

**The National Security Establishment's  
Obsession With Invading Castro's Cuba  
(1960-1963)**

*The Bay of Pigs,  
"Northwoods," and Beyond*

# Overview

- **From August of 1960 until December of 1963, the National Security establishment was obsessed with invading Cuba, and left a considerable paper trail documenting this.**
- By the November/December 1960 period, the CIA knew that its exile invasion (which later took place at The Bay of Pigs) could not succeed without overt U.S. military intervention, *but nevertheless continued planning for it on the assumption that overt U.S. military intervention would be provided when it began to fail.* JFK had warned openly that he would not allow U.S. military forces to participate in a Cuban invasion, but the CIA and Pentagon did not believe him, and were mistakenly convinced he could be leveraged if/when the invasion began to falter.
- **Operation Mongoose** was established on November 30, 1961; its goal was to sponsor psychological and economic pressure, and sabotage and paramilitary operations, against Cuba to bring down the Castro regime.
- Stimulated by the Mongoose Operations Officer, *in March 1962 the Pentagon proposed numerous pretexts for instigating a U.S. military invasion of Cuba, dubbed "Operation Northwoods."* Invading Cuba under the guise of pretexts was rejected by JFK that same month.
- *In April 1962, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended invading Cuba immediately, this time without resort to any pretexts.* Their advice was not followed.
- During the Cuban Missile Crisis in October of 1962, JFK prepared for and considered possible air strikes and a massive invasion, **but eventually resolved the crisis through diplomacy, infuriating the military/intelligence establishment.** An informal **no-invasion pledge** was publicly made by the Kennedy administration in Nov 1962, in exchange for no re-introduction of offensive weapons into Cuba by the USSR.
- Throughout 1963, the Pentagon continued to plan for a Cuban invasion, and the use of pretexts, in spite of President Kennedy's no-invasion pledge of Nov 1962 and his rejection of pretexts in March of 1962; **detailed Cuban invasion plans for 1964 were even drawn up by senior U.S. military planners by May of 1963.** Throughout 1963, interdepartmental U.S. government meetings were held to hammer out a new national policy on Cuba; during these deliberations a hawkish Pentagon and CIA were generally aligned against the State Department, which did not favor unilateral U.S. intervention. **Ultimately, the hawks won out, and the new national policy envisaged massive U.S. military intervention to remove the Castro regime, stimulated by the pretext of a U.S.-backed-and-stimulated coup in Cuba.**
- Remarkably, all of the above pressure to overthrow the Castro government by unilateral U.S. military action took place in an environment where the U.S. Commander-in-Chief, President Kennedy, strongly opposed any U.S. invasion of Cuba. *It is a remarkable example of a National Security Establishment determined to see its will prevail over a non-cooperative Chief Executive.* Only with JFK's assassination late in 1963, and Lyndon Johnson's immediate focus on Vietnam instead of Cuba, did this pressure subside and wither away.
- **The implications of this policy struggle** between the elected President, and the non-elected members of the nation-state's national security apparatus, will be discussed at the end of this lecture.

# The Bay of Pigs: A Covert Operation Against the President

- **March 17, 1960:** President Eisenhower approves “*A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime*,” which includes psychological, economic, and paramilitary actions to bring down the Castro regime in Cuba---but no direct, overt endorsement of an invasion plan. (However, the possibility of subsequent U.S. military intervention is hinted at in some of its language, per John Newman, in *Countdown to Darkness*.)
- **August 18, 1960:** Eisenhower approves the formation and training of a paramilitary exile force outside of Cuba (in Guatemala) for “immediate” insertion into Cuba (when ready). He demands *plausible deniability*. Initial CIA plans call for an insertion of about 500 Cuban exile paramilitary fighters in November, 1960; **a large internal uprising in Cuba is essential to the plan’s success**. By November 1960, the invasion plans would be hopelessly behind schedule, and the CIA knew its force of 500 men would be hopelessly inadequate to accomplish regime change on its own.
- **August of 1960:** The CIA enlists the American Mafia to assassinate Fidel Castro.
- **November 3, 1960:** By November 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Pentagon, State Department, and the National Security Advisor (NSA) had by this time all dismissed the “**internal uprising myth**”---they all knew that the exile invasion would **NOT** stimulate an internal Cuban uprising against Castro. The NSC meeting minutes state: (per Newman, *Countdown to Darkness*)

**“Mr. Gray [Eisenhower’s NSA] expressed the opinion that we will *never* be able to ‘clean up’ the situation without the use of *overt U.S. military force*. He suggested the possibility of using the CIA-backed exiles to mount a simulated attack on Guantanamo in order to offer an excuse for overt intervention.” [Emphasis added] (Although the use of a *pretext* to justify an American invasion was not adopted in November of 1960, President Eisenhower would again raise the idea of employing a *pretext* to justify U.S. military intervention *just two months later*, and this concept would become the driving force behind significant U.S. invasion plans in both 1962 and 1963.)**

# Bay of Pigs (continued)

- **November 15, 1960:** A bombshell conclusion was reached at a CIA (WH/4) meeting:

*"Our original concept is now seen to be unachievable in the face of the controls Castro has instituted. There will not be the internal unrest earlier believed possible, nor will the defenses permit the type [of] strike first planned. Our second concept (1,500-3,000 man force to secure a beach with an airstrip) is also now seen to be unachievable, except as a joint Agency/DOD action."* [Emphasis added]

Author John Newman considers this statement a "Rosetta Stone" to understanding the many follow-on actions in which President Kennedy, **who made it clear he would not approve overt U.S. military intervention**, was **repeatedly falsely informed by the CIA that the exile invasion would indeed stimulate a widespread internal uprising in Cuba** that would lead to Castro's downfall; furthermore, the **Joint Chiefs of Staff** ---after one initial warning to the new President that the CIA's exile invasion would fail---thereafter **dishonestly consistently endorsed** the CIA's exile invasion with **over-optimistic executive summaries**, while hiding their warnings of failure in heavily disguised fine print. These actions were taken, according to John Newman (in *Countdown to Darkness*), **to prevent a wary JFK from cancelling the planned exile invasion**. Allen Dulles and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were confident that an untested President Kennedy would do whatever was required to bail out the exile invasion with U.S. military intervention, to salvage his own reputation and the national honor of the United States---and that the **failure** of the exile invasion would trigger the all-out, massive U.S. military invasion of the island which Kennedy was unwilling to consider from the get-go, and which would be necessary to bring down the Castro regime. David Talbot and Daniel Schorr have publicly supported this view, as well.

- **November 29, 1960:** President-Elect John F. Kennedy is briefed (for the second time) on the exile invasion by Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell, and Bissell states that the CIA is contemplating a "significant strike force to act as a catalyst" **in ultimately provoking an anti-Castro uprising on the island**, per Peter Grose in *Gentleman Spy*. This lie is repeated and maintained ever-after by the CIA in all subsequent Presidential planning sessions for the exile invasion.
- **January 3, 1961:** In a White House meeting, the CIA says it will increase the size of the exile invasion force from the 600-750 men envisaged in early December, to 1,500 men. **President Eisenhower** (per Bissell's memoirs) **stated he would be prepared to move against Castro with the U.S. military if Castro provided a "really good excuse," and failing that, he then stated: "perhaps we could think of manufacturing something that would be generally acceptable."** This was a Presidential endorsement of the idea of the use of **pretexts for war**, raised 2 months previously by Eisenhower's NSA. **It would become the primary strategy for justifying proposed U.S. military intervention in Cuba throughout much of 1962 and 1963.**
- **January 4, 1961:** USMC Colonel Jack Hawkins, the Chief of the CIA's paramilitary section who is training the Cuban exiles, explains in a memo: **"There will be no early attempt to break out of the lodgment for further offensive operations unless or until there is a general uprising against the Castro regime or overt military intervention by United States forces has taken place."** [Emphasis added] (If an uprising failed to materialize, U.S. military intervention would be essential.)

# Bay of Pigs (continued)

- **January 11, 1961:** The Pentagon is briefed by the CIA on the exile invasion, and General Gray of the Joint Staff writes a report to the Chiefs evaluating the CIA paramilitary plan which states that *only overt U.S. military intervention*---either unilaterally, or in concert with the Cuban exile invasion force---**would guarantee success in overthrowing Castro.**
- **January 22, 1961:** JCS Chairman Lyman Lemnitzer reveals to the new Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, that **Castro has an army of 32,000 men, a police force of 9,000 men, and a militia of 200,000 men;** and that they had received 30,000 tons of supplies and equipment from the Soviet Bloc in the past 5 or 6 months. (These facts make it all too obvious that without an internal uprising, a small exile invasion of only 1,500 men has no chance of success.)
- **January 28, 1961:** President Kennedy meets with DCI Allen Dulles, JCS Chairman Lemnitzer, and other senior Cabinet officials to discuss what to do about Castro---whether or not to continue with the exile invasion planned under Eisenhower. Dulles accurately reports that the Pentagon's position was that *no currently authorized course of action could succeed in overthrowing the Castro regime.* This was true, and Lemnitzer confirmed this by saying that in spite of the CIA's optimistic view about the chances for the exiles to land and hold a beachhead, soon after the exiles landed, Castro would bring in superior forces and the question would then be, *who would come to their aid?* As Newman puts it, "The President did not bite." (Six days later, knowing JFK did not favor military intervention, the JCS would flip and approve the CIA plan.)
- **February 3, 1961:** The Joint Chiefs submitted a 10-page evaluation of the CIA's paramilitary Cuban invasion plan which, unaccountably, appeared to reverse the position Lemnitzer expressed to the President on January 28<sup>th</sup>. Its summary statement read: "**In summary, evaluation of the current plan results in a favorable assessment.**" After listing numerous shortcomings and possible ways in which the invasion might fail, the Chiefs again summarized by concluding: "**...timely execution of this plan has a fair chance of ultimate success.**" [Emphasis added] **After the ignominious failure at the Bay of Pigs, it was revealed that the Chiefs actually only felt the invasion had a 30% chance of success, and a 70% chance of failure, and yet they used the dishonest phrase "fair chance of success."**
- **March 11, 1961:** President Kennedy disapproves of the planned "Operation Pluto" exile invasion site at Trinidad, since plans to invade at that sight appear too "noisy" and U.S. involvement may not be plausibly deniable. *Plausible deniability* is JFK's chief priority (as it was for Eisenhower).
- **March 15, 1961:** DDP Bissell submits a plan for a new invasion site at the remote Bay of Pigs and Playa Giron. **The Joint Chiefs evaluate the new invasion plan, now called "Operation Zapata," and approve it.**
- **April 4, 1961:** President Kennedy approves the Bay of Pigs exile invasion, and it is scheduled to begin o/a April 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>. **JFK directs that the Cuban exile brigade leaders be informed that U.S. military forces would not be allowed to participate in, or support the invasion in any way.** The President's continued insistence on *plausible deniability* causes Secretary of State Dean Rusk to gradually whittle down the size and number of air strikes before the invasion, but **no one** at any of the planning meetings informs the President about how essential they consider the planned air strikes are to success.

# Bay of Pigs (conclusion)

- **April 17-20:** The Bay of Pigs exile invasion of Cuba, which never had a chance of succeeding without overt, massive U.S. military intervention, is “the perfect failure.” **President Kennedy resists repeated requests by the CIA and Pentagon to save the invasion with U.S. military intervention.** Prior to the invasion he insisted in private with his national security apparatus that there would be no overt U.S. military involvement or intervention; and he also *publicly* promised that no U.S. forces were preparing to invade Cuba prior to the exile invasion, in an attempt to maintain plausible deniability. JFK decided it was more important to maintain U.S. credibility, and not to become a liar in the eyes of the world, than to try to save a hopeless and doomed exile invasion with ill-advised, ad hoc, incremental and piecemeal U.S. military actions. *He also now realized he had been set-up, and was determined not to be manipulated into making a bad situation worse.*
- **Per David Talbot, in *The Devil’s Chessboard*: The Bay of Pigs was “not simply doomed to fail, it was meant to fail.”**
- **RETROSPECTIVE COMMENTS by John Newman, from *Countdown to Darkness*:**

“The covert CIA paramilitary plan was unable to keep pace with the consolidation of the regime in Havana, and that plan breathed its last death gurgle before Kennedy was inaugurated. It did not take long for Allen Dulles and the Chiefs to figure out that if they told the President the truth about Cuba and Laos, he would abort in Cuba and negotiate over Laos. So they lied. Over and over and over again. They assumed that when the invasion force was being slaughtered on the beachhead, the President would change his mind and send in the Marines and airplanes.”

“Kennedy’s subordinates repeatedly promised him that the exile landing in Cuba would trigger a popular uprising against the Castro regime. Yet, that outlandish canard had been unanimously rejected by everyone in the Special Group [of the NSC] well before Kennedy was elected, and was thoroughly demolished at the operational level of the CIA by [the] time of his election. As the moment to brief the President on Cuba neared, however, the uprising myth was quickly resurrected. Bissell was the first to feed this lie to the President-elect before his inauguration, and it was inserted into every estimate sent to the President by the CIA and the Pentagon after the inauguration.”

“President Kennedy had made it clear to his subordinates that he would not, under any circumstances, commit U.S. military forces to action in Cuba. Yet, Dulles and the Chiefs did not believe their Commander-in-Chief. They were certain that, once the exile brigade was pinned down and being slaughtered on the beachhead, Kennedy would have to give in. The Chiefs had lied about their professional position on the CIA plan. It was a disgraceful, disloyal, and insubordinate performance.”

## The Post Bay of Pigs Reaction: President Kennedy Scolds the Chiefs, and Transfers Most Paramilitary Operations from the CIA to the Pentagon

- **May 27, 1961:** President Kennedy motored over from the White House, across the Potomac to the Pentagon, and personally informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff about how dissatisfied he had been with their recent advice on both Cuba and Laos, which were characterized by poor staff work, and narrow-minded, blindered recommendations that failed to consider international or global strategic considerations.
- **June 28, 1961:** President Kennedy personally signed NSAM 55, “Relations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the President in Cold War Operations;” it was addressed to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and formalized his new expectations following the dissatisfaction he expressed in his oral remarks of May 27<sup>th</sup>. The key sentences read: **“I expect the Joint Chiefs of Staff to present the military viewpoint in governmental councils in such a way as to assure that the military factors are clearly understood before decisions are reached...while I look to the Chiefs to represent the military factor without reserve or hesitation, I regard them to be more than military men and expect their help in fitting military requirements into the overall context of any situation, recognizing that the most difficult problem in government is to combine all assets in a unified, effective pattern.”** [Emphasis added]
- **June 28, 1961:** The NSA, McGeorge Bundy, signs **NSAM 57, “Responsibility for Paramilitary Operations,”** which is addressed to State, Defense, and CIA. After defining paramilitary operations, the key passages read: **“The Department of Defense will normally receive responsibility for overt paramilitary operations. Where such an operation is to be wholly covert and disavowable, it may be assigned to CIA, *provided it is within the normal capacity of the agency.* Any large paramilitary operation wholly or partly covert...is properly the primary responsibility of the Department of Defense with the CIA in a supporting role.”** [Emphasis added]

# Operation Mongoose (Intended Primarily as a Covert Action Program) Stimulates Pentagon Planning for An Overt, Unilateral Invasion of Cuba with the Full Range of Conventional (not Paramilitary) Forces, To Be *Justified* by Covert Means (i.e., with Pretexts for Invasion)

- **November 30, 1961:** “**Operation Mongoose**” is the codeword given to the interdepartmental program within the Executive Branch charged with bringing down the Castro regime in Cuba---through implementation of political, psychological, economic, and covert actions, while simultaneously continuing JCS planning for “a decisive U.S. capability for intervention.” Mongoose is a subset of the National Security Council, and is a two-tier committee:
  - **Special Group, Augmented:** Provides policy guidance for Mongoose, and keeps higher authority informed (consists of Robert Kennedy, Maxwell Taylor, Lyman Lemnitzer, John McCone, U. Alexis Johnson, and Roswell Gilpatric).
  - **Operational Representatives:** [Meet weekly] are William Harvey [CIA]; Brig. Gen. William Harris [Defense]; Robert Hurwitch [State]; Robert Wilson [USIA]; **Brig. Gen. Lansdale [Operations Officer]**.
  - **Brigadier General Edward G. Lansdale**, the **Mongoose Operations Officer**, is the glue that holds the project together and is its driving force.
- An Obsession with Invading Cuba, Using American Armed Forces, Grips the Pentagon in the Spring of 1962
  - **January 17, 1962:** **Lansdale** requests that the **Joint Staff** prepare a **Policy Statement on Cuba**;
  - **February 7, 1962:** The Pentagon’s **Joint Staff** generates the requested **Policy Statement on Cuba**.
  - **March 5, 1962:** General Lansdale requests that Gen. Craig of the **Joint Staff** **provide a brief but precise description of pretexts** which would provide justification for U.S. military intervention in Cuba; *Lansdale further requests that he receive the views of the Joint Chiefs on this matter by March 13, 1962.*
  - **March 13, 1962:** The Joint Chiefs enthusiastically endorse detailed pretexts for war against Cuba called **“Northwoods,”** generated on March 9<sup>th</sup> by the Joint Staff, and forward them to Secretary of Defense McNamara.
  - **March 16, 1962:** President Kennedy rejects the concept of **any** U.S. military invasion of Cuba in a meeting with Lansdale and JCS Chairman Lemnitzer, when Lemnitzer brings up **“Northwoods”** at the meeting.
  - **April 10, 1962:** The Joint Chiefs of Staff push back against President Kennedy’s aversion to invading Cuba, in a scathing memorandum to the Secretary of Defense which demands that the U.S. invade Cuba in the near future---*without any mention of the use of pretexts whatsoever.*

[Details in next 6 slides]



## The “Northwoods” File:

### *The Documented History of 1962 Pretexts for the Invasion of Cuba*

- In response to ARRB search requests, in 1997 the Joint Staff Secretariat produced this **Top Secret, Special Handling NOFORN case file**, large portions of which were declassified that year on an expedited basis, thanks to the efforts of the Review Board’s Military Records Team. The “Northwoods” file documents the Pentagon’s response to **Mongoose (Lansdale) requests for:** (1) *a Cuba policy statement*, and (2) *pretexts for invasion of Cuba by U.S. military forces*.
- February 7, 1962: The Cuba Policy Statement produced by the Joint Staff at the Pentagon states:
  - The Soviets could establish land, sea, and/or air bases in Cuba;
  - The Soviets could provide Castro with a number of ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads; or they could furnish the missiles and maintain joint control of the nuclear warheads.
  - Principal conclusions: The Department of Defense holds that the Communist regime in Cuba is *incompatible with the minimum security requirements of the Western Hemisphere*.
  - The Department of Defense is prepared to *overtly* support any **popular movement** inside Cuba *to the extent of ousting the Communist regime and installing a government acceptable to the United States...* it is believed this can be accomplished *without* precipitating general war, and without serious effect on world public opinion if the following conditions prevail: [Emphasis added]

# Joint Staff **Cuba Policy Statement** (continued)

- **Conditions necessary to support successful U.S. military intervention in Cuba:**
  - If the impression is created that there is an urgent humanitarian requirement to restore order in Cuba;
  - If it is announced incident to the overt military action that the United States and/or OAS is moving into Cuba to restore order and hold free elections;
  - If the military operation is conducted as quickly as possible and with sufficient force so that the Communist Bloc's ability to take effective countermeasures in support of the Cuban regime is reduced to a minimum;
  - **OR, if the Cuban regime commits hostile acts against U.S. forces or property which would serve as an incident upon which to base overt U.S. intervention.**
- After Lansdale formally requests Cuban invasion pretexts from the **Joint Staff** on March 5, 1962, the **Joint Chiefs of Staff** meet to consider Lansdale's request on March 7, 1962 and provide a "green light" to the **Joint Staff** to proceed with the staff study; a record of this approval was recorded in an enclosure to "Northwoods" titled: "Facts Bearing Upon the Problem" [Emphasis added]
  - The Joint Chiefs of Staff have previously stated that U.S. unilateral military intervention in Cuba can be undertaken in the event that the Cuban regime commits hostile acts against U.S. forces or property which would serve as an incident upon which to base overt intervention.
  - The need for positive action in the event that current covert efforts to foster an internal Cuban rebellion are unsuccessful was indicated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on March 7, 1962, as follows: "**...determination that a creditable internal revolt is impossible of attainment [sic] during the next 9-10 months will require a decision by the United States to develop a Cuban 'provocation' as justification for positive U.S. military action.**" [This statement indicates Joint Chiefs concurrence with the Lansdale tasking of March 5<sup>th</sup>.]

# The “Northwoods” Pretexts for the Unilateral U.S. Military Invasion of Cuba

- The pretexts for war against Cuba were **generated on March 9, 1962 by the Joint Staff, and fully endorsed (without changes) by the Joint Chiefs.** These recommendations for “how to justify a war” were forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on March 13, 1962 above the signature of JCS Chairman Lyman Lemnitzer, in a cover memo titled: **“Justification for U.S. Military Intervention in Cuba”** (Top Secret Special Handling NOFORN). [In accordance with NSAM 57, the JCS Chairman requested that the JCS be assigned the responsibility for *both* overt and covert military *and* paramilitary operations.] The only caveat was that the plans would *“hold good only as long as there will be reasonable certainty that U.S. military intervention in Cuba would not directly involve the Soviet Union.”*
- They included the following **pretexts for war** (summarized):
  - **Guantanamo Bay Naval Base incidents (all false):** fake an attack on the base; blow up ammunition on the base and blame it on Castro; sabotage a ship in harbor (large fires); sink a ship near the harbor entrance (a “Remember the Maine” incident) and conduct mock funerals afterwards;
  - **Develop and implement a “Communist Cuban Terror Campaign” in the United States** in Miami, other Florida cities, and even in Washington, D.C. in which the targets could be anti-Castro Cuban refugees seeking haven in the United States. **The exploding of real bombs could be engineered, and attempts on the lives of Cuban refugees could be staged (even to include wounding them),** in concert with false documents to be released substantiating the involvement of the Cuban government.

## “Northwoods” Pretexts for War (continued)

- A U.S. jet such as an F-86 could be painted like a Cuban MiG and simulate an air attack on a U.S. airliner;
- A registered U.S. passenger airliner (a real commercial aircraft owned by a CIA subsidiary company) could be piloted by remote-control over Cuba, and be blown up by a remotely-controlled bomb onboard the aircraft, after this aircraft was converted into a drone; realism could be simulated by the broadcast of a tape recording onboard the aircraft in which the “pilots” are heard describing the “attack” by Cuban MiG fighters. This fake shootdown would be preceded by the filing of an authentic flight plan from the United States to either Jamaica, Guatemala, Panama, or Venezuela; a *duplicate airliner* (painted in all respects in a manner identical to the real, sacrificial commercial aircraft) and its passengers (carefully selected covert operatives operating under cover) would openly take off from the United States and secretly land at Eglin AFB in Florida to deplane the covert operatives masquerading as “passengers;” the authentic airliner, converted to a drone (and without passengers onboard) would then take off from Eglin AFB, resume the flight plan over Cuba, and be destroyed in the air. *This operation was designed to demonstrate convincingly that a Cuban military aircraft had attacked and shot down a chartered civilian aircraft.*
- A U.S. submarine or small craft could deposit at sea parts from a “destroyed” U.S. F-101 fighter plane which had supposedly been “shot down” by Cuban MiGs. This activity would be coordinated with a real flight of 4 or 5 U.S. fighter jets in which one would lag behind, leave the formation, complain about being attacked by a Cuban fighter near the Cuban coastline---and then land at Eglin AFB and be repainted with new markings and tail numbers. The pilot who had flown the mission under an alias would then resume his normal identity and his normal activities. The pilots of the planes not “shot down” would not be informed of the covert operation. U.S. search vessels would then be deployed to find the debris of the “shoot down” at sea.

# President Kennedy Rejects U.S. Military Intervention in Cuba on March 16, 1962

- **Source:** *Brothers*, by David Talbot, per Lansdale meeting notes declassified on March 28, 2005.
- **At a meeting about Cuba in the Oval Office on March 16, 1962** with General Lansdale (Operations Officer, Mongoose), General Lemnitzer (Chairman, JCS), General Maxwell Taylor (Military Advisor to the President), and McGeorge Bundy (National Security Advisor), **President Kennedy indicated he would not support U.S. military intervention, even if there were a popular revolt inside Cuba**, which General Lansdale was eternally hopeful about.
- General Lemnitzer nevertheless, per Lansdale's notes, brought up the subject of the **Northwoods pretexts** for invading Cuba, saying (per Lansdale's notes) that the Chiefs **"had plans for creating plausible pretexts to use force [against Cuba], with the pretexts either attacks on U.S. aircraft or a Cuban action in Latin America for which we would retaliate."**
- President Kennedy clearly rejected the concept of pretexts to justify an invasion of Cuba, per Lansdale's notes, and **"said bluntly that we were not discussing the use of military force."**
- JFK then admonished Lemnitzer by saying that he might not have enough divisions to fight in Cuba if the USSR responded to a U.S. invasion of that island by going to war over Berlin, or elsewhere.
- Robert McNamara (Secretary of Defense) told David Talbot he had no recollection of "Northwoods," and I am aware of no single document passing formal judgment on the JCS "Northwoods" proposals of March 13<sup>th</sup>, but the Lansdale meeting notes released in 2005 clearly indicate that **invoking pretexts to support a Cuban invasion by the U.S. military was a dead issue on March 16, 1962---only three days after Lyman Lemnitzer forwarded "Northwoods" to the Secretary of Defense.** *The joint gambit of Lansdale and the JCS had failed.*

## The Joint Chiefs Fight Back---And Insist on Unilateral U.S. Military Intervention in Cuba Without Using Pretexts as Justification

- On April 10, 1962 the Joint Chiefs of Staff send a blistering tutorial---in effect, a demand, with the strident tone of an ultimatum---to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, insisting upon a U.S. invasion of Cuba in the near future. **Undeterred by JFK's rejection of pretexts for invading Cuba, they "up the ante."** Verbatim excerpts from this policy paper follow:
- The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe the Cuban problem must be solved in the near future. Further, they see no prospect of early success in overthrowing the present Communist regime either as a result of internal uprisings or external political, economic, or psychological pressures. [Note: This is a clear rejection of the primary premise of Mongoose, and of Lansdale's eternal optimism about stimulating an internal rebellion.] Accordingly, they believe that military intervention by the United States will be required to overthrow the present Communist regime.
- **The United States cannot tolerate permanent existence of a Communist government in the Western Hemisphere...** While considered unlikely, it is possible for the Sino-Soviet Bloc to establish military bases in Cuba similar to U.S. installations around the Bloc periphery...
- Time favors the Cuban regime and the Communist bloc...
- The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that the United States can undertake military intervention in Cuba *without risk of general war*...Forces available would assure rapid essential military control of Cuba. *Continued police action would be required.*
- ...The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that a national policy of early military intervention be adopted by the United States...as soon as possible and preferably before release of National Guard and Reserve forces presently on active duty. [Emphasis added]

# The April 10, 1962 Invasion Demand Is Rejected; Khrushchev Conceives Operation Anadyr In May 1962; and the Ensuing Cuban Missile Crisis Brings the U.S. and USSR to the Brink of Nuclear War

- There were 3 causes for the USSR's plans to place MRBM and IRBM nuclear missiles in Cuba:
  - The USSR's awareness of its own nuclear strategic inferiority (April 1962, at Pitsunda on the Black Sea);
  - The desire to help defend a Socialist/Communist ally against the very real threat of a U.S. invasion; and
  - Misjudgment of President Kennedy as a weak leader, based upon the Bay of Pigs and the Vienna summit, who could be "rolled"
- U-2 Flight of October 14, 1962 reveals Soviet MRBMs in Cuba
- The Cuban Missile Crisis unfolds between October 16-October 28, 1962
- The **consensus position** of the Joint Chiefs and CIA **is in support of bombing and invading Cuba to remove the MRBMs**; however, JFK chooses blockade---in concert with the threat of air strikes and invasion---and strong diplomatic pressure.
- **The hardliners---the Pentagon and the CIA---were of the opinion that the President could no longer refuse to take direct military action**, and that the U.S. no longer needed any pretexts for invasion, since a bonafide reason---***indeed, an imperative***---had presented itself.
- **The Chiefs were furious and embittered, and openly insubordinate (to JFK's face), following the diplomatic resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis:**
  - Admiral George Anderson (CNO): **"We've been had."**
  - General Curtis LeMay (USAF COS): **"Won, hell! We lost! It's the greatest defeat in our history. We should go in and wipe them out today!"** (During the Crisis, directly to President Kennedy: "This is almost as bad as the appeasement at Munich," and "You're in a pretty bad fix.")

# The Aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis: Searching for a New Cuba Policy Throughout 1963 (Or, "A Government at War with Itself")

- **Operation Mongoose** died during the Cuban Missile Crisis for two principal reasons:
  - **William Harvey's rash actions** (insertion of a commando team into Cuba via U.S. submarine, without Presidential approval); and
  - **President Kennedy's ultimate decision not to invade Cuba in the face of overwhelming justification;** given the impossibility of an internal uprising, this signaled JFK's acceptance of co-existence with the Castro regime.
- **President Kennedy provides a public, informal "no-invasion pledge" in late November, 1962** following the true resolution of the Missile Crisis on November 20<sup>th</sup> (when the USSR agreed to remove the IL-28 medium range bombers from Cuba); it is contingent upon non-reintroduction of offensive weapons by the USSR, and inspection by the U.N. to verify same (which Castro never permitted).
- **The administration's search for a new Cuba policy in 1963 led to four concurrent actions within the U.S. government:**
  - **Spring 1963: JFK orders the FBI to shut down paramilitary anti-Castro guerilla training camps;**
  - **The new Chairman, JCS (Maxwell Taylor) begins secretly planning for a Cuban invasion by the U.S. military, justified by PRETEXTS (in spite of JFK's rejection of "Northwoods" in March of 1962, and his rejection of the invasion option in both April and October of 1962);**
  - **CINCLANT develops a detailed and shocking invasion plan for Cuba slated for calendar year 1964;**
  - **A new interdepartmental committee, the ICCCA, attempts to hammer out a new, formal Cuba policy that the entire U.S. government can agree on; although chaired by a State Department that does not favor overt U.S. military intervention, the Hawks (the Pentagon and the CIA) eventually win-out, and by the end of October 1963, an aggressive new policy is finalized in draft form, which predicates a massive U.S. military invasion, stimulated by a U.S.-engineered coup in Cuba---a **thinly disguised pretext.****



# Maxwell Taylor Renews Secret Planning to Invade Cuba, Using Pretexts as Justification

- Documents declassified by the ARRB reveal that *behind President Kennedy's back, the Joint Chiefs Chairman was disloyally soliciting pretexts that would justify an overt Cuban invasion by the U.S. military.*
- **March 25, 1963:** JCS Chairman Maxwell Taylor tasks the Joint Staff to generate pretexts for the invasion of Cuba, and asks for review of a new CINCLANT invasion plan, stating (in part):
  - “...it will always be extremely difficult to contrive a timed uprising in proper relation to U.S. preparations to exploit it.” Hence, “*consideration should be given to the advantages of engineering an incident as a cause for invasion rather than trying to generate and coordinate action from the inside involving many Cubans of doubtful reliability.*” He then stated that CINCLANT has forwarded a proposed concept for a “Cuban revolt well conceived, timed, executed, and supported overtly by U.S. military forces...” [Emphasis added]
- **May 1, 1963:** The requested Joint Staff report is sent to Maxwell Taylor regurgitating back to him his own tasking, as a ‘policy statement’ or ‘conclusion.’ Excerpts follow:
  - The purpose of the study is forthrightly stated: “**In response to a request from the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff to provide comment and recommendation concerning the requirements for and the desirability of fomenting a revolt in Cuba, giving consideration to the advantage of engineering an incident as an alternate cause for invasion.**” [Emphasis added]
  - The Conclusions section states in part: [Emphasis added below]
    - **The U.S. should intervene militarily in Cuba**, and *could either engineer provocative incidents ostensibly perpetrated by the Castro regime, or foment a revolt in Cuba.*
    - The U.S. should *create a pretext for overt U.S. military intervention in Cuba*, and at a propitious time, **launch appropriate military action to remove the Castro Communist government.**
    - The CINCLANT invasion plan for 1964 was appended to the May 1, 1963 report (see next slide)

# CINCLANT Cuban Invasion Plan for 1964

- **Preliminary operations:** introduction of CIA into Cuba to gather intelligence; organization of a Free Cuban Government by State; and development of a propaganda plan by USIA.
- **On or about January 15, 1964:** Actual operations would commence with the execution of CINCLANT OPLAN 380-63.
- **On or about June 15, 1964:** Augment UW forces and accelerate subversive operations to create conditions favorable for establishing a Free Cuban Government and for invasion.
- **On or about July 15, 1964:** Mobilization of U.S. military forces begins.
- **July 26, 1964 [Cuban Independence Day]:** **Execute CINCLANT OPLAN 312 [airstrike].**
- **On or about August 3, 1964:** **Execute "D-Day" OPLAN 316 [invasion].**
- **Condition:** The Free Cuban Government will be required to exist for about 18 days in the face of the Castro government's excellent counterguerilla ability. This time requirement appears to be excessive but could be shortened if necessary. During this period the U.S. government must recognize the legitimacy of the Free Cuban Government.
- **NLT October 1, 1964:** Defeat Castro's Communist government and install a government compatible with the aims of the OAS and friendly to the United States. [*Regime change completed prior to U.S. election.*]
- **This invasion plan was mysteriously withdrawn from consideration on October 4, 1963; no reason was given in the document trail.**
- **ANALYSIS:** The planners may have believed that completing the Cuban invasion and the regime change operation prior to the U.S. Presidential election in 1964 would make this operation more palatable to the Chief Executive. **Planning to launch a devastating, surprise air strike on the Cuban Independence Day was unbelievably tone-deaf.** Although this specific plan, CINCPAC OPLAN 380-63, was withdrawn from consideration on October 4, 1963, its general concept---an overt U.S. military invasion of Cuba justified by U.S. recognition of a puppet government inserted into Cuba---was later promulgated in the new policy drafted by the ICCCA near the end of 1963.

## Uncertainties in the Record:

### *It Is Unclear What Prompted Taylor's Planning, or Whether JFK Was Even Aware of His Activities (Presumably, He Was Not)*

- There is no known record indicating that the **May 1, 1963 Joint Staff study** was ever submitted to the Secretary of Defense for consideration.
- **May 10, 1963:** Maxwell Taylor sent a proposal to SECDEF *proposing that the U.S. should intervene militarily in Cuba in the event of a spontaneous revolt*. This Joint Chiefs recommendation (**for action less provocative than that proposed in the May 1<sup>st</sup> study**) was approved by them on May 6, 1963 and emanated from an earlier Joint Chiefs policy statement on April 22, 1963 which read (in part): [Emphasis added]
  - "...the United States should be prepared to support *any spontaneous revolt* in Cuba showing a reasonable promise of success..."
  - "It might prove desirable, *under some circumstances*, to apply the full force and power envisioned in OPLANS 312 and 316."
  - The policy statement endorsed a capability to undertake a full-scale invasion of Cuba within 18 days.
- **If the proposal sent to McNamara dated May 10<sup>th</sup> was not met with favorably, this could explain why there is no record of the May 1<sup>st</sup> study being delivered to the Secretary of Defense.**

**CONCURRENT with** the March, April, and May activities of Taylor and the Joint Staff, President Kennedy's formal search for a new national policy on Cuba---a true consensus that the entire government would support---began on January 14, 1963 with the establishment of the **Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee on Cuban Affairs, the ICCCA**, chaired by Kennedy's hand-picked man, State Department official Sterling Cottrell. (Key source: the "Califano Papers," declassified by the ARRB.)

# ICCCA Essentials:

## *A New Cuba Policy is Arrived at by October 30, 1963*

- **The essential principles under which the ICCCA was formed** included the following:
  - The Castro regime should be overthrown and replaced with one compatible to the United States;
  - The U.S. should isolate, undermine, and discredit the Castro regime by all means possible through all feasible diplomatic, economic, psychological, and covert actions;
  - *Invasion by the U.S. should not be undertaken in the absence of aggression that threatens the peace and security of the Western Hemisphere.* [Emphasis added]
- **The ICCCA's charter** did **NOT** include premeditated invasion, or unilateral military intervention.
- Nevertheless, Hawks within the USG (Paul Nitze, Elmo Zumwalt, and the JCS) eventually modified and highjacked the initial ICCCA guidelines to promote a policy that did indeed authorize massive U.S. military intervention, if it was preceded by a U.S.-instigated coup in Cuba which would give the military action legitimacy.
- **On October 30, 1963** Cyrus Vance, Executive Agent for the Department of Defense for Cuba policy, sent a memo to General Maxwell Taylor (Chairman, JCS) in response to Taylor's general approval on October 21<sup>st</sup> of the 13<sup>th</sup> draft of the ICCCA's joint State-DOD Contingency Plan for a Coup in Cuba. The Vance memo forwarded the final version of the ICCCA's new policy, titled: **"Contingency Plan for a Coup in Cuba."** The preamble started out well enough, and on the surface emulated the original guiding concepts of the ICCCA's charter back in January:
  - *"The U.S. does not contemplate either a premeditated full scale invasion of Cuba (except in the case of Soviet intervention or the reintroduction of offensive weapons) or the contrivance of a provocation which could be used as a pretext for such action."* [Emphasis added]

# “Contingency Plan for a Coup in Cuba:” The Victory of the Hawks in the ICCCA

- *BUT*, what at first appeared to be a victory for President Kennedy’s no-invasion policy *was nothing more than a fig-leaf providing cover* for the three-year long desire of the national security establishment to invade Cuba and impose regime change by force. (U.S. military intervention was recognized as essential beginning in Nov 1960.)
- The essentials of the “Contingency Plan for a Coup in Cuba” were as follows: [Emphasis added]
  - *Underlying the plan is the unstated assumption that a coup will not occur naturally in Cuba and that it would have to be engineered by CIA; once a new, alternative “provisional government” is in place, a “Special Team” of U.S. evaluators (State/CIA/military) would be inserted into Cuba to evaluate the situation;*
  - The “Special Team” would report within 24 hours of insertion if possible, and remain with the newly formed provisional government as liaison;
  - U.S. military forces would re-establish the blockade of Cuba, and would commence positioning forces to carry out OPLANS 312 [air strikes] and 316 [invasion];
  - *A recommendation to intervene would be made by the President;*
  - CINCLANT would assume command of all military and paramilitary operations in Cuba [IAW NSAM 57];
  - *When authorized by the President, the “Special Team” will direct the coup leaders to publicly proclaim a provisional government and openly request U.S. and OAS assistance. The President would then announce isolation of Cuba by air and sea blockade.*
  - The U.S. would complete positioning of forces to implement OPLANS 312 and 316.
  - The U.S. would probably have to introduce conventional forces incrementally as required to sustain the uprising *and should be prepared to and would implement portions or all of OPLANS 312 and 316.*
- If the opening wording of the plan was inserted as a “blocking move” by State to counter the Pentagon’s demand for unilateral military intervention, *IT FAILED*. The original 1962 concept of a U.S. invasion of Cuba stimulated by a pretext---expressed in “Northwoods”---remained the basic construct here, since it was recognized by the Chairman of the JCS on October 21<sup>st</sup> that “a coup is unlikely to occur at this time in Cuba.” *A staged or engineered “coup” (probably engineered by a CIA assassination and the immediate insertion of a “new Cuban government”) was nothing more than a PRETEXT.*

# Undeniable Facts

- Extreme bitterness and deep hatred for JFK over U.S. foreign policy direction existed within key elements of the national security state (the Pentagon and CIA) following the end of the Cuban Missile Crisis;
- Widespread anger within the establishment over President Kennedy's desire not to invade Cuba prior to the Missile Crisis, and his refusal to do so during the Crisis, was surely the proximate cause of his assassination.
- **Other events during 1963**---JFK's clamp-down on paramilitary training for Cuban exiles in the U.S.; the "Peace Speech" at American University in June of 1963; the successful negotiation and subsequent ratification of the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty; JFK's firm decision in NSAM 263 to withdraw U.S. military forces from Vietnam by the end of 1965; and his attempted "secret" rapprochement with Cuba in the autumn of 1963---**undoubtedly all impacted the resolve of the coup plotters, and made them even more determined.** But to them, the "unsuccessful" resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis highlighted the one truly unacceptable flaw in a "weak" President: his refusal to confront Communism on the battlefield, and *especially* his refusal to implement regime change in Cuba via U.S. military intervention.
- **That a Coup d'Etat took place in America in November of 1963 is undeniable:**
  - Indisputable evidence of crossfire in Dealey Plaza was clear evidence of a conspiracy;
  - The U.S. government did all it could to cover-up the assassination, not to solve it;
  - **President Kennedy's autopsy was a sham intended to suppress all evidence of shots from the front, and report only evidence of shots from the rear (consistent with the official cover story)---as evidenced by:**
    - The fact that his body arrived at Bethesda Naval Hospital 20 minutes prior to the motorcade from Andrews AFB the evening of Nov 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1963---in the wrong casket and in the wrong vehicle---proving a break in the chain of custody and *thus invalidating the autopsy.*
    - The fact that numerous autopsy photographs (up to 18 different views) and at least 2 skull x-rays are missing;
    - The fact that the three surviving skull x-rays are forged, composite copy films (i.e., *altered films*);
    - The conduct of a *second (fraudulent) brain exam* following the initial brain exam, after his autopsy;
    - The fact that photographs from the examination of JFK's brain were suppressed, and photographs of the *substitute brain* (at the second exam), with a differing pattern of damage, were placed in the official record;
    - The rewriting of JFK's autopsy report (the document in the Archives is only the *third written version*);
    - The fact that the wounds observed in his autopsy photos and skull x-rays do not represent anything close to the wounds observed by the treatment staff at Parkland Hospital in Dallas---evidence of obstruction of justice.

# Possible Implications/Questions

- The “legend” constructed around President Kennedy’s accused assassin---as a Castro sympathizer---was clearly a determined attempt by those who designed the assassination plot to blame JFK’s death on Fidel Castro. **Was JFK’s assassination, therefore, designed to serve as a “Northwoods”-style PRETEXT for a U.S. invasion of Cuba?**
  - The love of pretexts was endemic in all Cuba planning throughout 1962 and 1963;
  - Although President Kennedy’s assassination did *not* trigger an invasion of Cuba, it may nevertheless have been intended to.
  - In the minds of the operational planners---the coup plotters---it would have been the perfect revenge against a President they hated and despised: *namely, to ensure his death became the stimulus for the U.S. military invasion of Cuba he would never authorize.*
- **John Newman, in his Epilogue to *Oswald and the CIA***, eloquently explained how, during Oswald’s visit to Mexico City in late September/early October 1963, he (and/or his impostor) was maneuvered into personal proximity with Valery Kostikov (Head of KGB “wet affairs” in the Western Hemisphere)---and how James J. Angleton’s manipulation of this information planted a “virus” within the U.S. government which virtually ensured a cover-up by the U.S. national security bureaucracy after JFK’s assassination, in an attempt to prevent World War III.
  - **One alternate explanation here** is that **while this is indeed what did happen, it may not have been what was intended;**
  - If Lyndon Johnson had been more gung-ho about regime change in Cuba, and less afraid to confront the Soviet troops remaining in Cuba, **the basic circumstances surrounding Oswald’s Mexico City visit may well have served to justify a U.S. invasion of Cuba to avenge JFK’s death, *and to simultaneously kill the growing movement toward détente and peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union.***
  - **In this alternative view, a duplicitous Lyndon Johnson may well have thwarted the true intentions of the operational coup plotters---their desire to seize Cuba and remove what was viewed as an intolerable regime from the Western Hemisphere.** Did LBJ knowingly “turn the tables” on the coup plotters, and betray them? Presumably, Oswald’s contact with Kostikov/KGB would still have justified a national security cover-up of the apparent KGB involvement (and of the crossfire in Dallas), allowing the surface explanation---*that Oswald killed Kennedy for Castro*---to prevail, justifying an invasion of Cuba.