. 'Looking back, it's very odd. We should have asked Eisenhower: What the hell did you mean [with this covert operation]? Politically it would have been very useful: try to pin him down, take part of the responsibility. The President never said, "Get Goodpaster [and send him to Eisenhower]."'¹¹⁰ And so Kennedy hesitated, unhappy with the plan he had inherited from the previous administration, but unwilling to abandon it. And while he hesitated, the training in Guatemala continued, and the CIA warned that time was running out.¹¹¹ While he hesitated, he inched forward, towards approval.

In the weeks that followed the Mann–Bissell exchange, the focus of the debate shifted. Everyone acknowledged that the fundamental point, the one that would decide victory or defeat, was what would happen after the creation of the beachhead. As McGeorge Bundy later wrote to General

¹¹⁰ Interview with Bundy. General Goodpaster had been scheduled to take a command in Europe as soon as Eisenhower stepped down, but Kennedy had insisted that 'he would like to hold Goodpaster for two months into the new Administration... He would be handicapped unless he had Goodpaster for a month or two'. (Eisenhower, 'Account of My December 6th, 1960 Meeting with President-elect Kennedy', n.d., p. 6, WF, DDE Diary Ser., box 55, DDEL. See also Eisenhower to Kennedy, 16 Dec. 1960, *ibid.*)

In his two months in the Kennedy White House, Goodpaster was never asked his views on the Cuban operation or told to get in touch with Eisenhower. Nor was he ever invited to any meeting dealing with the operation. (Interview with Goodpaster) After the Bay of Pigs débâcle, Eisenhower told a select group of Republicans: 'We must have advance knowledge of certain operations before we can give our support. This was the habit in our Administration but was not observed by Mr. Kennedy in the Cuban operation.' ('Memorandum of Conference with the President', 12 May 1961, p. 7, DDE: Papers, Post Presidential, August–Walter Reed Ser., box 1, DDEL)

¹¹¹ 'A driving force behind the operation was that the longer we waited, the more time the USSR would have to pour in military equipment, which would make it impossible to overthrow Castro short of major military invasion. There was the specter of the jets that Fidel would receive.' (Interview with Esterline.) Moreover, the November 1960 revolt in Guatemala had convinced the CIA 'that we could not stay there too long'. (Interview with Bissell.) The US embassy warned that the regime was unstable. (*Joint Weeka*, no. 48, 2 Dec. 1960; *Joint Weeka*, no. 50, 19 Dec. 1960; *Joint Weeka*, no. 2, 12 Jan. 1961. All FOIA.) 'Further', Bissell advised Eisenhower, 'people who are training these individuals [the Cubans] think morale will suffer dangerously if action is not taken by early March.' (Bissell, in 'Memorandum of Meeting with the President [Tuesday, January 3 at 9:30 a.m.]', 9 Jan. 1961, pp. 5–6, WHO, Special Assistant Ser., Presidential Subser., box 5, DDEL. On time running out, see also 'Memorandum for: Chief WH/4', 4 Jan. 1961, p. 5, Annex 14, NSF, box 61A, JFKL; 'Evaluation of CIA Task Force', enclosed in Lemnitzer to Secretary of Defense, 10 March 1961, pp. 17–22, Annex 10, *ibid.*; 'Proposed Operation Against Cuba', 11 March 1961, pp. 3–5, Annex 11, *ibid.*; PMSGM, 24 April 1961, p. 20, *ibid.*; PMSGM, 26 April 1961, pp. 2–3, *ibid.*; 'Narrative', p. 15; Mann, 'List of Conclusions', enclosed in Mann to Secretary of State, 15 Feb. 1961, p. 3, enclosed in Bundy, 'Memorandum for the President', 18 Feb. 1961, NSF, box 35, JFKL; Bissell, 'Cuba', 17 Feb. 1961, pp. 1–2, 4, 6–7, *ibid.*)

Maxwell Taylor, 'Success in this operation was always understood to be dependent upon an internal Cuban reaction.'¹¹²

The debate, however, ignored the Mann and Bissell papers. 'I don't remember ever seeing this document', observed Bissell after reading my copy of Mann's 15 February memo.¹¹³ 'I don't think I ever saw the Bissell paper', remarked Mann after reading my copy of Bissell's 17 February memo. He had written his paper on his own initiative, he explained, without consulting Berle or Rusk, the two other insiders in the State Department on the operation; there was at that point no common State Department position. 'I don't even know what Rusk thought of the operation', Mann remembers. 'I don't think anyone knows. To this day, I don't know. Rusk was an enigma to me: I never knew what he thought. I just never knew what he thought. He never said. I never understood Rusk. He was like Buddha, silent.'¹¹⁴

What was the reaction of the policymakers to Mann's memo? According to Mann himself, 'Nothing at all'. Kennedy never called him to discuss it. Nor was he asked to defend or expand on his views by Bundy, Rusk or anyone else. There was no meeting with Bissell to compare the two papers. 'It was like a stone falling in water. That's essentially it.'¹¹⁵ In the weeks that followed, the focus was on the figleaf (and, to a lesser extent, given the positive evaluations of the JCS, on the military feasibility of a beachhead). Very little attention was paid to what would happen in Phase 2, that is, after the establishment of the beachhead.

'We didn't have any agreed upon policy for the contingency that we successfully establish a beachhead – what next? We had no plan on how to end the war', remarked Bissell.¹¹⁶ His explanation for this lapse is, at least for an outsider, perplexing, and yet consistent with the evidence.

¹¹² Bundy to Taylor, 4 May 1961, p. 2, NSF, box 35, JFKL.

¹¹³ Interview with Bissell.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Mann. The lack of a State Department position, suggested by the written record, is confirmed in interviews with Bundy and Goodwin (who adds 'Rusk was a master at not expressing a position'). (Telephone interview with Goodwin, 13 Nov. 1992) Rusk himself says, 'I never expressed my doubts explicitly in our planning sessions', and notes that 'many of my colleagues...believed that I favored the invasion'. (Rusk, *As I Saw It*, pp. 210, 212) As for Berle, after some initial reluctance, he supported the operation. He would have preferred, however, that the United States 'act as a great Power' and use force openly. (See 'The Diary of Adolf A. Berle', entries of 11 March, 12 March, 3 May 1961 [quoted], Roll 7 [1954–1960], Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Berle in PMSGM, 5 May 1961, pp. 2–3, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.)

'The way the State Department operated', Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric observed, 'was to come in with everybody on his own, so to speak, with Rusk perhaps leading off, but there being no necessary correlation between what he said and [Averell] Harriman said or [George] Ball said or [Roger] Hilsman or whoever else was there, whatever assistant secretary was there along with the State group.'

¹¹⁶ Interview with Bissell.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Mann.

And it is consistent with what occurred in other cases, such as in PBSUCCESS.

‘In most covert operations I know of’, observed Bissell, ‘particularly those that have a large paramilitary component, the planning for later stages is very incomplete. The outcome of the first stages of the operation is usually so difficult to predict (especially in operations like PBSUCCESS and the Bay of Pigs, in which there is very heavy reliance on psychological warfare) that it wouldn’t have seemed sensible to have planned the later stages. One can plan the first phases, but not what happens next.’¹¹⁷

When I told Bissell’s former deputy and successor, Richard Helms, that I was baffled by the fact that these senior CIA officers had not discussed Phase 2, he explained, ‘When you begin to work on Phase 1 in something as big as the Bay of Pigs, you are so absorbed with all the details – security, cover, personnel problems, public relations, etc. – that you have no time for Phase 2. To think much about Phase 2 is quite beyond their capacity. When they end their meetings together in the evening at 9 p.m., they are not going to start focusing on Phase 2, when everyone is dying to get out so that they can go back to work on Phase 1.’¹¹⁸

Indeed, it is clear that beyond a general tendency to denigrate the quality and commitment of the Cuban army and militia, there was not a united CIA view about what would happen in Phase 2.¹¹⁹ This was true regarding the likelihood of uprisings after the beachhead had been established, and even regarding the degree of popular support enjoyed by the Castro regime. Contrary to later allegations, Dulles, Bissell and many of the men within WH/4 were not blind in this regard. This is not surprising. ‘At the time’, Esterline recalls, ‘we still had in place in Cuba a number of good agents; and we gave them fairly sophisticated communication equipment before the US Embassy was closed, and they kept operating after the embassy was closed. Therefore our information was quite good for quite a while.’¹²⁰ Thus Dulles told the National Security Council in April 1960 that ‘disillusionment with Castro had

¹¹⁷ Interview with Bissell.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Helms. ‘We worked seven days a week through the entire period; I [Esterline] worked 80 hours a week. At 7 a.m. every morning I met with my staff people; again we met at 6 p.m. to recap all that had happened during the day.’ (Interview with Esterline)

¹¹⁹ See for example ‘Second Meeting’, pp. 8, 16, 18–20; PMSGM, 24 April 1961, pp. 3–4, 13–18, NSF, box 61A, JFKL; PMSGM, 26 April 1961, pp. 3–5, *ibid.*; ‘Memorandum for: General Maxwell D. Taylor’, 26 April 1961, Annex 18, *ibid.*; PMSGM, 3 May 1961, p. 3, *ibid.*; PMSGM, 30 May 1961, pp. 1–4, *ibid.*

¹²⁰ Interview with Esterline. ‘After the Embassy was closed, we still had a number of agents in Cuba with communication equipment who were left behind, including a few Americans. Two Americans were executed: one was indeed CIA, the other had nothing to do with us – he only liked to brag around that he had CIA contacts.’ (Interview with Esterline)

occurred principally among the educated classes of the population; there was not much evidence of any change in the feeling of other classes for Castro. A change in the sentiment of the lower classes would only occur over a long period of time, probably as a result of economic difficulties.' He was more optimistic, but not wildly so, nine months later, as he told Eisenhower 'that the white collar people were against Castro but the peasants and workers were still largely for him; however, reliable reports indicated that the trend is against Castro'.¹²¹ Other CIA officials involved in the operation were equally sober: 'In September [1960] we thought he [Castro] still had 75 % of the population behind him, although his popularity was then declining', noted one,¹²² while another said: 'I have a paper of 3 March [1961] in which it was estimated that... 25 % of the population was opposed to the Castro regime.'¹²³

Jack Esterline conveyed the contradictions and doubts within WH/4 about the mood in Cuba well.

How many Cubans would rise up [once the beachhead had been established]? That was the \$64,000 question. And there was no way it could be determined until the beachhead had been established.

Hawkins, myself and the others talked about what would happen after the beachhead [had been established]; some old Cuba-hands thought that the Cubans would rise up. Others among us thought that we really didn't know. There was disagreement as to how feasible it would be to break out of the beachhead.¹²⁴

Reports on the strength of the Castro government were contradictory, depending on the agent. In the Task Force, many of the old hands were inclined to put the best face on it [i.e.: to stress the fragility of the regime].

We clearly understood what the army situation was in Guatemala [at the time of PBSUCCESS]. In Cuba it was very difficult to get hold of anything that was going on in Castro's army; it was very difficult to find an asset. We felt that the militia would tend to melt away. We had a number of the old military officers with us [in the Task Force]; their view was: it's nothing, we will cream the army. We knew that this was hogwash but we didn't think that the military was a tough problem.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Quotations from 'Discussion at the 441st Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, April 14, 1960', 14 April 1960, pp. 7–8, WF, NSC Ser., box 12, DDEL and from 'Memorandum of Meeting with the President (Tuesday, January 3 at 9:30 a.m.)', 9 Jan. 1961, p. 4, *ibid.* ¹²² XXX [Hawkins] in 'Second Meeting', p. 9.

¹²³ XXX, in PMSGM, 26 April 1961, p. 5, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.

¹²⁴ Asked whether there were written papers on what would happen after the establishment of the beachhead, Esterline replied: 'There were papers on how the *Frente* would make appeals to the people of Cuba, the governments of Latin America and especially the government of the United States asking for help.' (Interview with Esterline.)

¹²⁵ 'We had very little penetration of the Cuban army; in the months before April 1961 one of our major sources of information was the exiles (who had their contacts in Havana) and the CIA Station in Cuba. But we didn't have penetration of the Armed Forces: it is a slow, professional job; requires a lot of time. All our concentration was on things that could bring quick results.' (Interview with Bissell)

There was belief in the magic of US power, in the impact on the Cubans of US ships coming to the shoreline and of US planes flying overhead.¹²⁶

Bissell, and the CIA officials who surrounded him, believed that if the rebels could hold the beachhead for a few days, they would be able to hold it for the next month and beyond. If Castro proved unable to defeat the invaders, things were bound to happen. It was not deemed important to define exactly what would happen or how or when; it was not important and even a little silly, for planning could not be specific beyond the first phase. But just imagine: Castro is unable to defeat the beachhead, the rebel air force has absolute control of the sky, it bombs without pause and with increasing effectiveness. Things were bound to happen.¹²⁷

Things were bound to happen: Bissell himself was not sure exactly what. 'The very able Marine Colonel [Hawkins] who was my aide for the operation felt that once the beachhead had been consolidated, very soon – as a result of the psychological offensive, disinformation campaign, and so on – the Brigade would begin to attract a lot of young people, get stronger, and march on to Havana.' Bissell himself was sceptical. 'I always considered this highly unlikely', he said. He felt, however, that if the Brigade were able to consolidate the beachhead and achieve a stalemate, then the United States would have different options: recognise it as the Cuban government and begin to give material support; or go to the OAS and get the OAS to impose a ceasefire and free elections, 'or something of that kind'.¹²⁸ What is striking, for an outsider, is that CIA officials did not discuss their scenarios of the second phase even among themselves. Thus Bissell: 'How did Dulles, Esterline, see developments after Phase 1? I don't know. I don't think that they spent much time on it.'¹²⁹

Bissell had his own ideas, his own hopes regarding Phase 2, but he did not discuss them with the men around him (Esterline, Barnes, Hawkins, Dulles) or with the players outside the CIA. So in the CIA each of the protagonists was alone with his own thoughts and hopes about the second phase.¹³⁰

'I thought that there would be enough time to make some decision', Bissell explained. 'Kennedy never pressed for one. I don't remember any in-depth discussion at the White House about what to do after Phase 1. Everybody was concerned with Phase 1. And everybody had the feeling

¹²⁶ Interview with Esterline.

¹²⁷ Interviews with Bissell and Esterline. See also Bissell, *OH* (Columbia University, 1973), pp. 25–26.

¹²⁸ Quotations from interview with Bissell and Bissell, *OH* (Columbia University, 1973), p. 27. When told of Bissell's statement on the lack of thoughts about Phase 2, Esterline remarked: 'No. Thought was given to Phase 2; but not enough organized thought.' (Interview with Esterline)

¹²⁹ Interview with Bissell.

¹³⁰ Interview with Bissell.

that if we established the beachhead, then we would have time. It was a state of mind. Because of the intense concentration on Phase 1, people in meetings didn't want to divert the discussion.¹³¹ McGeorge Bundy agreed: 'While there were arguments about Phase 2, it is true that neither side [CIA, White House] focused on it. Phase 2 didn't get much study.'¹³² The record supports Bundy's and Bissell's recollection: the reluctance to focus on Phase 2 was shared by the men in the White House and in all the other agencies that were in on the secret.

There was, however, at least one exception: Thomas Mann focused on Phase 2 and concluded that it would not work. But the record indicates that in the weeks that followed his 15 February memo quoted above, he abandoned his opposition and focused instead on the figleaf. Eventually, he came out in support of the operation. 'Tom Mann', stated McNamara, 'endorsed the plan before the point of no return.'¹³³

'I do have a recollection', Mann writes, 'of a meeting in the Department of State at which President Kennedy asked each of those present to vote for or against the proposed operation. As everybody present expressed support, I did the same. I did this', he explains, 'because I did not wish to leave the impression that I would not support whatever the president decided to do.'¹³⁴ According to Mann's friend Lincoln Gordon, 'Tom was expecting to be and was designated ambassador to Mexico, and he was very anxious to get out. ... He was very tired, and he was terribly troubled by the fact that what turned out to be the Bay of Pigs was in gestation at that time. ... In due course, Tom Mann left for the embassy in Mexico. He managed to get himself out of Washington before the Bay of Pigs took place.'¹³⁵ Mann may have felt that he had already gone far enough. He had done his duty by writing a forceful and courageous memo that had been met by silence. To persist, under the circumstances, would have been foolhardy.

A senior official who claims to have known that Phase 2 would not work is Paul Nitze, who attended many meetings on the operation. Having been convinced by General Edward Lansdale that the plan was impractical, Nitze says that he had decided to speak up strongly and clearly at a meeting in the State Department called by Rusk on 4 April. 'But Kennedy arrived with [Senator William] Fulbright on his arm. Fulbright went into a long and passionate exposition of his views – how

¹³¹ Interview with Bissell.

¹³² Interview with Bundy.

¹³³ McNamara in PMSGM, 3 May 1961, p. 7, NSF, box 61A, JFKL. On Mann and the figleaf, see for example Lemnitzer in PMSGM, 18 May 1961, pp. 10–11, *ibid*.

¹³⁴ Mann, letter to the author, 13 May 1992. See also 'Summary of White House Meetings', 9 May 1961, p. 3, Annex 16, NSF, box 61A, JFKL. The meeting took place on 4 April 1961.

¹³⁵ Lincoln Gordon, *OH* (Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 1969), pp. 10–11.

it would be outrageous and immoral for the United States to engage in a covert operation against Cuba.' Nitze took great exception to what Fulbright had to say. 'I hopped into the debate and attacked Fulbright, and as a result I never got around to saying what really was on my mind, that the operation would not work – for which I ever after kicked myself.'¹³⁶ Bissell's recollection of the meeting is different. He makes no mention of Nitze's exchange with Fulbright, only that the President 'asked everyone for their votes' and Nitze was among those who voted in favour.¹³⁷ In any event, Nitze never did get round to voicing his opposition.

Of the critics of the plan, Dean Rusk did not argue that Phase 2 would not work, he merely emphasised the diplomatic cost for the United States. And so did Arthur Schlesinger, who wrote three cogent memos to Kennedy along the same lines. That was it.¹³⁸ In this regard, Kennedy was poorly served by his advisers, but he himself failed to probe the tentative voices of protest.

'At the 17 February meeting the President and the Secretary had urged an examination of all possible alternatives',¹³⁹ and on 11 March, the CIA recommended the Trinidad Plan, which was similar to the plan the JCS had evaluated in early February. The crux of it was:

The military plan contemplates the holding of a perimeter around the beachhead area [which included the town of Trinidad]. It is believed that initial attacks by the Castro militia, even if conducted in considerable force, could be repulsed with substantial loss to the attacking forces. The scale of the operation and the display of professional competence and of determination on the part of the assault force would, it is hoped, demoralize the militia and induce defections therefrom, impair the morale of the Castro regime, and induce widespread rebellion. If the initial

¹³⁶ Interview with Paul Nitze, Washington DC, 8 Oct. 1992; see also Paul Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision* (New York, 1989), pp. 183–5. For Lansdale's involvement, see Lansdale in PMSGM, 2 May 1961, p. 12, NSF, box 61A, JFKL. Lansdale and Nitze had worked together in the Philippines against the Huks.

¹³⁷ Bissell, *OH* (JFKL, 1967), p. 27. Fulbright never refers to Nitze in his account of the 4 April meeting (see Fulbright, *OH* [JFKL, 1965], p. 47–58).

¹³⁸ See Schlesinger, 'Memorandum for the President', 15 March 1961, NSF, box 35, JFKL; *ibid.*, 5 April 1961, POF, box 115, JFKL; *ibid.*, 10 April 1961, POF, box 65, JFKL. Chester Bowles did oppose the operation, but he was only peripherally involved in the deliberations. He expressed his opposition not to Kennedy, but in a memo to Rusk which never reached the President. (See Bowles to Kennedy, 28 April 1961, POF, box 114A, JFKL; Bowles, *Promises to Keep: My Years in Public Life, 1941–1969* [New York, 1971], pp. 384–92; Rusk, *As I Saw It*, p. 209.)

For Fulbright's argument, see his memorandum, 'Cuba Policy', 29 March 1961, in POF, box 114A, JFKL; Pat Holt, *OH* (Senate Historical Office, 1980), pp. 150–56; Fulbright, *OH*, pp. 31–3, 43–59. Fulbright was the only member of Congress who was told about the operation. (See Rusk, *As I Saw It*, p. 209.)

¹³⁹ Bissell in 'Second Meeting', p. 4.

actions proved to be unsuccessful in thus detonating a major revolt, the assault force would retreat to the contiguous mountain area and continue operations as a powerful guerrilla force.

This course of action has a better chance than any other of leading to the prompt overthrow of the Castro regime because it holds the possibility of administering a demoralizing shock.¹⁴⁰

Thus the plan assumed that if the initial assault did not spark a major revolt, the CEF would be able to move into the Escambray mountains, even though this would require breaking through the encircling Castro troops and forging through territory controlled by the enemy.

The plan also noted that ‘the provisional government would land as soon as the beachhead had been secured. If initial military operations were successful and especially if there were evidence of spreading disaffection against the Castro regime, the provisional government could be recognized and a legal basis provided for at least non-governmental logistic support.’¹⁴¹

No decision came out of the 11 March meeting. The President ‘believes that the best possible plan, from the point of view of combined military, political and psychological considerations, has not yet been presented, and new proposals are to be concerted promptly’, stated National Security Action Memorandum 31 on 11 March. But the same memorandum went on to note that ‘The President expects to authorize U.S. support for an appropriate number of patriotic Cubans to return to their homeland.’¹⁴²

Rather than focusing on the key assumptions of the 11 March plan regarding Phase 2 and the guerrilla option, President Kennedy focused on the figleaf. And so, in a clumsy compromise, the Trinidad Plan was abandoned for one in which the US role would be less flagrant: ‘At the 11 March meeting, the President asked for a plan to be prepared which would be less spectacular in execution, and therefore more plausible as an essentially Cuban operation.’¹⁴³

Over the next few days, WH/4 worked intensively to devise a plan with the desired characteristics. They presented three alternatives to the Working Group of the Joint Staff late in the morning of 14 March. ‘My staff evaluated it’, the chairman of the Working Group later stated, ‘and

¹⁴⁰ ‘Proposed operation against Cuba’, 11 March 1961, pp. 8–9, Annex 11, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9. The paper also estimated that there were in Cuba ‘some 1200 active guerrillas and another thousand individuals engaging in various acts of conspiracy and sabotage’. (*Ibid.*, p. 4)

¹⁴² National Security Action Memorandum 31, 11 March 1961, NSF, Meetings and Memoranda, box 329, JFKL.

¹⁴³ Gray, in ‘Memorandum for Record of the Taylor Committee’, 24 April 1961, p. 12, NSF, box 61A, JFKL. See also ‘Summary of White House Meetings’, 9 May 1961, p. 1, Annex 16, *ibid.* and ‘Narrative’, p. 10.

the JCS reviewed it on the 15th of March.' The JCS chose the alternative that had been recommended by the Working Group – the Zapata Plan; that is, the landing at the Bay of Pigs.¹⁴⁴

On 15 March, Bundy reported to Kennedy that in the afternoon 'CIA will present a revised plan for the Cuban operation. They have done a remarkable job of reframing the landing plan so as to make it unspectacular and quiet, and plausibly Cuban in its essentials. I have been a skeptic about Bissell's operation, but now I think we are on the edge of a good answer. I also think that Bissell and Hawkins have done an honorable job of meeting the proper criticisms, and cautions of the Department of State.'¹⁴⁵ At the afternoon meeting, Kennedy was briefed on the three alternative plans the JCS had considered. Each plan targeted a different area: the first was a modification of the original Trinidad Plan ('except main landings at night, without benefit of airborne landing or air strikes'); the second targeted an area on the northeast coast of Cuba, and the third the Bay of Pigs, on the southern coast.¹⁴⁶ The President withheld approval of the

¹⁴⁴ Quotation from Gray, in 'Memorandum for Record of the Taylor Committee', 24 April 1961, p. 12, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.

Did the JCS give McNamara the wrong impression, that is, that they preferred the Zapata Plan to the Trinidad Plan? Yes, according to McNamara: 'It was my understanding that...the Chiefs preferred Zapata to Trinidad.' (McNamara, in PMSGM, 3 May 1961, p. 9, *ibid.*) Yes, according to Rusk: 'They didn't put their view in writing and that [their preference of Trinidad over Zapata] didn't come through. There was a strong impression that they favored the [Zapata] plan.' (PMSGM, 4 May 1961, p. 9, *ibid.*)

Actually, the JCS had been clear: 'None of the alternative concepts', they wrote to McNamara, 'are considered as feasible and likely to accomplish the objective as the basic para-military plan [Trinidad Plan].' (Lemnitzer to Secretary of Defense, 'Evaluation of the Military Aspects of Alternate Concepts, CIA Para-Military Plan, Cuba', 15 March 1961, p. 2, Annex 12, *ibid.*) 'I don't see how you can say it any clearer than that', Lemnitzer later observed. (Lemnitzer in PMSGM, 18 May 1961, p. 5, *ibid.*) In fact, already in their 3 February evaluation, the JCS had concluded: 'Based on an independent analysis by the Joint Staff the beachhead area [Trinidad] is considered to be the best area in Cuba for accomplishment of the Task Force mission.' ('Military Evaluation of the CIA Para-Military Plan, Cuba', p. 1, enclosed in Lemnitzer to Secretary of Defense, 3 Feb. 1961, Annex 9, *ibid.*)

¹⁴⁵ Bundy, 'Memorandum for the President', 15 March 1961, NSF, box 35, JFKL. (Bundy noted that 'the one major problem which remains is the air battle. I think there is unanimous agreement that at some stage the Castro Air Force must be removed. It is a very sketchy force, in very poor shape at the present, and Colonel Hawkins...thinks it can be removed by six to eight simultaneous sorties of B-26s. These will be undertaken by Cuban pilots in planes with Cuban Air Force markings. This is the only really noisy enterprise that remains.') For Bundy's earlier criticism, see Bundy, 'Memorandum for the President', 18 Feb. 1961, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ See Lemnitzer to Secretary of Defense, 'Evaluation of the Military Aspects of Alternate Concepts, CIA Para-Military Plan, Cuba', 15 March 1961, p. 1 quoted, Annex 12, NSF, box 61A, JFKL; Memorandum for the Record, 'Briefings of JCS on "Bumpy Road" by General Gray', 4 May 1961, pp. 1-2, Annex 13, *ibid.*

Zapata Plan and directed certain modifications to be considered.¹⁴⁷ The CIA returned the following day, 16 March, and presented a modification for the landing at Zapata.¹⁴⁸ Kennedy authorised the agency to proceed with the plan, but ‘reserved the right to call off the plan even up to 24 hours prior to the landing’.¹⁴⁹ In fact, Kennedy was still hesitating: in a 4 April meeting, he again indicated ‘his preference for an operation which would infiltrate the force in units of 200–250’. Again, the CIA countered that this would not work.¹⁵⁰

At the President’s request, a few days later (about one week before the landing) Bissell briefed Robert Kennedy on the operation. ‘He was enthusiastic about it’, Robert Kennedy recalled.

He said – this was a very important factor in my mind and, I think, in the President’s – he said it really can’t be a failure, because once they land on the beach, even if as a military force they don’t win, they can always stay in Cuba and be guerrillas. They’ll cause Castro so much difficulty. It’ll be a very important factor in bringing about his downfall. [Bissell] said this was guerrilla territory and that they’d all been trained for guerrilla action.¹⁵¹

Asked whether Robert Kennedy’s statement was correct, Bissell replied, ‘Yes, I think it is, to the best of my recollection.’¹⁵²

The rest of the story – the cancellation of the air strikes, the landing, the battle at the beachhead, and the surrender – has been told time and again and need not be repeated here.¹⁵³ Instead, it is better to return to the initial question: How could Bissell and the CIA push for this plan? How could Kennedy accept it?

Kennedy and the CIA were like ships passing in the night. The real failure of intelligence was not so much regarding Cuba as it was within the US government – between the right hand and the left hand. There was a fundamental failure of communication between the president and the CIA about what would happen if developments after Phase 1 did not go smoothly.

¹⁴⁷ ‘The President did not like the idea of the dawn landing and felt that in order to make this appear as an inside guerrilla-type operation, the ships should be clear of the area by dawn. He directed that this planning be reviewed and another meeting be held the following morning.’ (‘Summary of White House Meetings’, 9 May 1961, p. 2, Annex 16, *ibid.*)

¹⁴⁸ ‘At the meeting with the President, CIA presented revised concepts for the landing at Zapata wherein there would be air drops at first light with the landing at night and all of the ships away from the objective area by dawn.’ (*Ibid.*)¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3. ¹⁵¹ Guthman and Shulman, *Robert Kennedy*, p. 240.

¹⁵² Interview with Bissell.

¹⁵³ The best account remains Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, pp. 173–288. An excellent study is Vandenbroucke, *Perilous Options*, pp. 40–50. For Cuban accounts, see Lisandro Otero et al. (eds.), *Playa Girón: derrota del imperialismo*, 4 vols. (Havana, 1961), vol. 1, pp. 81–517 and Quintín Pino Machado, *La batalla de Girón: razones de una victoria* (Havana, 1983), esp. pp. 67–192.

‘With hindsight’, mused McGeorge Bundy, ‘it is clear that both Dulles and Bissell thought that when Kennedy really had to choose between failure or putting US troops ashore, he would do the latter. That was simply a misreading of Kennedy. It wasn’t as if Kennedy hadn’t made it clear – he had. With hindsight, however, we didn’t hammer it out as much as we could wish we had. It was said, all right, but it was not underlined as much as one could have wished.’¹⁵⁴

Bundy’s hindsight is confirmed by the men who ran the operation within the CIA. In Esterline’s words:

We never went beyond [planning] the mechanics of establishing a viable bridgehead for X number of days and establishing a Provisional Government and putting those five old gentlemen – none of whom was too brave – on the beachhead. And then it would be up to the United States to intervene [faced with the beachhead and the Provisional government there asking for help]. And nobody [in WH/4] really wanted to articulate that [i.e.: that Kennedy’s hand would be forced].

What I am sure of is that we told the *Frente* that there would be no US overt military intervention until a viable provisional government had been established on the beach.

We would establish the beachhead – it would give the US time to decide what to do.

The unstated assumption was that once the beachhead was established, the US would have the pretext it needed to intervene on behalf of the Provisional Government against the Communist colossus. It was made abundantly clear to the Cubans that they could expect no help until they had established that piece of real estate.¹⁵⁵

Bissell’s thoughts ran along similar lines. ‘I was convinced that nothing would induce Kennedy to authorize the use of force short of impending disaster of the operation.’ If the beachhead had been established and maintained for a reasonable length of time, and the Revolutionary Council was asking for US aid from Cuban soil, and the invaders were on the verge of being overwhelmed, then, Bissell assumed, Kennedy would have to relent and intervene. This intervention would take the form of the demand for free elections in Cuba or, in the likely case that Castro would refuse to comply, stronger measures.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Bundy.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Esterline. ‘Hawkins felt that if we could establish the beachhead and hold it for a few days – then the Government in Exile could fly in, and the United States could help them.’ (Interview with Esterline) This feeling had already been expressed, openly, by Esterline and Hawkins in their 4 January memorandum.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Bissell. Vandenbroucke has made a similar point in relation to Allen Dulles. Going through the Dulles papers in the Mudd Library, he first came across a telling comment by Dulles explaining that one reason the CIA planners did not ‘raise

‘Those of us in the CIA who were advocating the operation... [were] deeply committed to it emotionally’, Bissell has noted.¹⁵⁷ They believed that if Eisenhower had given the green light for the invasion, he would have seen to it that it succeeded, sending in the troops if necessary.¹⁵⁸ They assumed that Kennedy would do the same, if not out of personal conviction, then at least because of his campaign rhetoric and the domestic pressure that would inevitably build once the beachhead had been established. Therefore, what was crucial was that Kennedy give the green light, that he cross the point of no return. The CIA insistence that a guerrilla option existed must be examined within this context.

‘Those in charge of the operation must accept a serious responsibility for having ill-informed the President on this aspect of the operation’, Bissell has written.¹⁵⁹ ‘I think all of us committed the error of saying “there is always the guerrilla option”, without planning it’, he stated in a later interview. ‘If I had said to Col. Hawkins, we have got to develop in detail what the guerrilla option involves, and how it will be carried out, I think he would have said, “I don’t have the time, I’m too busy, and anyway that’s very unlikely to happen.”’ This was exactly Bissell’s view: the operation would succeed, because Phase 1 would be successful. Therefore, there was no need for the guerrilla option.¹⁶⁰

But the guerrilla option was important in a different way: as a way to reassure Kennedy that the operation could not fail. This is why the CIA referred to it repeatedly when briefing the President. This is why Bissell

objections’ to restrictions they deemed unwise was that ‘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.’ (*Perilous Options*, p. 33, quoting from Dulles’s handwritten notes.)¹⁵⁷ Bissell, *OH* (JFKL, 1967), p. 8.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Once a nation resorts to force, it should ensure that the venture is a success.’ (Eisenhower, in ‘Memorandum of Conference with the President’, 12 May 1961, p. 2, DDE: Papers, Post Presidential, August–Walter Reed Ser., box 1, DDEL); ‘I believe there is only one thing to do when you go into this kind of thing, it must be a success.’ (Eisenhower, draft of Oral History, 8 Nov. 1966, p. 7, enclosed in Malcolm Moos to Eisenhower, 5 Oct. 1967, *ibid.*).

‘I will say, I would have to say in any discussion of the Bay of Pigs, that I’m as sure as I’m sitting here that if this had all developed in the Eisenhower administration, President Eisenhower would have seen it through to its conclusion. Because I remember him saying to the group in the very beginning, when he began to approve training, he said, “Now boys, I want to tell you something. Unless you’re going to look at this thing as something you are going to see through from beginning to end, let’s not start anything.” He repeatedly told them that, when they were considering the thing. He said, “Let’s not talk about this unless, whatever you want to try and do in this, think in terms of being successful.”’ (Gordon Gray, *OH* [Columbia University, 1968], p. 276.) See also Andrew Goodpaster, *OH* (Columbia University, 1967), p. 45.

¹⁵⁹ Bissell, ‘Reflections on the Bay of Pigs’, *Strategic Review*, Winter 1984, p. 70.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Bissell.

waxed enthusiastically about it to the President's brother and the President himself. It was a smokescreen, a lullaby for John Kennedy.¹⁶¹

Hence, the ships passing in the night. For both the CIA and the President, the operation included a two-track approach. They were agreed on Track 1: an internal collapse of the Cuban regime after the successful establishment of the beachhead. Track 2 meant, for Kennedy, that if this collapse did not occur, the invaders could melt into the countryside and become guerrillas. For the CIA, however, Track 2 meant US intervention.

It is within this context that the debate over the cancellation of the air strikes becomes relevant. Here, too, ships pass in the night. When Bissell claimed that the battle had been lost in the air, his critics scoffed: even with the air strikes, they argue, the operation was doomed – how could 1,400 men get from the beachhead to Havana?¹⁶² (That is, the critics do what Kennedy and his advisers failed to do: they focus on Phase 2.) In fact, both Bissell and his critics are right. In February 1961, the JCS had stated: 'it is estimated that, lacking a popular uprising or substantial follow-on forces, the Cuban army could eventually reduce the beachhead, but no estimate of the time this would require is possible.'¹⁶³ Control of

¹⁶¹ The Taylor Committee put it well: 'In approving the operation, the President and senior officials had been greatly influenced by the understanding that the landing force could pass to guerrilla status, if unable to hold the beachhead.' ('Conclusions of the Cuban Study Group', memorandum no. 3, 13 June 1961, p. 2, enclosed in Taylor to President, 13 June 1961, NSF, box 61A, JFKL.)

¹⁶² 'With hindsight, I think one is not justified in saying that given adequate air cover the operation would surely have been a success... I do think you could pretty well say, however, that without air cover it didn't have a chance.' (Bissell, *OH* [JFKL, 1967], p. 14; see also Bissell, 'Reflections on the Bay of Pigs', pp. 68–9). The same point was made by Dulles: 'Many of us thought at the time of decision, and still feel, that with adequate air cover the operation could have been successful.' (Allen W. Dulles, 'My Answer on the Bay of Pigs', unpub. ms., second draft, master copy [1965], p. 17, Allen W. Dulles Papers, box 244, Mudd Library. See also Allen W. Dulles, 'My Answer to the Bay of Pigs', pp. 16, 29–37, unpub. ms., *ibid.*, box 138.)

¹⁶³ 'Military Evaluation of the CIA Para-Military Plan, Cuba', enclosed in Lemnitzer to Secretary of Defense, 3 Feb. 1961, p. 2, Annex 9, NSF, box 61A, JFKL. For a powerful criticism of the JCS's performance in the operation, see Vandembroucke, *Perilous Options*, pp. 22–26.

In a 1964 interview, General Earle Wheeler, who had been the director of the Joint Staff in 1961, claimed that 'we had a tremendous difficulty in getting information out of the agency [CIA]'. (Wheeler, *OH* [JFKL, 1964], p. 20.) This complaint, however, was not made by any of the military officers who testified to the Taylor Committee and conflicts explicitly with the recollection of General George Decker. General Decker, who was the Chief of Staff of the Army in 1961, has stated that 'we were in pretty close touch with them [CIA]'; when asked, 'Were there problems because they [CIA] were holding things too close?' he replied: 'Oh, no. Oh, no. We had no problems with communication at all'. (Decker, *OH* [JFKL, 1968], p. 12.)

The JCS and their supporters have made three valid points, however: a) the JCS had made clear their preference for Trinidad over Zapata (see above no. 144); b) they had made clear that ultimate success of the operation depended on Phase 2, about

the air would not have changed this. But control of the air might have assured that the beachhead could have resisted at least several days. And this, in the CIA view, would have been enough to have forced Kennedy's hand and triggered the American intervention. Hence the air strikes were vital – not to enable the 1,400 Cubans to march from the beachhead to Havana, but to trigger US intervention.

'It's very much on my conscience that I recommended that we undertake the Bay of Pigs. It was recommended to him [Kennedy] unanimously by all of his advisers', lamented McNamara in 1968. 'Every single one of his advisers, me included, recommended it', echoed Rusk.¹⁶⁴ Reviewing the evidence, one is struck by the passivity of Kennedy's advisers within the White House, the Department of State, and the Department of Defense.¹⁶⁵

'There were many reasons for this restraint', McGeorge Bundy wrote to Kennedy shortly after the debacle, 'but respectful unfamiliarity with a new President was an important element.'¹⁶⁶ Kennedy's top aides were not in awe of the CIA. They were in awe of the President. They did not know each other well, and they did not know the President well.¹⁶⁷ They did not want to take a position that would not please the President. 'Bundy was not happy with the operation', noted Richard Goodwin, 'but he was not going to attack it.'¹⁶⁸ Bundy put it delicately: 'It was not my job to be in visible disagreement with the President; once he leaned in favor, I supported him.'¹⁶⁹

It is tempting to read an almost causal link between PBSUCCESS and

which they could not comment for lack of data; and c) they bear no responsibility for the cancellation of the D-Day air strike. As Lemnitzer put it, Kennedy made this decision 'without ever telling the Joint Chiefs of Staff or ever asking about it'. (Lyman Lemnitzer, *OH* [Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 1982], p. 17)

¹⁶⁴ *New York Times*, 5 Feb. 1968, pp. 9 and 15. See also Rusk, *As I Saw It*, pp. 207–17.

¹⁶⁵ There was a certain amount of groupthink, as defined by Irving Janis: 'The mode of thinking that group members engage in when they are dominated by the concurrence-seeking tendency'. (Janis, 'Groupthink in Washington,' *New York Times*, 28 May 1973, p. 15. See also Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* [Boston, 1982], pp. 14–47.)

¹⁶⁶ Bundy, 'Some Preliminary Administrative Lessons of the Cuban Expedition', 24 April 1961, p. 1, NSF, box 35, JFKL.

¹⁶⁷ 'Many of us were strangers to each other and to President Kennedy as well.' (Rusk, *As I Saw It*, p. 207) 'We must bear in mind that the Administration consisted largely of strangers. The President did not personally know his Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were completely unknown to the civilian leadership.' (Taylor, *OH* [JFKL, 1964], p. 17)

¹⁶⁸ Telephone interview with Goodwin.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Bundy. See also Theodore Sorensen: 'President Kennedy did not know his advisers. He did not know their strengths and weaknesses. He did not know enough about the decision making process.' (*New York Times*, 14 Aug. 1965, p. 20)

the Cuban gambit. Indeed, many of the CIA players were the same in both operations, and victory in PBSUCCESS reinforced the 'can do' feeling, the sense of US omnipotence in the region, the sense of historical inevitability: the CIA was to Castro as the CIA had been to Arbenz. Success in Guatemala reinforced the ethnocentrism that was rooted in the previous six decades of US relations with the region. In the words of Esterline, 'Allen Dulles, Bissell and so on were marked by the experience of World War II: the US always wins! Then the Guatemalan thing stumbled to success. It reinforced the feeling that anything the US did would succeed.'¹⁷⁰

Many in the agency, including Allen Dulles and members of WH/4, understood that the majority of the Cuban population still supported Castro, just as many had understood, at the time of PBSUCCESS, that the majority of the Guatemalan population supported Arbenz. But they also believed, as Esterline put it, that 'the great majority of the Cuban population was apathetic',¹⁷¹ that is, they would not fight for their beliefs, that they would side with the winners. This view was based not so much on lack of intelligence, as on ethnocentrism, on the imperial reflex and on the lessons of the history of the region, and it was reinforced by 'our' Cubans, the 'good' Cubans: 'They say it is Cuban tradition to join a winner', explained Hawkins.¹⁷²

What is different from PBSUCCESS, however, is that in 1954 the CIA plan was based on the assumption that the Guatemalan army's will to resist would crumble. In 1961, however, the CIA plan was more complex. It included the possibility that after a successful Phase 1 Cuban resistance would collapse. But this was not the key assumption. The plan included a secret 'track 2': US military intervention.

Therefore, 'the attitude of the Cuban population was not crucial', as Helms has observed, and it would have made little difference whether the analysts from the Deputy Directorate for Intelligence had been brought in on the operation, nor indeed is there any reason to think that their analysis would have been any more sophisticated.¹⁷³

Ships passing in the night, then. Tracks that diverged, assumptions shrouded in the veils of the convoluted language, the half-expressed thoughts that characterised the principle of plausible denial. A new President was handicapped by his rhetoric during the presidential campaign, and CIA operatives were led astray by their own passionate commitment. But amid this lack of communication there was one

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Esterline.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Esterline.

¹⁷² XXX [Hawkins] in 'Memorandum for: General Maxwell D. Taylor', 26 April 1961, p. 1, Annex 18, NSF, box 61A, JFKL. See also PMSGM, 28 April 1961, p. 1, *ibid*.

¹⁷³ Interview with Helms.

common belief. Department of State officials and CIA operatives, Eisenhower's holdovers and the new Kennedy people, Republicans and Democrats,¹⁷⁴ Eisenhower and Kennedy – all agreed that Castro represented a deadly threat to US interests, and that the United States had the right to intervene to remove the threat.

The fiasco of the Bay of Pigs did not shake this conviction. Four months later, Che Guevara arranged to meet Kennedy's close aide Richard Goodwin. 'He [Che] seemed very ill at ease when we began to talk, but soon became relaxed and spoke freely', Goodwin reported to Kennedy.

Although he left no doubt of his personal and intense devotion to Communism, his conversation was free of propaganda and bombast. He spoke calmly, in a straightforward manner, and with the appearance of detachment and objectivity. He left no doubt, at any time, that he felt completely free to speak for his government and rarely distinguished between his personal observations and the official position of the Cuban government. I had the definite impression that he had thought out his remarks very carefully – they were extremely well organized.

Cuba, Che told Goodwin, wanted 'a *modus vivendi*' with the United States. 'He said they could discuss no formula that would mean giving up the type of society to which they were dedicated.' But the Cubans were willing to accept limits on their foreign policy: 'they could agree not to make any political alliance with the East – although this would not affect their natural sympathies.' And Che indicated 'very obliquely... that they could also discuss the activities of the Cuban revolution in other countries'.¹⁷⁵

Kennedy categorically refused the olive branch. Instead, he initiated Operation Mongoose, the programme of paramilitary operations, assassination attempts and sabotage designed to wreck the Cuban economy and visit the 'terrors of the earth'¹⁷⁶ on Fidel Castro. The lesson Kennedy drew from the Bay of Pigs was not that he should talk to Castro, but that he should intensify his efforts to overthrow him.

¹⁷⁴ The one exception was Fulbright.

¹⁷⁵ Goodwin, memorandum for the President, 'Conversation with Commandante Ernesto Guevara of Cuba', 22 Aug. 1961, POF, box 115, JFKL. (I would like to thank Suzanne Forbes and Stuart Culy of the Kennedy Library for bringing this document to my attention.) See also Goodwin, memorandum for the President, 22 Aug. 1961, *ibid.* and Goodwin, 'The Annals of Politics: A Footnote', *The New Yorker*, 25 May 1968, pp. 93–114.

¹⁷⁶ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (New York, 1979), p. 516.