

# [The bay of pigs invasion essay](https://assignbuster.com/the-bay-of-pigs-invasion-essay/)

The story of the failed invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs is

one of mismanagement, overconfidence, and lack of security. The

blame for the failure of the operation falls directly in the lap of

the Central Intelligence Agency and a young president and his

advisors. The fall out from the invasion caused a rise in tension

between the two great superpowers and ironically 34 years after the

event, the person that the invasion meant to topple, Fidel Castro,

is still in power. To understand the origins of the invasion and

its ramifications for the future it is first necessary to look at

the invasion and its origins.

Part I: The Invasion and its Origins.

The Bay of Pigs invasion of April 1961, started a few days

before on April 15th with the bombing of Cuba by what appeared to

be defecting Cuban air force pilots. At 6 a. m. in the morning of

that Saturday, three Cuban military bases were bombed by B-26

bombers. The airfields at Camp Libertad, San Antonio de los Baos

and Antonio Maceo airport at Santiago de Cuba were fired upon.

Seven people were killed at Libertad and forty-seven people were

killed at other sites on the island.

Two of the B-26s left Cuba and flew to Miami, apparently to

defect to the United States. The Cuban Revolutionary Council, the

government in exile, in New York City released a statement saying

that the bombings in Cuba were “. . . carried out by ‘ Cubans inside

Cuba’ who were ‘ in contact with’ the top command of the

Revolutionary Council . . . .” The New York Times reporter

covering the story alluded to something being wrong with the whole

situation when he wondered how the council knew the pilots were

coming if the pilots had only decided to leave Cuba on Thursday

after ” . . . a suspected betrayal by a fellow pilot had

precipitated a plot to strike . . . .” Whatever the case, the

planes came down in Miami later that morning, one landed at Key

West Naval Air Station at 7: 00 a. m. and the other at Miami

International Airport at 8: 20 a. m. Both planes were badly damaged

and their tanks were nearly empty. On the front page of The New

York Times the next day, a picture of one of the B-26s was shown

along with a picture of one of the pilots cloaked in a baseball hat

and hiding behind dark sunglasses, his name was withheld. A sense

of conspiracy was even at this early stage beginning to envelope

the events of that week.

In the early hours of April 17th the assault on the Bay of

Pigs began. In the true cloak and dagger spirit of a movie, the

assault began at 2 a. m. with a team of frogmen going ashore with

orders to set up landing lights to indicate to the main assault

force the precise location of their objectives, as well as to clear

the area of anything that may impede the main landing teams to be

added when they arrived. At 2: 30 a. m. and at 3: 00 a. m. two battalions

came ashore at Playa Girn and one battalion at Playa Larga beaches.

The troops at Playa Girn had orders to move west, northwest, up the

coast and meet with the troops at Playa Larga in the middle of the

bay. A small group of men were then to be sent north to the town of

Jaguey Grande to secure it as well.

When looking at a modern map of Cuba it is obvious that the

troops would have problems in the area that was chosen for them to

land at. The area around the Bay of Pigs is a swampy marsh land

area which would be hard on the troops. The Cuban forces were quick

to react and Castro ordered his T-33 trainer jets, two Sea Furies,

and two B-26s into the air to stop the invading forces. Off the

coast was the command and control ship and another vessel carrying

supplies for the invading forces. The Cuban air force made quick

work of the supply ships, sinking the command vessel the Marsopa

and the supply ship the Houston, blasting them to pieces with five-

inch rockets. In the end the 5th battalion was lost, which was on

the Houston, as well as the supplies for the landing teams and

eight other smaller vessels. With some of the invading forces’

ships destroyed, and no command and control ship, the logistics of

the operation soon broke down as the other supply ships were kept

at bay by Casto’s air force. As with many failed military

adventures, one of the problems with this one was with supplying

the troops.

In the air, Castro had easily won superiority over the

invading force. His fast moving T-33s, although unimpressive by

today’s standards, made short work of the slow moving B-26s of the

invading force. On Tuesday, two were shot out of the sky and by

Wednesday the invaders had lost 10 of their 12 aircraft. With

air power firmly in control of Castro’s forces, the end was near

for the invading army.

Over the 72 hours the invading force of about 1500 men were

pounded by the Cubans. Casto fired 122mm. Howitzers, 22mm. cannon,

and tank fire at them. By Wednesday the invaders were pushed back

to their landing zone at Playa Girn. Surrounded by Castro’s forces

some began to surrender while others fled into the hills. In

total 114 men were killed in the slaughter while thirty-six died as

prisoners in Cuban cells. Others were to live out twenty years or

more in those cells as men plotting to topple the government of

Castro.

The 1500 men of the invading force never had a chance for

success from almost the first days in the planning stage of the

operation. Operation Pluto, as it came to be known as, has its

origins in the last dying days of the Eisenhower administration and

that murky time period during the transition of power to the newly

elected president John F. Kennedy.

The origins of American policy in Latin America in the late

1950s and early 1960s has its origins in American’s economic

interests and its anticommunist policies in the region. The same

man who had helped formulate American containment policy towards

the Soviet threat, George Kennan, in 1950 spoke to US Chiefs of

Mission in Rio de Janeiro about Latin America. He said that

American policy had several purposes in the region,

. . . to protect the vital supplies of raw materials

which Latin American countries export to the USA; to

prevent the ‘ military exploitation of Latin America by

the enemy’ The Soviet Union; and to avert ‘ the

psychological mobilization of Latin America against us.’

. . . .

By the 1950s trade with Latin America accounted for a quarter

of American exports, and 80 per cent of the investment in Latin

America was also American. The Americans had a vested interest

in the region that it would remain pro-American.

The Guatemalan adventure can be seen as another of the factors

that lead the American government to believe that it could handle

Casto. Before the Second World War ended, a coup in Guatemala saw

the rise to power of Juan Jose Arvalo. He was not a communist in

the traditional sense of the term, but he “. . . packed his

government with Communist Party members and Communist

sympathizers.” In 1951 Jacobo Arbenz succeeded Arvalo after an

election in March of that year. The party had been progressing with

a series of reforms, and the newly elected leader continued with

these reforms. During land reforms a major American company, the

United Fruit Company, lost its land and other holdings without any

compensation from the Guatemalan government. When the Guatemalans

refused to go to the International Court of Law, United Fruit began

to lobby the government of the United States to take action. In the

government they had some very powerful supporters. Among them were

Foster Dulles, Secretary of State who had once been their lawyer,

his brother Allen the Director of Central Intelligence who was a

share holder, and Robert Cutler head of the National Security

Council. In what was a clear conflict of interest, the security

apparatus of the United States decided to take action against the

Guatemalans.

From May 1st, 1954, to June 18th, the Central Intelligence

Agency did everything in its power to overthrow the government of

Arbenz. On June 17th to the 18th, it peaked with an invasion of 450

men lead by a Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas. With the help of air

support the men took control of the country and Arbenz fled to the

Mexican Embassy. By June 27th, the country was firmly in control of

the invading force. With its success in Guatemala, CIA had the

confidence that it could now take on anyone who interfered with

American interests.

In late 1958 Castro was still fighting a guerilla war against

the corrupt regime of Fulgencio Batista. Before he came to power,

there was an incident between his troops and some vacationing

American troops from the nearby American naval base at Guantanamo

Bay. During the incident some US Marines were held captive by

Casto’s forces but were later released after a ransom was secretly

paid. This episode soured relations with the United States and

the chief of U. S. Naval Operations, Admiral Burke, wanted to send

in the Marines to destroy Castro’s forces then but Secretary of

State Foster Dulles disagreed with the measures suggested and

stopped the plan.

Castro overthrew Batista in 1959. Originally Castro was not a

communist either and even had meetings with then Vice-President

Richard Nixon. Fearful of Castro’s revolution, people with money,

like doctors, lawyers, and the mafia, left Cuba for the United

States. To prevent the loss of more capital Castro’s solution was

to nationalize some of the businesses in Cuba. In the process

of nationalizing some business he came into conflict with American

interests just as Arbenz had in Guatemala. “. . . legitimate U. S.

Businesses were taken over, and the process of socialization begun

with little if any talk of compensation.” There were also

rumours of Cuban involvement in trying to invade Panama, Guatemala,

and the Dominican Republic and by this time Castro had been

turn down by the United States for any economic aid. Being rejected

by the Americans, he met with foreign minister Anasta Mikoyan to

secure a $100 million loan from the Soviet Union. It was in

this atmosphere that the American Intelligence and Foreign

Relations communities decided that Castro was leaning towards

communism and had to be dealt with.

In the spring of 1960, President Eisenhower approved a plan to

send small groups of American trained, Cuban exiles, to work in the

underground as guerrillas to overthrow Castro. By the fall, the

plan was changed to a full invasion with air support by exile

Cubans in American supplied planes. The original group was to

be trained in Panama, but with the growth of the operation and the

quickening pace of events in Cuba, it was decided to move things to

a base in Guatemala. The plan was becoming rushed and this would

start to show, the man in charge of the operation, CIA Deputy

Director Bissell said that,

. . . There didn’t seem to be time to keep to the

original plan and have a large group trained by this

initial cadre of young Cubans. So the larger group was

formed and established at La finca, in Guatemala, and

there the training was conducted entirely by Americans .

. . .

It was now fall and a new president had been elected.

President Kennedy could have stopped the invasion if he wanted to,

but he probably didn’t do so for several reasons. Firstly, he had

campaigned for some form of action against Cuba and it was also

the height of the cold war, to back out now would mean having

groups of Cuban exiles travelling around the globe saying how the

Americans had backed down on the Cuba issue. In competition

with the Soviet Union, backing out would make the Americans look

like wimps on the international scene, and for domestic consumption

the new president would be seen as backing away from one of his

campaign promises. The second reason Kennedy probably didn’t abort

the operation is the main reason why the operation failed, problems

with the CIA.

Part II: Failure and Ramifications.

The failure at the CIA led to Kennedy making poor decisions

which would affect future relations with Cuba and the Soviet Union.

The failure at CIA had three causes. First the wrong people were

handling the operation, secondly the agency in charge of the

operation was also the one providing all the intelligence for the

operation, and thirdly for an organization supposedly obsessed with

security the operation had security problems.

In charge of the operation was the Director of Central

Intelligence, Allan Dulles and main responsibility for the

operation was left to one of his deputies, Richard Bissell. In an

intelligence community geared mainly for European operations

against the USSR, both men were lacking in experience in Latin

American affairs. Those in charge of Operation Pluto, based

this new operation on the success of the Guatemalan adventure, but

the situation in Cuba was much different than that in Guatemala. In

Guatemala the situation was still chaotic and Arbenz never had the

same control over the country that Castro had on Cuba. The CIA had

the United States Ambassador, John Puerifoy, working on the inside

of Guatemala coordinating the effort, in Cuba they had none of this

while Castro was being supplied by the Soviet block. In

addition, after the overthrow of the government in Guatemala,

Castro was aware that this may happen to him as well and probably

had his guard up waiting for anything that my indicate that an

invasion was imminent.

The second problem was the nature of the bureaucracy itself.

The CIA was a new kid on the block and still felt that it had to

prove itself, it saw its opportunity in Cuba. Obsessed with

secrecy, it kept the number of people involved to a minimum. The

intelligence wing of CIA was kept out of it, their Board of

National Estimates could have provided information on the situation

in Cuba and the chances for an uprising against Castro once the

invasion started. Also kept out of the loop were the State

Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff who could have provided

help on the military side of the adventure. In the end, the CIA

kept all the information for itself and passed on to the president

only what it thought he should see. Lucien S. Vandenbroucke, in

Political Science Quarterly of 1984, based his analysis of the Bay

of Pigs failure on organizational behaviour theory. He says that

the CIA “. . . supplied President Kennedy and his advisers with

chosen reports on the unreliability of Castro’s forces and the

extent of Cuban dissent.” Of the CIA’s behaviour he concludes

that,

. . . By resorting to the typical organization 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 . .

. .

The CIA made sure the deck was stacked in their favour when the

time came to decide whether a project they sponsored was sound or

not. President Kennedy’s Secretary of State at the time was Dean

Rusk, in his autobiography he says that,

. . . The CIA told us all sorts of things about the

situation in Cuba and what would happen once the brigade

got ashore. President Kennedy received information which

simply was not correct. For example, we were told that

elements of the Cuban armed forces would defect and join

the brigade, that there would be popular uprisings

throughout Cuba when the brigade hit the beach, and that

if the exile force got into trouble, its members would

simply melt into the countryside and become guerrillas,

just as Castro had done . . . .

As for senior White House aides, most of them disagreed with

the plan as well, but Rusk says that Kennedy went with what the CIA

had to say. As for himself, he said that he “. . . did not serve

President Kennedy very well . . .” and that he should have

voiced his opposition louder. He concluded that “. . . I should

have made my opposition clear in the meetings themselves because he

Kennedy was under pressure from those who wanted to proceed.”

When faced with biased information from the CIA and quiet advisors,

it is no wonder that the president decided to go ahead with the

operation.

For an organization that deals with security issues, the CIA’s

lack of security in the Bay of Pigs operation is ironic. Security

began to break down before the invasion when The New York Times

reporter Tad Szulc “. . . learned of Operation Pluto from Cuban

friends. . .” earlier that year while in Costa Rica covering an

Organization of American States meeting. Another breakdown in

security was at the training base in Florida,

. . . Local residents near Homestead air force base had

seen Cubans drilling and heard their loudspeakers at a

farm. As a joke some firecrackers were thrown into the

compound . . . .

The ensuing incident saw the Cubans firing their guns and the

federal authorities having to convince the local authorities not to

press charges. Operation Pluto was beginning to get blown wide

open, the advantage of surprise was lost even this early in the

game.

After the initial bombing raid of April 15th, and the landing

of the B-26s in Florida, pictures of the planes were taken and

published in newspapers. In the photo of one of the planes, the

nose of it is opaque whereas the model of the B-26 the Cubans

really used had a plexiglass nose,

. . . The CIA had taken the pains to disguise the B-26

with “ FAR” markings Cuban Air Force, the agency

overlooked a crucial detail that was spotted immediately

by professional observers . . . .

All Castro’s people had to do was read the newspapers and they’d

know that something was going to happen, that those planes that had

bombed them were not their own but American.

In The New York Times of the 21st of April, stories about the

origins of the operation in the Eisenhower administration appeared

along with headlines of “ C. I. A. Had a Role In Exiles’ Plans”

revealing the CIA’s involvement. By the 22nd, the story is

fully known with headlines in The New York Times stating that “ CIA

is Accused by Bitter Rebels” and on the second page of that

day’s issue is a full article on the details of the operation from

its beginnings.

The conclusion one can draw from the articles in The New York

Times is that if reporters knew the whole story by the 22nd, it can

be expected that Castro’s intelligence service and that of the

Soviet Union knew about the planned invasion as well. Tad Szulc’s

report in the April 22nd edition of The New York Times says it all,

. . . As has been an open secret in Florida and Central

America for months, the C. I. A. planned, coordinated and

directed the operations that ended in defeat on a

beachhead in southern Cuba Wednesday . . . .

It is clear then that part of the failure of the operation was

caused by a lack of security and attention to detail on the part of

the Central Intelligence Agency, and misinformation given to the

president.

On the international scene, the Bay of Pigs invasion lead

directly to increased tensions between the United States and the

Soviet Union. During the invasion messages were exchanged between

Kennedy and Khrushchev regarding the events in Cuba. Khrushchev

accused the Americans of being involved in the invasion and stated

in one of his messages that a,

. . . so-called “ small war” can produce a chain reaction

in all parts of the world . . . we shall render the Cuban

people and their Government all necessary assistance in

beating back the armed attack on Cuba . . . .

Kennedy replied giving American views on democracy and the

containment of communism, he also warned against Soviet involvement

in Cuba saying to Khrushchev,

. . . In the event of any military intervention by

outside force we will immediately honor our obligations

under the inter-American system to protect this

hemisphere against external aggression . . . .

Even though this crisis passed, it set the stage for the next

major crisis over Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba and probably lead

to the Soviets increasing their military support for Castro.

In the administration itself, the Bay of Pigs crisis lead to

a few changes. Firstly, someone had to take the blame for the

affair and, as Director of Central Intelligence, Allen Dulles was

forced to resign and left CIA in November of 1961 Internally,

the CIA was never the same, although it continued with covert

operations against Castro, it was on a much reduced scale.

According to a report of the Select Senate Committee on

Intelligence, future operations were “. . . to nourish a spirit of

resistance and disaffection which could lead to significant

defections and other by-products of unrest.” The CIA also now

came under the supervision of the president’s brother Bobby, the

Attorney General. According to Lucien S. Vandenbroucke, the

outcome of the Bay of Pigs failure also made the White House

suspicious of an operation that everyone agreed to, made them less

reluctant to question the experts, and made them play “ devil’s

advocates” when questioning them. In the end, the lessons

learned from the Bay of Pigs failure may have contributed to the

successful handling of the Cuban missile crisis that followed.

The long term ramifications of the Bay of Pigs invasion are a

little harder to assess. The ultimate indication of the invasions

failure is that thirty-four years later Castro is still in power.

This not only indicates the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion,

but American policy towards Cuba in general. The American policy,

rather than undermining Castro’s support, has probably contributed

to it. As with many wars, even a cold one, the leader is able to

rally his people around him against an aggressor.

When Castro came to power he instituted reforms to help the

people and end corruption, no longer receiving help from the Soviet

Union things are beginning to change. He has opened up the Cuban

economy for some investment, mainly in telecommunications, oil

exploration, and joint ventures. In an attempt to stay in

power, he is trying to adapt his country to the new reality of the

world. Rather than suppressing the educated elite, he is giving

them a place in guiding Cuba. The question is, will they

eventually want more power and a right to control Cuba’s fate

without Castro’s guidance and support? If the collapse of past

regimes is any indication, they will eventually want more power.

When Castro came to power in 1959, the major opponents in

America to him, as with Guatemala, were the business interests who

were losing out as a result of his polices. The major pressure for

the Americans to do something came, not only from the Cuban exiles

in Florida, but from those businesses. Today, the tables are turned

and businesses are loosing out because of the American embargo

against Cuba. It is estimated that if the embargo were lifted, $1

billion of business would be generated for US companies that first

year. Right now, 100 firms have gone to Cuba to talk about doing

business there after the embargo is lifted. Will American

policy change toward Cuba because of pressure from business

interests and growing problems with refugees from Cuba? Given the

reasons why the United States got involved in Latin American

politics in the first place, it is very likely that their position

will change if they can find a face saving way to do so. American

policy at this time though is still stuck in the cold war, the

chairmen of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Jesse Helms said

that,

. . . Whether Castro leaves Cuba in a vertical or

horizontal position is up to him and the Cuban people.

But he must and will leave Cuba . . . .

The failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion was caused by

misinformation and mismanagement, the consequences of that was egg

in the face for the Americans and an increase in tension between

the superpowers at the height of the cold war. We will only have to

wait and see if the Americans have really learned their lesson and

will not miss another opportunity to set things right in Cuba.

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