

TERRIBLE REMINDER

Bay of Pigs Could Repeat

LAT-7/25/65
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The publication of the Schlesinger and Sorensen accounts of the Bay of Pigs disaster made particularly depressing reading against the backdrop of last week's momentous White House conference on Vietnam.

It is not, of course, that the circumstances surrounding the covert Bay of Pigs operation in 1961 are comparable to those entailed in the open warfare in Southeast Asia. What is depressing rather is the devastating reminder in the new works of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Theodore M. Sorensen of the fallibility of public officials and the tendency of great events to slip beyond human control.

The men who gathered in the White House last week to make decisions that may affect tens of thousands of American lives are doubtless as well intentioned and as wise as any group of citizens that could be assembled today. But so we are reminded were the men who sat in the White House in 1961 to examine the plan for the Cuban invasion. Yet with a few exceptions those men failed to perceive the dreadful consequences of what they were doing.

Ghastly Failure

When the ghastly failure finally struck, according to Sorensen, President Kennedy asked incredulously, "How could everybody involved have thought that such a plan would succeed?"

Among those Kennedy advisers who gave their assent to the Bay of Pigs were Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of De-

fense Robert S. McNamara, who last week were among the principal advisers to President Johnson in the deliberations on Vietnam.

The thing that is so dismaying about the history of the Bay of Pigs is that designs which looked sound to rational, well informed men before the event were shown to be utterly hollow immediately after it.

Sorensen sums up John Kennedy's anguished reaction when he says, "He was aghast at the enormity of his error, angry at having been badly advised by some and let down by others . . ."

The civilian and military officials who sat in the White House in 1961 and decided to go ahead with the Bay of Pigs operation believed that the first pre-invasion air strike would wreak great damage on Fidel Castro's air force.

They believed that the public would be deceived by the "cover story" that the raid was conducted by defectors from Castro's air force.

They believed, many of them, that the Escambray

mountains lay near the Bay of Pigs.

They believed the invaders were assured of having enough ammunition.

They believed, most of them, that the invaders could achieve their goal without U.S. military intervention.

False Assumption

All these assumptions and others as well were proved false almost as soon as they were put to the test.

The hollowness of these assumptions has often been matched since then by the emptiness of many assumptions drawn by the U.S. government about the war in Vietnam.

Thus at one time or another it had been assumed that things were going better because of the increase in the capture of Viet Cong weapons.

It had been assumed that the Viet Cong was weakening because the desertion rate rose.

It had been assumed that the Viet Cong could be checkmated by the strategic hamlet program.

It had been assumed that the political situation in Saigon could be improved by the removal of Premier Ngo Dinh Diem.

It had been assumed that the introduction of a considerable number of army special forces troops as "advisers" on counter-insurgency could stabilize the South Vietnamese army.

Still another assumption was contained in a White House statement of Oct. 2, 1963, which said:

"Secretary McNamara and Gen. Taylor reported their judgment that the major part of the United States military task (in Vietnam) can be completed by the end of 1965 . . . they reported that by the end of this year the United States program to train Vietnamese should have progressed to the point where 1,000 United States military personnel . . . can be withdrawn."

Lost Control

Finally, it had been assumed more recently that the United States could bring Hanoi to its senses by

bombing targets in North Vietnam.

In light of the seemingly irresistible course of Vietnamese affairs a most depressing aspect of the Bay of Pigs' history is its lesson of how men often lose control of events capable of destroying them.

In their respective histories now being serialized both Schlesinger and Sorensen, who were assi-

stants to President Kennedy, stress this lesson in their accounts of the Cuban fiasco.

New to his role in the White House, John F. Kennedy did not realize, writes Schlesinger, "how contingency planning could generate its own momentum and create its own reality."

Doubts Revived

And Sorensen observes: "The whole project seemed to move mysteriously and inexorably toward execution without the President's being able either to obtain a firm grip on it or reverse it."

The buildup for the invasion had begun in the Eisenhower administration, and by the time President Kennedy had to make the final decision, the weight of logic, of politics, of military considerations and all the rest seemed heavily on the side of going ahead.

Reading this sorry history now revives old doubts whether man is adequate to the unbelievable complexities and dangers of the modern world.

The false assumptions about the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam recall the terribly false assumptions to which the victorious allies fell prey after World War I. The result was World War II. There is little comfort about the path on which humanity is embarked in the growing war in Vietnam.

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