

A Crime So Immense  
By James K. Galbraith

One of the great travesties of the Cold War surfaced on April 29, when the *Washington Post* reported the declassification in full of General Maxwell Taylor's June, 1961 special report on the Bay of Pigs invasion. Partial versions of this document have been available for decades. But only now did its darkest secret spill.

Here is what Taylor reported to Kennedy. The Russians knew the date of the invasion. (Therefore, Castro also knew.) The CIA, headed by Allen Dulles, knew that the Russians knew. (Therefore, they knew the invasion would fail.) The leak did not come from the invasion force; it had happened before the Cuban exiles were themselves briefed on the date. Kennedy was not informed. Nor, of course, were the exiles. And knowing all this, Dulles ordered the operation forward.

Was this incompetence? I think not. The evidence points, rather, to treachery.

With the Cuban brigade trapped on the beachhead, Dulles's deputies demanded that Kennedy agree to a direct U.S. military intervention. In the standard history, this was a call for air bombardment to take down Castro's Air Force: Kennedy had canceled a strike just before the brigade went in, but Navy jets were gunning their engines on aircraft carriers nearby. The histories don't tend to mention something else: there were landing craft full of Marines offshore, waiting for the order to go in. (How do I know? I know someone who was on one.)

Had Kennedy caved to the CIA at that moment, then several boatloads of U.S. Marines would have joined the doomed brigade ashore. Later, the survivors would have been paraded through Havana, alongside the captured exiles, on their way to prison. There would have been an uproar, here in the United States, far greater than actually occurred. In all likelihood, we would then have committed ourselves to the vast proposition of a full-scale invasion.

And, that, it would seem, was the plan.

Kennedy refused the bait. Later, armed with Taylor's report and its radioactive accusation, he forced the resignation of Dulles and his top lieutenant in the Bay of Pigs matter, General Charles Cabell. But, being Kennedy, he kept his secret weapon locked up. And only now, it appears, do we know what it was.

The CIA took its revenge. Despite their own 1962 Inspector General's report stating the contrary, high officials spread the myth that Kennedy himself was responsible for the failure of the invasion -- that if only he had sent in the jets (and the Marines) the outcome would have been different. Kennedy chickened out! That became what the Miami Cubans believed, and still do believe. But in truth, the betrayal of the Cubans came from their friend and protector, Allen Dulles and his CIA. The exiles were his pawns, nothing more, in a bigger, bolder game.

Now, fast forward. In his 1978 memoir, *The Ends of Power*, H.R. Haldeman relates that when Watergate broke over the White House in 1972, President Nixon had the idea of getting the CIA to squelch the FBI's investigation. His leverage was to threaten then-Director Richard Helms with the secret of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Haldeman duly relayed this information to Helms, and here was the result:

“Turmoil in the room. Helms, gripping the arms of his chair leaning forward and shouting, ‘The Bay of Pigs had nothing to do with this. I have no concern about the Bay of Pigs.’

“Silence. I just sat there. I was absolutely shocked by Helms’ violent reaction. Again I wondered, *what was such dynamite* in the Bay of Pigs story?”

It seems that Haldeman never uncovered a definitive answer to this question. A few pages later, he speculates that “in all those Nixon references to the Bay of Pigs, he was really referring to the Kennedy assassination.” However that may be, Haldeman reports that his conversation did suffice to put the CIA between the FBI and the Watergate burglars. For a time.

Kennedy took a political hit at the Bay of Pigs, but he won that particular round. He did not get trapped into an invasion of Cuba. There is no reason to believe that Allen Dulles ever forgave him. And certainly the exiles in Miami, pawns to this very day, never knew the truth.

One wonders if it matters to them, anymore.

\*\*\*\*\*

James K. Galbraith teaches at the LBJ School. This essay first appeared in the Texas Observer and is copyright © 2000 by the Texas Democracy Foundation. Permission granted to circulate for any non-commercial purpose, so long as the essay and this notice remain intact.