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# Anatomy of a Failure: The Decision to Land at the Bay of Pigs

LUCIEN S. VANDENBROUCKE

Graham T. Allison's *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* was one of the most influential works of political science in the last decade. Yet the author took pains to specify that he presented only a tentative account of foreign policy decision-making; he called for more testing of his propositions and left the door open for the refinement of his models of decision-making!<sup>1</sup> Since these models have been so helpful in understanding what passes for the Kennedy administration's "finest hour," the Cuban missile crisis, it seems appropriate to respond to Allison's call for further case studies by applying his concepts to John F. Kennedy's "worst hour," the Bay of Pigs. This article therefore tests Allison's concepts by applying them to the decision to land a brigade of anti-Castro exiles in Cuba on 17 April 1961. This investigation comprises several parts that correspond to Allison's three conceptual models. Each part

<sup>1</sup> Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971), 273. For other studies using Allison's or similar concepts, see Edmund Beard, *Developing the ICBM: A Study in Bureaucratic Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976); I. M. Destler, *Making Foreign Economic Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1981); Morton H. Halperin, "The Decision to Deploy the ABM: Bureaucratic and Domestic Politics in the Johnson Administration," *World Politics* 25 (1972): 62-95. Serious literature on the Bay of Pigs is limited but growing. The most detailed journalistic account is Peter Wyden's *Bay of Pigs* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979). The best accounts by members of the Kennedy administration are in Theodore Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 291-309; and especially two books by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1978), 443-67, and *A Thousand Days* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965), 226-97. Now that official documents are being declassified and participants are talking more freely, our understanding of the venture has improved. Much, however, remains to be made public.

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uses a separate model to put the facts in a specific perspective, then evaluates the findings the given model suggests. Upon completion of this threefold investigation I will consider the limitations of Allison's models and suggest the usefulness of complementing the third model with the insights of cognitive theory.

#### NATIONAL DECISION-MAKING AND THE BAY OF PIGS

Allison's first model holds that a nation's foreign policy reflects rational and purposive behavior. Decision-makers react to the threats and opportunities arising on the international scene by formulating a number of options and submitting them to a cost-benefit analysis. The government then selects the policy option that provides the maximum payoff in terms of the nation's goals and objectives. To explain a given national policy, the analyst must therefore establish, on the basis of the available evidence, that the policy represented a coherent, value-maximizing choice.

In 1961, the cold war dominated international affairs, and the West did not seem to be winning. The Soviet Union threatened intervention in the Congo, Communist forces were poised to overrun Laos, and much closer to home, the Cuban revolution was drifting ever more to the left. Many Americans believed that the emergence of a Communist state only ninety miles from U.S. shores would pose a grave threat to the security of the Western Hemisphere. Popular opinion in the United States pressed the executive to react.

Yet its options appeared limited in dealing with the Cuban challenge. Merely observing the Cuban scene would not check the Cuban "threat"; on the other hand, the United States was reluctant to resort to gunboat diplomacy, which had fallen into disrepute. Much preferred was a median course between acquiescence and direct intervention. But the United States's efforts to isolate Cuba internationally and to cripple it through trade sanctions seemed unpromising. Fidel Castro was circumventing these measures by drawing closer to the Eastern bloc. Meanwhile, American intelligence concluded that there was little hope of the amateurish Cuban underground overthrowing Castro on its own.

Still, there was evidence of increasing disenchantment and discontent in Cuba. Hence, policymakers developed the following scenario—the anti-Castro opposition might succeed if it were trained and organized by the United States. The landing of a disciplined, well-armed force of Cuban exiles would jolt the island and trigger uprisings against the regime. From the beachhead, the émigrés could launch air strikes to disrupt Castro's communications and military forces, while they set up a provisional government. At the same time, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) would add to the disruption in Cuba through psychological warfare, using clandestine radio broadcasts and extensive leaflet drops to confuse and dishearten Castro loyalists, while encouraging the population to revolt. Chances were that, as in the case of the leftist Jacobo Arbenz during the CIA-sponsored coup in Guatemala in 1954, Castro would lose his nerve and his regime would fall apart. If not, the émigrés could take to the hills and wage a

fierce guerrilla struggle. Carried out deftly enough to conceal the American hand, this invasion scenario promised to deal with Castro while preserving the United States's image.<sup>2</sup> In short, then, the rational actor model suggests that the lack of other viable alternatives prompted the choice of the invasion, which appeared best in terms of a rational cost-benefit analysis.

Such an interpretation, however, is questionable on several grounds. First, it was less than fully rational to assume that a plan that had worked in Guatemala would meet with equal success in Cuba. Castro had over 200,000 men in arms and the benefit of the Guatemalan precedent. He therefore expected an American-sponsored coup and took numerous precautions.<sup>3</sup> Nor was it rational, no matter how elaborate the deceit, to expect that the United States could deny involvement in the invasion and escape international censure.

Finally, the rational actor interpretation suffers from the fact that the president and his advisers did not carefully weigh competing alternatives and then select the invasion of Cuba as the best policy. In reality, in response to the Eisenhower administration's growing concern about Cuba, the CIA conceived a plan in the middle of 1960 to topple Castro, submitted it to the president, and received authorization to proceed with the preparations.<sup>4</sup> Although President Dwight D. Eisenhower withheld final approval, by the time John F. Kennedy took office in January 1961 the plan had acquired a momentum of its own. Thus, Kennedy's first policy decision on Cuba was not to choose a course of action among the various options available. Instead, it was to decide for or against an invasion project to which considerable resources had already been committed, and that a powerful agency vigorously promoted. The CIA's advocacy warrants looking at the operation from the perspective of bureaucratic politics.

<sup>2</sup> On the Guatemalan episode, see Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), and Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982). For the declassified portions of the official investigation of the Bay of Pigs, see Luis E. Aguilar, ed., *Operation Zapata: The "Ultrasensitive" Report and Testimony of the Board of Inquiry on the Bay of Pigs* (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1981). The scenario of the Cuban invasion is derived from this source (pp. 9–19), and from Richard M. Bissell, interview with author, Farmington, Conn., 14 January 1981. The role of uprisings in the plan, however, remains disputed. Bissell reported that according to the CIA, the plan called for gradual rather than immediate uprisings within Cuba, and that success depended foremost on psychological warfare and Castro's loss of nerve. In fact, however, a shift occurred in CIA's perceptions as it continuously reworked its plan, and the agency progressively downgraded the role of uprisings. See Aguilar, ed., *Operation Zapata*, 86–87. But the CIA failed to make this change clear to the other decision-makers who generally believed that uprisings shortly after the landing remained a key to its success. Memorandum by Robert Kennedy, 1 June 1961, quoted in Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 445; General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, interview with author, Washington, D.C., 16 February 1982; Arthur Schlesinger, Memorandum for the President, "Cuba: Political, Diplomatic and Economic Problems," 10 April 1961, Box 65, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Mass., 3.

<sup>3</sup> Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 196.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Gray Oral History, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kans., 27–52.

## A BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS INTERPRETATION

Allison's second model, based on organizational processes, holds that bureaucratic agencies and not simply the chief executive frequently make important decisions. Bureaucracies have their own goals, in particular; the promotion of their institutional interests, or "organizational health." Likewise, organizations possess their own logic, including sets of routines and standard operating procedures (SOP). As a result, bureaucracies tend to develop their own views, which they can often translate into policy. This power stems in part from their control over information. An organization that controls information on a given issue can shape the appearance the issue takes, and thus largely predetermine the executive's response. The organizational process model therefore explains policy decisions as bureaucratic outputs based on organizational control of knowledge and conformity to institutional patterns of behavior. This approach enables analysts to reconstruct the sequence of events leading to the Cuban invasion. The account comprises two parts: how the CIA decided in favor of the invasion; and how the agency obtained executive endorsement of the project.

As noted above, the CIA originated the plan to overthrow Castro and pressed it on the president. In so doing, the agency was probably displaying typical organizational imperialism. Over the course of the 1950s, this newcomer to the federal bureaucracy had assumed a major foreign policy role. Considerable evidence suggests that, encouraged by previous successes, the CIA sought a fresh occasion to prove its effectiveness and consolidate its position.<sup>5</sup>

The CIA explored different ways of eliminating Castro. But attempts on his life proved difficult to undertake and highly uncertain, while the weakness of the Cuban underground eroded the agency's faith in an insurgency. Bureaucratic logic eventually prompted the choice of an invasion executed by exile proxies.

The study of organizational behavior has revealed that an organization's behavior at a given moment usually differs only marginally from its previous behavior. An organization facing a new situation thus typically reduces the unfamiliar issue to a familiar problem and solution. Here the Guatemalan episode, in which the CIA toppled a leftist dictator with a handful of exiles and a skillful campaign of psychological intimidation, supplied the familiar precedent. The operation was a lucky longshot, but it covered the CIA with glory and became a manner of agency program for disposing of troublesome Third World dictators. A similar operation was attempted against Indonesia's Achmed Sukarno in 1958. Although the venture failed, the CIA again turned to the Guatemalan model in dealing with Castro. CIA officials repeatedly referred to the precedent while preparing the Bay of Pigs. The agency assigned many of the operatives involved in the Guatemalan coup to the Cuban project, and envisioned a similar

<sup>5</sup> By 1960, the CIA had a history of clashes with other bureaucratic actors, particularly the Defense Department, for control of activities such as aerial reconnaissance and paramilitary operations. Roswell Gilpatrick Oral History, Kennedy Library, 41.

type of psychological warfare.<sup>6</sup> The organizational process model's explanation of bureaucratic choices therefore suggests that it was natural for the CIA to imitate the Guatemalan scenario in its Cuban venture.

The agency's prime SOP, secrecy, also rendered the invasion option attractive. Secrecy meant that within the CIA itself only a few operatives of the Directorate of Plans (covert operations) were cleared for the project. Hence many potential dissenters were eliminated, with incalculable consequences. The CIA's scenario, for instance, made limited sense unless the landing had a reasonable chance of triggering uprisings or at least widespread defections from Castro's regime. But for reasons of secrecy the agency's own authoritative Board of National Estimates, which believed that Castro had a firm grip on the island, was never asked to evaluate the Cubans' likely reaction to an invasion. Instead, the operatives used fragmentary and selected reports to draw optimistic conclusions about the potential for anti-Castro reactions.<sup>7</sup>

Once the CIA's repertoire and routines led it to choose an invasion, the next step was securing the official go-ahead. This took place in several stages. The CIA pushed its program with all its might. The only organization in a position to impede the program, the military, went along out of bureaucratic parochialism and prudence. The president then agreed to the plan while insisting on certain constraints. But organizational behavior prompted the agency to deal with these restraints in its own way.

By the time the CIA had opted for an invasion, the agency fit organizational theory's description of a typical sub-unit that, instructed to explore an option, becomes an advocate for its adoption.<sup>8</sup> In securing presidential approval for its plan, the CIA enjoyed a prized bureaucratic resource—control over information. The agency first acquired a quasi-monopoly of information on the invasion by stressing the need for secrecy, thereby keeping all but a handful of White House advisers and top-level bureaucrats ignorant of the plan. Unfortunately, the latter were mostly generalists, and secrecy cut them off from non-CIA officials who knew Cuba well. The Cuban specialists of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, for instance, could have provided a realistic appraisal of the Cubans' likely reaction to an invasion. The CIA's concern with secrecy was obsessive, at least in Washington. The agency never supplied any written documents to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and collected the documents that circulated in White House meetings after each briefing. Secrecy made sense, but

<sup>6</sup> The failure of the Indonesian venture, a smaller operation than the Guatemalan coup, apparently was not enough to discredit the Guatemalan scenario. On Indonesia, see Thomas Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 88–92. On the Guatemalan precedent and the Bay of Pigs, see Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 188–97.

<sup>7</sup> Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, 99.

<sup>8</sup> Allison, *Essence of Decision*, 93; McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum for the President, 8 February 1961, Box 35, National Security Files, Kennedy Library. Bissell agreed that the CIA was "very involved in seeing the plan go ahead." *Washington Evening Star*, 20 July 1965.

whether by design or not, it also increased the CIA's power to determine policy.<sup>9</sup>

Having become the privileged purveyor of knowledge, the CIA then supplied President Kennedy and his advisers with chosen reports on the unreliability of Castro's forces and the extent of Cuban dissent. The agency did not dwell, however, on its own Board of Estimates's memoranda that foresaw a continuous reinforcement of Castro's power, nor did it mention other pessimistic reports from independent observers. The CIA also ignored certain requests for information. Although both the JCS and Presidential Assistant Richard Goodwin asked on separate occasions for the planners' written assessment of the potential for uprisings in Cuba, they never saw such a document. Eventually the CIA became, in Arthur Schlesinger's words, "less than candid."<sup>10</sup> It reported that the exiles' morale was excellent, despite a near mutiny at the training base in Guatemala. After the invasion site changed from the coastal city of Trinidad to the Bay of Pigs, the agency continued to assure the president that if the brigade ran into difficulties it could "go guerrilla" in the Escambray Mountains. But if these mountains were indeed in the vicinity of Trinidad, eighty miles of impassible swamp lay between the Escambrays and the new landing site. Moreover, the exiles had long since ceased guerrilla training in favor of conventional tactics. Thus the CIA's selective information painted a rose-colored picture – that Castro was weak and the Cubans were rebellious. The invasion had a good chance of toppling him, and short of this, the operation would tie Castro down in an insurgency war.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile exile proxies and CIA deceit would disguise the U.S. hand. Viewed in this light, the project seemed reasonable.

The CIA also sold its plan by skillfully formulating the range of options. The agency bracketed the invasion between two unacceptable alternatives – procrastinating or disbanding the brigade. According to the CIA, the first alternative would jeopardize the plan since Castro was about to receive massive military aid from the Soviets, including jet fighters. The agency also claimed that disbanding the brigade posed a "disposal problem," as hundreds of disgruntled Cubans would spread the word that the United States had backed off. Kennedy would appear weak, and the Communist world could be counted on to create trouble. Implicit in the warning was the hint that the president's domestic adversaries might do the same. As CIA Director Allen Dulles later stated: "We had made it very clear to the President that to call off the operation would have resulted in a very unpleasant situation."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The CIA failed to communicate fully with the other government players, even after the loquacity of the Cuban exiles and the sheer size and visibility of the invasion preparations led to revelations in the press. The CIA's reasons are unclear. Roger Hilsman, then head of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, believed that the CIA was "so emotionally committed that [it] deliberately cut out information." Roger Hilsman Oral History, Kennedy Library, 11. The CIA could reply that it was following standard procedures for covert action.

<sup>10</sup> Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, 99; Lemnitzer, interview with author; Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 453; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 250.

<sup>11</sup> Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 249–50; Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, 102–103.

<sup>12</sup> Aguilar, ed. *Operation Zapata*, 147.



By resorting to the typical organizational strategy of defining the options and providing the information required to evaluate them, the CIA thus structured the problem in a way that maximized the likelihood the president would choose the agency's preferred option. One organization might have frustrated this strategy, however, as the president asked the military to evaluate what amounted to a full-fledged invasion. But institutional logic led the Pentagon seemingly to concur with the CIA. Since the operation was not the military's direct responsibility, bureaucratic parochialism meant that the Pentagon viewed its role as merely responding to requests for advice. Thus, the military did not weigh fine points of the plan and missed deficiencies built into the details. Bureaucratic parochialism also led the armed services to believe that it was not their role to unduly emphasize whatever weaknesses in the plan they did perceive.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the Pentagon probably heeded the unspoken rules of bureaucratic Washington. Since this was another agency's plan, and did not threaten any of the military's vital interests, it made no sense to antagonize another powerful organization by excessive outspokenness. In the words of one of the joint chiefs: "You couldn't expect us . . . to say this plan is no damn good, you ought to call it off; that's not the way you do things in government. . . . The CIA were doing their best in the planning, and we were accepting it. The responsibility was not ours."<sup>14</sup>

Thus, when asked to evaluate the CIA's original plan for an invasion at Trinidad, the Pentagon did not dwell on the deficiencies it did perceive, and delivered a cautiously worded yet favorable evaluation. Then, after Kennedy rejected the Trinidad plan as too spectacular, the military's response proved less than frank. Asked to assess the CIA's three alternative proposals, the military expressed a guarded preference for Zapata, the plan to land at the Bay of Pigs. The Pentagon mentioned only once, however, its belief that Zapata was merely the least objectionable of the CIA's alternatives, and that the Trinidad plan remained the best. This preference appeared in a memorandum of 15 March 1961, which the secretary of defense somehow overlooked and the president never saw. But the military did not raise the issue again; nor did it mention at all its private opinion that none of the alternatives was in fact likely to succeed!<sup>15</sup>

Faced with the CIA's vigorous promotion of its program and the military's

<sup>13</sup> When asked why the military was not more open with its reservations about the plan, General Lemnitzer, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, replied: "It was not our operation." Lemnitzer, interview with author. Admiral Arleigh Burke, former Chief of Naval Operations, echoed: "We were not responsible for the plan." Arleigh A. Burke, interview with author, Washington, D.C., 1 October 1983.

<sup>14</sup> Lemnitzer, interview with author.

<sup>15</sup> For example, the military experts dispatched to Guatemala to evaluate preparations for the Trinidad landing reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the odds against surprise were "about 85 to 15," and that without surprise the invasion would fail, adding that one plane "could sink all or most of the invasion force." The logistics expert reported that "logistically the operation would likely fall apart. . . . The Brigade's logistical capacity was marginal without resistance, but impossible with it." Aguilar, ed., *Operation Zapata*, 10, 154–55. The military's official appraisal is in *ibid.*, 108–10; its private view appears in a Navy memorandum of 15 March 1961.



acquiescence, the president had good reasons to agree to the invasion. But organizational theory recognizes that, while constrained by the programs in a bureaucracy's repertoire, government leaders are not helpless captives of bureaucratic choices. The government leadership can attempt to leave its own stamp on an agency's program, as the president sought to do with the invasion plan. Kennedy was clear about the limits he did not want to exceed. Insisting on a covert operation that would avoid charges of U.S. involvement, the president excluded the direct participation of American forces, and strove to reduce the visibility of the operation. The latter concern led first to the change in landing sites in March 1961, and later to the cancellation of the key second air strike. The final plan called for two bombing missions against Castro's air force by the brigade's air wing. Whereas the raid two days before the landing was mostly a diversion, the second was to be a major pre-emptive strike on the morning of D-Day. The agency hoped the strikes would pass for the work of Cuban air force defectors, but the cover story fell apart immediately after the first raid on April 15. A furor ensued at the United Nations, with American Ambassador Adlai Stevenson hard pressed to answer charges of U.S. aggression. In view of these difficulties, the national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy, and Secretary of State Dean Rusk recommended canceling the second strike, and Kennedy agreed.<sup>16</sup>

The CIA's reaction to these constraints was again typical of organizational behavior. The change in the air plan put the operation in dire jeopardy. Because the exiles had too few aircraft to match Castro's air force in the sky, the CIA's plan called for the destruction of the Cuban air force on the ground through the limited air strike on D-Day-2 (April 15) and especially a major strike on D-Day. The cancellation of the second strike meant that the invasion force, particularly the brigade's landing fleet with its crucial supplies, would be defenseless against Castro's largely intact air force. The CIA knew that this could spell disaster, yet failed to make the point as forcefully as possible to the president, who might then have canceled the whole operation!<sup>17</sup>

Organizational theory again suggests various reasons for the agency's attitude. Sheer organizational momentum makes it difficult to call off a year's planning hours before execution. Administrative theory also warns that bureaucracies can resist unwelcome orders, particularly those that require a departure from organizational repertoires. It was difficult to contravene the cancellation of the D-Day air strike, but the CIA most likely thought it could circumvent this order by bending the restriction barring direct U.S. participation. Indeed, considerable evidence shows that direct American involvement was an integral part of the agency's program for Guatemala-type interventions. In the original Guatemala venture, American CIA pilots conducted bombing missions, and the planners envisaged overt military intervention in case the operation failed. American

<sup>16</sup> Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, 185–90, 195–202.

<sup>17</sup> CIA officials Bissell and General Charles Cabell appealed the decision to Rusk, who phoned the president in their presence. When Kennedy maintained his decision, Rusk asked the men if they wanted to speak to the president themselves, but they declined. Aguilar, ed., *Operation Zapata*, 20–21.

agents again fought in the 1958 Indonesian affair. The CIA's early planning documents also show that in applying the Guatemala scenario to Cuba, the agency once again contemplated direct U.S. involvement.<sup>18</sup>

The evidence is equally compelling that even after Kennedy ruled out direct American participation, the CIA did not relinquish an idea that was firmly rooted in the organization's repertoires. The agency had learned that in large operations "you can't draw narrow boundaries of policy around them and be absolutely sure they will never be overstepped."<sup>19</sup> In fact, as Dulles later revealed in an unpublished manuscript, the CIA had already seen a number of operations that had begun with strict prohibitions against direct U.S. involvement. Once the operations were actually underway, however, the limitations had tended to disappear.<sup>20</sup> The CIA also knew that the United States would be loathe to abandon its allies, especially when its own prestige was at stake.

Hence, as Dulles explained, in the Cuban operation the agency assumed that when the invasion actually occurred, the president would end up authorizing whatever was required for success, including overt U.S. military intervention if necessary, rather than allow the venture to fail.<sup>21</sup> As a result, the CIA probably did not object as strenuously as possible to the cancellation of the second air strike, confident that if the brigade ran into trouble, the White House would have no choice but to allow U.S. intervention. Indeed, when the invasion started to founder, the CIA pressed for American air support, but the president held his ground.

The organizational process model thus suggests that the decision to invade Cuba was reached in stages. The CIA first adopted the plan as an outcome of its goals and repertoires; the agency then steered it past the president by the skillful use of its monopoly of information. Meanwhile the bureaucratic routines and interests of the Pentagon muted a possible voice of dissent. Finally, despite last minute modifications jeopardizing the project, the agency proceeded with its plan as a result of three organizational characteristics—inertia, repertoires, and independence.

<sup>18</sup> During the Guatemalan coup, a dozen U.S. Navy units, a battalion of Marines, and an air transport wing were placed on standby alert. Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 111. On U.S. intervention in the CIA's Cuban scenario, see Aguilar, ed., *Operation Zapata*, 71.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Bissell, in "The Science of Spying," NBC Television, 4 May 1965.

<sup>20</sup> Allen Dulles, handwritten notes, Box 244, Allen W. Dulles Papers, Seeley Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* There is considerable other evidence that the CIA did not view the president's restrictions regarding U.S. participation as ironclad. The agency recruited American pilots for the operation, "feeling that if there were great pressures, the prohibition on U.S. volunteers would be withdrawn." Bissell, interview with author. During the invasion, the first man to land and open fire was in fact an American CIA paramilitary operative. Nor was the CIA alone in considering the possibility of U.S. intervention. When the CIA's 1958 Indonesian venture ran into difficulty, the military was asked to rescue American agents, but was caught unprepared. Determined not to let a similar situation arise again, Admiral Burke took it upon himself to assemble shortly before the Cuban invasion a force of U.S. Marines on the island of Vieques (Puerto Rico), ready for action in case the U.S. decided to intervene.

The organizational process model thus offers a more satisfactory interpretation of the decision to invade Cuba than does the rational actor model. Nevertheless, the organizational model fails to explain all of the record, for the CIA enjoyed a near monopoly of information only because the president willed it. He could have found alternative sources for different views on the situation in Cuba. Kennedy read the newspapers; in fact, he even asked one presidential aide, Arthur Schlesinger, to obtain a private assessment of the Cuban scene from the well-informed journalist Joseph Newman.<sup>22</sup> But apparently the latter's pessimistic views had little effect on the president. Moreover, the fallacy of believing that the United States could dissociate itself from the invasion was glaring. Kennedy's blindness to the fact cannot be laid simply to the quality of the advice he received.

There is another limitation to the organizational process model. It assumes the existence of quasi-monolithic bureaucracies whose members single mindedly promote their organization's shared goals and programs. But the bureaucracy did not function in this fashion in the case of the Bay of Pigs. Within the CIA, for instance, only a small sub-group in the Directorate of Plans handled the project. Moreover, this ad hoc group was somewhat atypical of the division as a whole. Although many of the middle-level operatives working on the invasion were veterans of the covert service, they were often drawn from the division's lesser talent. Furthermore, the chief architect of the invasion, Deputy Director for Plans Richard Bissell, was a relative newcomer to covert operations, having spent most of his time in the CIA developing the U-2 spy plane and the first reconnaissance satellite. Some of his closest collaborators in the venture were likewise rather unfamiliar with this sort of "dirty tricks." Bissell and his associates thus lacked some of the instincts of caution that characterized the covert branch's better careerists, who had risen through repeated hazardous duty in the field.<sup>23</sup> A look at the events from the perspective of Allison's third model is therefore in order.

#### A GOVERNMENTAL POLITICS INTERPRETATION

The governmental politics model holds that government decisions are the result of a bargaining game. To understand a given decision, analysts must determine its context and the channels through which the decision was reached. They can then identify the important participants whose input in the decision reflects their values, goals, stakes and power. The final decision is thus the outcome of a process of "pulling and hauling" among different players with different interests and power resources.

The first step then, is to recall the enormous pressure of time involved in the

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Memorandum: "Joseph Newman on Cuba," 31 March 1961, Box 35, National Security Files, Kennedy Library.

<sup>23</sup> Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*, 94–98; Robert Amory, interview with author, Washington, D.C., 16 February 1982.

Bay of Pigs. By early 1961, the exiles had completed their instruction, and the Guatemalans who harbored the training base were pressing for their departure. Moreover, the invasion seemed viable only before Cuba received heavy weapons from the East. The decision had to be made now or never. Meanwhile, the new and inexperienced administration also faced crises in Laos and the Congo. The context of the Bay of Pigs favored anything but calm decision-making.

The CIA had charge of preparing and executing the plan, while evaluation and approval devolved to a loose de facto committee. Its core members included the president, CIA Director Dulles and Deputy Director Bissell, Secretary of State Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff,<sup>24</sup> Special Assistant for National Security McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant to the Secretary of State Adolf Berle, Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze and his deputy, William Bundy. Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs Thomas Mann and White House aide Arthur Schlesinger also played significant roles.

These players had different stakes, values, goals, and power resources that dictated different inputs into the decision. Dulles and Bissell were devoted to the “national interest,” which they equated with the militant prosecution of the cold war. They were also activists with a predilection for the “romantic” side of intelligence work, covert operations. Hence the idea of overthrowing Castro had an inherent appeal. There were probably more mundane motivations too. Dulles was about to retire, and there was strong competition within the agency for the succession. Kennedy was thinking of Bissell for the position, and the deputy director for plans, a reasonably ambitious man, knew that a brilliant success in Cuba would enhance his prospects. The operation was risky, but CIA’s culture favored calculated risks, a factor that also appealed to Bissell’s personality. He made a practice of defying odds, and often accomplished the unusual, as when he developed the U-2 in less than twelve months, a task the Air Force estimated would take six years. Finally, the operation could only fail if the United States remained passive in case of a mishap, and there were reasons to assume otherwise. Dulles and Bissell were soon enthusiastic about the project. As one participant recalled: “Allen and Dick didn’t just brief us on the Cuban operation. They sold us on it.”<sup>25</sup>

These players were influential indeed. They enjoyed prestige, as Schlesinger has noted: “We all listened to Bissell transfixed . . . fascinated by the working of this superbly clean, organized and articulate intelligence.”<sup>26</sup> Bissell and Dulles

<sup>24</sup> Generals Lyman Lemnitzer (chairman), Thomas White (Air Force), George Decker (Army), David Shoup (Marines), Admiral Arleigh Burke (Navy). Of the five, Lemnitzer and Burke followed the operation most closely.

<sup>25</sup> Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*, 83, 101–102. Bissell’s character helps explain his secrecy. Never a team man, he wanted all the reins in his hands. He had run the U-2 project, in his own words, as a “private duchy,” and attempted the same with the Cuban invasion. *Ibid.*, 97–104; Karl E. Meyer and Tad Szulc, *The Cuban Invasion* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1962), 103.

<sup>26</sup> Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 241.

also wielded real power in Washington. They were skillful bureaucratic players with easy access to the president, and they were well connected within the political network, often through Office of Strategic Services and Ivy League ties.<sup>27</sup> The situation further enhanced the CIA officials' bargaining power. The agency was the natural source of expertise on covert operations; it also enjoyed a near monopoly of information on the Cuban issue, and its officials had far more time to devote to the problem than any other participant. Under these conditions, it would have taken powerful players to resist their hard sell.

The Joint Chiefs could have been such players, for they knew enough about the agency's capabilities to be skeptical. But they believed that it suited neither the military's role nor its interests to be overly critical. Moreover, for General Lyman Lemnitzer, "there were all kinds of difficulties in the world at the time . . . and [the] operation was far from being a high priority."<sup>28</sup> Much of his attention went to other issues. Admiral Arleigh Burke, in turn, concluded that the lack of response to the Joint Chiefs' memorandum of March 15, favoring the original Trinidad plan over the CIA's alternatives, meant that the JCS had been overruled. As a military man, Burke thereupon believed his role no longer called for dissent but for loyal support of the commander in chief's decision.<sup>29</sup> Hence the CIA's potentially most damaging critics opted for acquiescence. Unfortunately, the remaining players were at a relative disadvantage in challenging the agency's plan. The tightly sealed decision channel cut off the civilian decision-makers from the effective source of expertise on Cuba, the middle-level bureaucracy both inside and outside the intelligence community. The only available rebuttal of the CIA's optimistic picture of the Cuban internal situation were the reports appearing in the press. Furthermore, the many other demands on their time limited the attention the civilian participants could spare for the operation. Robert McNamara, for one, devoted most of his energy to gaining control of the Department of Defense.

There were additional reasons for the civilian decision-makers' relatively uncritical stance. At the start of the Kennedy administration, McGeorge Bundy believed that his role was less to promote his own views than to ensure that in foreign affairs the president heard the views of all the relevant government actors. Hence Bundy did not voice his own misgivings. Meanwhile, Adolf Berle had long since become an almost fanatical cold warrior and was convinced that,

<sup>27</sup> Kennedy and Dulles became friends through common acquaintances at Palm Beach. Kennedy also admired Bissell, whom Bundy knew from Yale. Schlesinger knew Dulles in the Office of Strategic Services during World War II, and became a friend of Bissell when the latter worked for the Marshall Plan. Mann was friendly with both Bissell and Dulles. Amory Oral History, Kennedy Library, 19–20; McGeorge Bundy, interview with author, New York, N.Y., 1 March 1982; Arthur Schlesinger, interview with author, New York, N.Y., 8 March 1982; Thomas C. Mann, letter to author, 30 June 1983.

<sup>28</sup> Lemnitzer, interview with author.

<sup>29</sup> Burke subsequently concluded that with Kennedy "you couldn't state your view and assume it was heard. When you were opposed to something, you had to pound the table." Burke, interview with author.

like Adolf Hitler a quarter of a century before, the Communists had a plan of world aggression. Certain that “the battle [was] joined,” Berle feared appeasement and believed that the sooner the U.S. stood up to the challenge, the better. Other participants from the State Department, such as Thomas Mann, also agreed to the invasion, fearing that Cuba might become a base from which the Communists could strike at the United States and other American countries.<sup>30</sup> Aware of the difficulties the invasion could create for the United States, however, State Department representatives fought to reduce the scale and visibility of the operation, while not criticizing the basic idea itself.<sup>31</sup>

Dean Rusk believed that the secretary of state should not “influence the debate but preside over it,” and only afterwards express his views to the president in private. He therefore was reluctant to voice his doubts in the meetings he attended. Moreover, as a man very attuned to the nuances of power, Rusk was aware that he lacked a power base of his own, and did not yet enjoy the president’s full confidence. He may thus have deemed it unwise to come out strongly against a plan whose advocates the president held in high esteem.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, such prudence probably characterized many of the civilian players. In these early days of the administration, it remained unclear when criticism ceased to be welcome and became foolhardy, especially when the subject was the overthrow of Castro, after the president had campaigned on the promise to check communism in general and Castro in particular.

Two members of the White House staff did harbor strong misgivings, but their dissent remained limited and cautious. Arthur Schlesinger and Richard Goodwin were junior appointees; the role the president meant for them was unclear and their power was uncertain. As an academic, Schlesinger was also hesitant to “speak up in church” against a paramilitary operation in the presence of the assembled CIA and military experts. Thus, neither adviser had the capacity or inclination to mount a major challenge to the CIA’s hard sell.<sup>33</sup>

Several outside players could have had a major impact upon the decision. In late March 1961, Senator J. William Fulbright, alarmed by accounts surfacing in the press, suspected that the government was preparing a venture that he considered reprehensible. He offered Kennedy a memorandum outlining the legal, moral, and political objections to an invasion, whereupon the president invited him on April 4 to a meeting on the operation. There the senator restated his opposition, but all the other participants whom the president polled voted

<sup>30</sup> On Bundy’s balancing of opinions for the president, see McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum for the President, 18 February 1961, Box 35, National Security Files, Kennedy Library. The National Security Council director also believed almost to the end that Kennedy did not favor the plan. Thus, Bundy was reluctant to express his own doubts, lest the president obtain an unbalanced view of the pros and cons. Bundy, interview with author; diary entry, 6 March 1961, *The Adolf A. Berle Diary*, (microfilm), (Hyde Park, N.Y.: Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, 1978), roll 8; Mann, letter to author.

<sup>31</sup> *Operation Zapata*, 11–12, 15–16.

<sup>32</sup> Warren I. Cohen, *Dean Rusk* (Totowa, N.J.: Cooper Square Publishers, 1980), 96, 100–15.

<sup>33</sup> Schlesinger, interview with author; Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 306–307.



in favor of the project. At this point, Fulbright too deferred to the contextual values of the cold war; satisfied that he had been heard, he would not undermine the nation's foreign policy by making his opposition public. Similar scruples helped silence another potential dissenter—the press. Alerted by rumors among the Cuban exiles in Miami, several prominent journalists soon discovered what was afoot. But the administration appealed to the editors' sense of the national interest, and despite partial disclosures by *The Nation* as early as November 1960, most of the press respected the secret until the eve of the invasion. When the *New York Times* finally disclosed the story in early April, it did so in a sanitized and relatively unobtrusive account.<sup>34</sup>

The key player, of course, remained the president. He had reserved the right to call off the venture up to twenty-four hours before the actual landing, and he alone reached the final decision to proceed. Kennedy's decision reflected both his goals and values. But perhaps the single most important reason behind his decision was the desire to avoid domestic criticism on the issue of communism. Memories of the savage attacks on the policies of the Truman administration remained fresh, and only months before the Republican presidential candidate, Richard Nixon, had assailed Kennedy's "softness" on Quemoy and Matsu. In an effort to establish his anti-communism, the Democratic candidate had lashed out against Cuba, rebuking the outgoing administration for its passive response to Castro and calling for American support of Cuban freedom fighters. Now as president, and acutely aware of his narrow victory as well as his vulnerability to a Republican opposition he viewed as "belligerent," Kennedy suddenly faced a plan that fit his campaign rhetoric. Moreover, the plan had the warm endorsement of no less a military expert than Dwight Eisenhower himself.<sup>35</sup> The new president had little taste for the venture; only days before the invasion he told Schlesinger: "I'm still trying to make some sense out of it."<sup>36</sup> But after his own attacks on Republican passivity towards Castro, canceling the operation could hardly fail to create an uproar that the president's rhetoric was mere sham, and

<sup>34</sup> Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, 45–47, 122–23, 142–55.

<sup>35</sup> On Kennedy's deep concern over both his majority of a mere 118,000 votes and Republican criticism, see Adlai E. Stevenson, "Conference JFK and Blair," 6 December 1960, Adlai E. Stevenson Papers, Box 789, Seeley Mudd Library, Princeton, N.J. Discussing the anti-Castro opposition during the presidential transition, President Eisenhower emphasized that it was his policy "to support such forces to the utmost." Regarding the training of anti-Castro forces in Guatemala, the outgoing president "recommend[ed] that the effort be continued and accelerated." Clark M. Clifford, Memo on Conference between President Eisenhower and President Kennedy and their chief advisers, 19 January 1961, President's Office Files, Box 29a, Kennedy Library. Reportedly, Eisenhower even proposed to Kennedy during the lame-duck period that the outgoing administration carry out the overthrow of Castro before the new president assumed office, but Kennedy declined. Walter Judd interview, quoted in Edwin J. Rozek, ed., *Walter H. Judd: Chronicles of a Statesman* (Denver, Colo.: Grier, 1980), 43.

<sup>36</sup> Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 256. Dulles later told Tom Wicker of the *New York Times* that Kennedy's dislike of the plan was obvious. To secure approval, according to Wicker, "Dulles had to suggest repeatedly . . . that if Kennedy canceled the project, he would appear less zealous than Eisenhower against communism." Quoted in Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 453.

that in truth, Kennedy had made his peace with Castro when Eisenhower would have swept him away.<sup>37</sup> In view of the public's anti-communism and concern about Cuba, Kennedy no doubt felt compelled to approve the invasion, despite his misgivings.

While the project was thus a means of implementing key presidential goals, Kennedy's personal values may have helped the president reach his decision. Young and relatively inexperienced, he was particularly open to suggestions from his experts, the CIA and the Joint Chiefs. Moreover, in his political career he had succeeded less as an innovator than as someone well versed in effective political management who knew how to use expert advice. The military's apparent endorsement of the invasion was thus bound to impress him. As Kennedy later admitted himself: "If someone comes in and tells me this or that about the Minimum Wage Bill, I have no hesitation in overruling them. But you always assume the military and intelligence people have some secret skill not available to ordinary mortals."<sup>38</sup>

Other of the president's values, particularly his penchant for courage and action, may also have helped him overcome his doubts. The governmental politics model acknowledges that the core of bureaucratic politics is personality, and justifies such reference to a player's psyche. The cult of fortitude and energy was a deep-rooted trait of Kennedy's personality, and had repeatedly sustained him as he struggled to overcome physical liabilities and meet family expectations. More recently, the author of *Profiles in Courage* had promised in his presidential campaign to usher in a new era of "vigor." Such values of energy and courage may thus have made it easier for Kennedy to accept a bold course of action, despite nagging doubts, especially since the CIA was careful to present the plan as a test of his mettle.<sup>39</sup> The new president's values may also explain his apparent dismissal of unfavorable evaluations of Castro's strength such as Joseph Newman's. Courage meant indeed taking action in spite of risks and doubts.

Along with Kennedy's values, the new president's style also affected his decision. The hallmarks of the new administration were ad hoc, informal decision processes and impatience with matters of organization. This contributed to the mediocrity of the advice the president received on the Cuban invasion. Uncon-

<sup>37</sup> A glimpse of possible Republican reaction to a cancellation of the invasion appeared in Eisenhower's notes on a meeting after the invasion with William Pawley, who had been very close to the brigade. Pawley related the account, since disproven, that Kennedy revoked both the D-Day strike and an alleged promise of direct U.S. air cover after a last minute meeting in which Stevenson strongly opposed such assistance. Eisenhower wrote: "if the whole story ever becomes known to the American people (and . . . is substantially correct), there will be a terrible outcry and I should think a virtual repudiation of the present Administration. . . . If true, this story could be called a 'Profile in Timidity and Indecision.'" Memorandum, 5 June 1961, Post Presidential Papers, Eisenhower Library. I am grateful to Thomas G. Paterson for this information as well as the C.D. Jackson correspondence cited in footnote 50.

<sup>38</sup> Meyer and Szulc, *The Cuban Invasion*, 97; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 258.

<sup>39</sup> Herbert S. Parmet, *Jack: The Struggles of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Dial Press, 1980), 15-19; Theodore C. Sorensen, "Kennedy's Worst Disaster," *Look*, 10 August 1965, 49.

cern for organization meant that Kennedy paid scant attention to structuring the debate. He made no particular effort to absent himself from meetings to encourage uninhibited discussion. As noted, he also failed to make clear to his advisers that it was safe to be outspoken. All this increased the timidity of their criticism. Nor did the president pause to think that by agreeing to the CIA's exclusion of so many knowledgeable players from the debate, he was allowing the agency to become both advocate and chief judge of the project's feasibility. Finally, there is cause to suspect that the president's impatience with organizational details kept him from studying the project as carefully as was warranted. After all, a glance at a map would have told him that by changing the landing site from Trinidad to the Bay of Pigs, the guerrilla option had become all but infeasible.<sup>40</sup>

The stance of the different players is thus quite understandable in terms of their goals and values, and in the context in which the players operated. Bissell hoped to enhance his position through the operation; the JCS underestimated the need for candid criticism of the plan and shunned an unnecessary clash with the CIA. The White House advisers were in no position to challenge this apparent unanimity of the intelligence community and the Joint Chiefs. Faced with intense lobbying by the CIA players, the president considered the operation in the light of his political goals. Despite hesitations, he could also reconcile it with his own values, especially since, for all he knew, the operation was fail-safe with the escape hatch of "going guerrilla." The decision to proceed was therefore the resultant of the different forces and resistances within the decision channels.

The governmental politics model thus views the invasion as the outcome of a bargaining game. But players rarely start out with fully formed perceptions; these usually take final shape through the exchange of information that occurs during the bargaining. This exchange is subject to miscommunication and misperception. In last analysis then, the decision depends on how the players communicate as well as who they are.

In the Bay of Pigs there was severe miscommunication and misunderstanding, caused in part by tight deadlines and the pace of events. For example, after Kennedy rejected the Trinidad plan in early March 1961, the CIA hastily devised several "quieter" alternatives, and gave the Pentagon only two days to evaluate them. The agency's reluctance to divulge details or provide written documents compounded the problem, while the incrementalism of the decision-making also had deleterious effects. Up to and even after the final "go," given a few hours before the scheduled landing, the plan was constantly changing to accommodate objections from various quarters. Cancellation of the D-Day air strikes, for instance, occurred while the pilots were in the cockpits, preparing for take-off.

<sup>40</sup> According to the official investigation, the plan outlining the air strikes of D-2 and D-Day was presented at a meeting on 12 April 1961. "However, this document was only passed around at the meeting, read and considered by some, and collected after the meeting. It is doubtful if the President read it or understood the details." Aguilar, ed. *Operation Zapata*, 129-30. This reveals a lack of thoroughness both on the part of those giving the briefings and those receiving it.

Finally, making matters even worse was the tendency to consider these changes one by one while losing sight of the operation as a whole. According to the official postmortem, the Joint Chiefs “reviewed the successive changes of the plan piecemeal and only within a limited context, a procedure which was inadequate for a proper examination of all the military ramifications.”<sup>41</sup> Nor did the president review the entire plan as it stood in its latest form before granting the final go-ahead. Owing to repeated changes and the lack of overall perspective, the plan eventually meant many different things to many people. Kennedy thought he had ordered a large but quiet infiltration of freedom fighters. Meanwhile, the CIA was staging a miniature Normandy landing.

The governmental politics model thus provides an insightful analysis of the decision to land at the Bay of Pigs. Yet there are limitations to this account. Applying the model requires extensive information about the players that is not always available. Certain findings of the government politics analysis are therefore incomplete. In particular, the different joint chiefs’ reasons for going along with the agency are not sufficiently clear. Nor is it possible to ascertain yet the relative influence Kennedy’s penchant for bold action, respect for expertise, and operating style had upon his stand.<sup>42</sup> The richness of the governmental politics explanation will increase, however, as new material becomes available.

A second and more enduring limitation of the model is its inability to account for an essential flaw in the decision. Neither the goals and values of individual actors nor the pulling and hauling of the players seem adequate to explain the decision-makers’ persistent refusal to face up to unpleasant facts. For instance, once Richard Bissell and his aides opted for the invasion, they never seem to have reconsidered their assumption that a judicious application of pressure would topple Castro’s regime, despite numerous indications to the contrary. Instead, the operatives ignored the agency’s own analysts, who stressed the regime’s control over the island, as well as the outside experts who confirmed that Castro retained considerable support. As one specialist, who shortly before the operation tried to warn the operatives of Castro’s real strength, recalls: “It was like talking to a brick wall.”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Aguilar, ed., *Operation Zapata*, 21, 42, 131, 206; Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 302. As the official inquiry discovered, few if any participants had a common understanding of the plan. Robert Kennedy marvelled at the chaos uncovered: “It’s very significant that the Commandant of the Marine Corps, whom the President . . . thought had approved this plan, had an entirely different idea of what the plan was. It seems that something has gone wrong somewhere along the line.” Aguilar, ed., *Operation Zapata*, 251.

<sup>42</sup> Knowledge of the separate joint chiefs’ thoughts about the invasion plan remains limited, as the JCS long felt they would best serve the national interest by not commenting on the debacle. Lemnitzer, interview with author. Some joint chiefs, however, expressed their candid views in material that is currently unavailable. Studies such as Doris Kearns’s forthcoming psychobiography of John Kennedy will also help complete the governmental politics explanation.

<sup>43</sup> The CIA’s Board of National Estimates concluded in a memorandum of 10 March 1961 that despite a fall in Castro’s popularity, and scattered resistance to his regime, there were “no signs that such developments portend any serious threat to a regime which by now has established a formidable

## COGNITIVE THEORY AND THE ESSENCE OF THE CUBAN DECISION

Governmental politics do not account for the self-delusions held by policy-makers. Here, the findings of cognitive theory might usefully complement the governmental politics analysis. The literature of cognitive theory holds that the human mind strives for cognitive consistency, or the congruence of beliefs and perceptions. Individuals tend to disregard information that challenges their beliefs, especially if the information is ambiguous.<sup>44</sup> In this perspective, the operatives' dismissal of unfavorable reports on Castro's strength becomes more understandable; the CIA's planners could always find off-setting reports stressing Castro's weakness to bolster their beliefs. The operatives, however, were not the only ones practicing self-delusion. The president too seemed blind to certain facts, particularly insofar as he hoped the operation would remain quiet. Fourteen hundred men with tanks, artillery, an invasion fleet and air force do not infiltrate quietly, even in a backwater. As Lyman Kirkpatrick, the CIA inspector general who conducted the agency's own postmortem, noted: "President Kennedy seemed to believe [the operation] was going to be some sort of mass infiltration that would perhaps, through some mystique, become quickly invisible."<sup>45</sup> The invasion clearly had also lost its secrecy, precluding the "plausible denial" that was Kennedy's *sine qua non* for accepting the venture. Reading accounts in the American press on the eve of the invasion, the president exploded: "Castro doesn't need agents over here! All he has to do is read our papers! It's all laid out for him!" And Bundy later mused: "I'm amazed that we thought there was a chance of deniability."<sup>46</sup>

Again, neither the pressure of advocates nor miscommunication is sufficient to explain such self-delusions. A second strand of cognitive theory, however, stressing defensive avoidance, might also complement the account of the government politics model. According to Irving Janis and Leon Mann, a decision-maker who realizes there are high risks to a policy yet sees no better alternative tends to alleviate the ensuing stress by ignoring "threat cues." Kennedy's delusions may have reflected such behavior. The president, despite serious misgivings about the plan, felt nevertheless compelled to accept it, largely out of fear of domestic criticism. In this case, he may well have practiced "defensive avoidance" in his hope that somehow the invasion would be "quiet," and that the U.S. hand would not show.<sup>47</sup>

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structure of control over the daily lives of the Cuban people." Quoted in Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, 99. Schlesinger had John Plank, a Harvard professor of Latin American Affairs, who had recently returned from a visit to Cuba, brief the CIA. John Plank, interview with author, Storrs, Conn., 9 December 1981.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 143–54, 172–202.

<sup>45</sup> Lyman B. Kirkpatrick, "Paramilitary Case Study: The Bay of Pigs," *Naval War College Review* 2 (1972): 32–42.

<sup>46</sup> Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, 155; Aguilar, ed., *Operation Zapata*, 182.

<sup>47</sup> Irving L. Janis and Leon Mann, *Decision Making: A Psychological Analysis of Conflict, Choice and Commitment* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 57–58, 74, 107–33. Janis has also ex-

Cognitive theory, however, holds that cognitive consistency and defensive avoidance foster perceptual distortions once the decision-maker starts to favor, or definitely espouses, certain views or policies. But it seems that Kennedy had even rejected discrepant information *before* he leaned towards the CIA's plan. Even when the president appeared close to rejecting the project, he nevertheless seemed to believe that, should he authorize the operation, the United States could deny being involved. At this stage, another cognitive mechanism may have operated, one that does not merely reflect order-inducing thought processes or the need to circumvent fear. This may have been an instance of wishful thinking, in which emotions color perception and result in mistaking one's wishes for reality.<sup>48</sup> Evidence suggests that such thinking, encouraged in part by the cumulative successes of a lifetime, was present in the Bay of Pigs. This was one of Kennedy's first major foreign policy ventures. Until then, he had defied probability to reap an unbroken series of political victories. Reflecting upon the Bay of Pigs, Arthur Schlesinger later wrote:

One further factor no doubt influenced him: the enormous confidence in his own luck. Everything had broken right for him since 1956. He had won the nomination and the election despite every odd in the book. Everyone around him thought he had the Midas touch and could not lose. Despite himself, even this dispassionate and skeptical man may have been affected by the soaring euphoria of the new day.<sup>49</sup>

Such wishful thinking may also have affected other decision-makers. The CIA's Richard Bissell and his deputy Tracy Barnes were men upon whom fortune had always smiled. Gifted with wealth and high ability, they had moved smoothly from Groton to Yale, and thereafter from success to success, often like Kennedy, in the face of considerable odds. Buoyed by their previous experiences, it was easy for them to assume that Castro was but another weak despot who would be no match for their craft. As one colleague recalled, they "just didn't contemplate losing." However, the thinking of the planners in Washington and the organizers in Miami did disturb another observer, a particularly well-informed journalist, who warned a colleague shortly before the invasion:

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plained the Bay of Pigs in terms of groupthink. Irving Janis, *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1972), 14–49. This explanation is less persuasive, however, for Kennedy made a number of major decisions concerning the operation outside of any given group. Furthermore, the action group involved displayed little of the cohesiveness or intolerance of criticism characteristic of groupthink.

<sup>48</sup> Schlesinger has written that at the time he believed "the tide was flowing against the project. . . . Obviously no one could believe any longer that the adventure would not be attributed to the United States—news stories described the recruitment in Miami every day—but somehow the idea took hold around the Cabinet table that this would not much matter so long as United States soldiers did not take part in the actual fighting." *A Thousand Days*, 249. On "wishful thinking," see Janis and Mann, *Decision Making*, 52–54 and passim; Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 356–81; Otto Klineberg, *The Human Dimension in International Relations* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 91; Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 169–222.

<sup>49</sup> Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 259.



The thing that concerns me the most about their plan is the faith they are putting in militia defections. Maybe that will happen; it had better, or they are dead ducks. Napoleon used to sack generals for “making pictures”—that is, presuming on their own wishful thinking. . . . It may be a rough landing. Cross fingers.<sup>50</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Taken together, then, Graham Allison’s second and third models explain the Bay of Pigs decision more satisfactorily than a rational actor account. The organizational process model is most helpful in explaining the genesis of the plan within the CIA and the agency’s response to the constraints on its freedom of action. The government politics model sheds considerable light on the government’s decision to adopt the CIA’s plan. Yet as they currently stand, none of Allison’s models provide a full explanation of the decision to invade Cuba. At this point there is evidence that the players’ thought processes may help explain the remaining questions. Because of the secrecy surrounding the record, the available knowledge of these processes is still limited. Thus more research is needed, particularly as new material on the operation becomes available. Nevertheless it appears that cognitive theory could prove a fruitful means of complementing Allison’s governmental politics model.

The need for additional information and research, however, goes beyond the purpose of refining these conceptual models. The Bay of Pigs held significant lessons for policymakers that the Kennedy administration drew from thereafter. Two lessons in particular stand out. The first was to distrust the experts; from then on the Kennedy team systematically questioned the assumptions of the bureaucracy. The White House further controlled the views of the bureaucratic leadership by soliciting the opinions of subordinates in direct contact with the issue under consideration. A second major lesson was to be skeptical of consensus. Thereafter, White House advisers received “a license for the impolite inquiry” and open encouragement to be devil’s advocates.<sup>51</sup>

Unfortunately, details of the Cuban fiasco were jealously guarded. Most copies of the report by the Board of Inquiry on the Bay of Pigs were destroyed, and for years information on the episode amounted mostly to a few accounts in memoirs by members of the Kennedy administration. As a result, the lessons of the disaster grew dimmer as the event receded into the past. Thus, some twenty years later, as decision-makers authorized another ill-fated venture, the Iranian hostage rescue mission of 24 April 1980, they consciously recalled the precedent of the Bay of Pigs. Ironically, though, President Jimmy Carter and National Security Council director Zbigniew Brzezinski seem to have overlooked the major lessons of the Cuban fiasco. Their recollection of the event prompted

<sup>50</sup> Amory, interview with author. Gene Farmer to C. D. Jackson, 28 March 1961, Box 42, C. D. Jackson Papers, Eisenhower Library.

<sup>51</sup> Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Missile Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1969), 111–17; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 296–97.

them to doubt the wisdom of interfering with the military experts once an operation was underway. Apparently forgotten, however, was the wisdom of doubting these experts before an operation ever got underway.<sup>52</sup> Yet had the civilian leaders been skeptical enough to question the planners' optimistic assessments, and sought first-hand information on the actual preparation for the rescue mission, the shortcomings the White House would have discovered may well have prevented it from authorizing the mission at all.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, if the mistakes of the past are to be avoided, the Bay of Pigs fiasco must be fully understood. Needed then is more research, as well as more information than those limited amounts made available so far. Such knowledge will not benefit historians and political scientists alone; it may also prevent a future decision-maker from echoing Kennedy's lament after the invasion: "How could I have been so stupid to let them go ahead?"<sup>54\*</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Failed Mission," *New York Times Magazine*, 18 April 1982, 64. After the Bay of Pigs, Bundy concluded: "In the future the President . . . should hear something from other than advocates." Aguilar, ed., *Operation Zapata*, 181. Yet the official inquiry into the hostage rescue mission noted that "planners—in effect—reviewed and critiqued their own product for soundness as they went along. . . . The hostage rescue plan was never subjected to rigorous testing and evaluation by qualified, independent observers and monitors short of the Joint Chiefs of Staff themselves." United States Naval War College, "Iran Rescue Mission Report," Washington, D.C., August 1980, mimeographed, 21.

<sup>53</sup> David C. Martin, "Inside the Rescue Mission," *Newsweek*, 12 July 1982, 16–25.

<sup>54</sup> Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 309. Only portions of the study by the Board of Inquiry on the Bay of Pigs have been released. Other postmortems are not available at all, including two by the CIA and one by the State Department. One of the conversations of the Kennedy administration on tape at the Kennedy Library is also devoted to an analysis of the Bay of Pigs.

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