

# Long-secret report blames CIA for Bay of Pigs debacle

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NEW YORK (AP) — One of the Cold War's most secret documents — the CIA's scathing internal investigation into the 1961 Bay of Pigs debacle — is finally out, and there is little wonder why the spy agency has guarded it so jealously.

The 150-page report, released after sitting in the CIA director's safe for more than three decades, blamed the disastrous attempt to oust Fidel Castro not on President John F. Kennedy's failure to call in air strikes, but on the agency itself.

The CIA's ignorance, incompetence, as well as its arrogance toward the 1,400 Cuban exiles it trained and equipped to mount the invasion, was responsible for the fiasco, said the report, obtained by The Associated Press.

"The choice was between retreat without honor and a gamble between ignominious defeat and dubious victory. The agency chose to gamble, at rapidly decreasing odds," the report said.

The document, released by the agency last week, criticized almost every aspect of the CIA's handling of the invasion: misinforming Kennedy administration officials, planning poorly, using faulty intelligence and conducting an overt military operation beyond "agency responsibility as well as agency capability."

Few of the CIA personnel helping train the exiles for the invasion spoke Spanish, yet "the agency reduced

the exiled leaders to the status of puppets."

Despite U.S. news articles linking the United States with a plan to invade Cuba, the project went forward under the "pathetic illusion" of deniability, the report said.

Castro's forces easily turned back the April 1961 assault at the Bay of Pigs, killing 200 rebel soldiers and capturing 1,197 others, who were later turned over to U.S. authorities.

The fiasco at the swampy, mosquito-ridden inlet on Cuba's southern coast was a watershed for the CIA, puncturing the air of invincibility it had acquired with its successes in helping topple Iran's president in 1953 and Guatemala's leader in 1954.

It was also a major foreign policy disaster for the Kennedy administration, tarnishing its "Camelot" sheen and frustrating its young president. Yet it also hardened his determination to get rid of Castro, evident in subsequent assassination plots that became subject of congressional investigations.

CIA officials and Cuban exiles believed Kennedy's failure to approve air strikes to back up the seaborne invaders doomed the plan.

But the report, by CIA Inspector General Lyman Kirkpatrick, placed the blame directly on CIA leaders,

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saying they had "failed to advise the president, at an appropriate time, that success had become dubious and to recommend that the operation therefore be canceled."

The report so outraged CIA officials that all but one of the 20 copies

produced was destroyed.

CIA officials feared that if the document leaked, it could provoke crippling public criticism of the agency. "In unfriendly hands, it can become a weapon unjustifiably (used) to attack the entire mission, organization, and functioning of the agency," CIA deputy director C.P.

Cabell wrote in a Dec. 15, 1961, memorandum.

The sole remaining copy of the report remained in the CIA director's safe until last week, when it was released in response to a Freedom of Information Act request by the National Security Archive, a non-profit group in Washington.