

The Bay of Pigs invasion - on the 17th of April, 1961 - was in the planning stages before John F. Kennedy became America's President. Planned by the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) during the Eisenhower years, JFK supported the decision with modifications.

Edward R. Drachman and Alan Shank provide some background in their book *Presidents and Foreign Policy: Countdown to Ten Controversial Decisions*:

President Kennedy's decision approving the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961 was aimed at removing Fidel Castro from power in Cuba and reestablishing a government friendly to the United States. The goal was to end Castro's ties to the Soviet Union since American foreign policy considered Cuba as part of its sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere. (Drachman and Shank, page 85.)

In order to understand the mood of the country—and the fear and worry which characterized Americans' concerns about the "Cold War" and a communist country ninety miles off their Florida coast—one needs to step back in time. What may seem foolhardy today must be placed into historical context:

Consequently, Kennedy and his advisers agreed to a covert operation planned and executed by the Central Intelligence Agency. The plan had developed during the last year of the Eisenhower administration after Cuba and the United States were ready to end all diplomatic ties. After taking office, Kennedy agreed to the plan but insisted that it must appear to be a completely anti-Castro operation without any participation or sponsorship by the United States. (Drachman and Shank, page 85.)

Leaks about the planned event began to surface, and the *New York Times* ran a story about it. Then ... when the invasion actually happened ... it was a disaster which historians have called a "perfect failure." The President was extremely upset but took responsibility even though the plan had not been concocted by his administration:

When the invasion occurred, nearly everything went wrong. It turned out to be a total fiasco, a "perfect failure" of presidential conduct of United States foreign policy. All of the CIA assurances of success were erroneous. Kennedy's new administration appeared weak and unsure of itself. But Kennedy quickly took full responsibility for the disaster and made several changes to ensure it would never happen again. (Drachman and Shank, page 85.)

Few people, at the time, seemed to realize that the CIA plan was doomed to fail from the very beginning. For example:

- Why would anyone believe that Castro's seasoned troops—who had already toppled the country's prior regime—could be defeated by a much-smaller, barely-trained group of Cubans?
- What evidence did the CIA have that Cuban civilians would support the rebels and not Castro's defenders?

The list of questions goes on ... but ... it took very little time—on the 17th of April, 1961—for the invasion to monumentally fail.

The impact of the Bay of Pigs fiasco continues to this day. Historians believe it is—at least in part—responsible for the continuing estrangement of Cuba and the United States.

For more background on *Operation Zapata*—code-name for the Bay of Pigs invasion—see:

- Drawings from General Maxwell Taylor's report on the Bay of Pigs operation: **Pre-Strike** and **Post-Strike**;
- Freedom of Information Act - **disclosures on the Bay of Pigs**; and
- **CIA - Internal Probe** on the failed operation.
- Failure at the Bay of Pigs ultimately led to the Cuban Missile Crisis. For additional background, see **this series of videos**.

Credits:

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See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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