

# Bay of Pigs report reveals a fractured CIA leadership

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Unlike old soldiers who, it is said, never die but simply fade away, the debate over who and what is responsible for the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba does neither.

Thirty-seven years later, the issue was fueled anew with the release last week of the lone remaining copy of a tightly held and scathing indictment of the Central Intelligence Agency's role in the invasion project by Lyman Kirkpatrick, the CIA's inspector general at the time.

Although its existence — and the fact it was critical of the agency — had long been known, few thought the report would ever be released. Only 20 copies were made; 19 were recalled and destroyed. The only remaining one was said to have been kept locked in the office safe of the CIA director.

The six-month study, ordered immediately after the April 1961 invasion by 1,500 CIA-trained and backed Cuba exiles, criticizes virtually every aspect of the project's planning and execution.

But initial news accounts have largely overlooked another 300 or so pages released with the report, including a lengthy rebuttal to the Kirkpatrick survey by Richard Bissell, the CIA's deputy director for

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clandestine operations at the time of the Bay of Pigs and directly responsible for the invasion's planning and execution.

Taken together, the two documents offer a posthumous glimpse at what many in the agency, including those not associated with the Bay of Pigs project, believe were the rival ambitions of the two men — Kirkpatrick and

Bissell — to become CIA director.

Also released were numerous memos and letters — all critical to some extent of the Kirkpatrick study — from various ranking CIA officials, including outgoing Director Allen Dulles, incoming Director John McCone, and Air Force Gen. Charles Cabell, the agency's deputy director.

Jake Esterline, project director for the Bay of Pigs and the highest surviving agency officer directly involved with it, said in an interview that "any good that could have come from the report was lost because of the vitriolic manner in which Kirkpatrick wrote it."

## A litany of lament

Esterline, 78, was among the few to whom the report was distributed upon completion.

The 150-page document is a litany of lament about the CIA's role in the invasion.

"The fundamental cause of the disaster was the agency's failure to give the project, notwithstanding its importance and its immense potentiality for damage to the United States, the top-flight handling which it required — appropriate organization, staffing throughout by highly qualified personnel and full-time direction and control of the highest quality," Kirkpatrick charged.

Those "insufficiencies" led to "numerous serious operational mistakes and omissions" that resulted "in lack of awareness of developing dangers, in failure to take action to counter them, and in grave mistakes of judgment."

Kirkpatrick dismisses President Kennedy's cancellation of the D-Day airstrikes as the chief cause of the invasion's failure, suggesting that if the project had been "better organized, better managed and better staffed," Kennedy wouldn't have been faced with the decision.

Kirkpatrick accuses the agency of faulty intelligence on both the strength of the Castro regime and the opposition to it; reducing Cuban exile political leaders "to the status of puppets;" failing to clearly delineate "policies and operational plans;" staffing the project with too few Spanish-speaking officers with a knowledge of Latin America; and lax internal security.

Bissell, in his rebuttal, argues that "a large majority of the conclusions reached in the survey are misleading or wrong. . . . The sur-

vey is especially weak in judging what are the implications of its own allegations and . . . is greatly impaired by its failure to point out fully or in all cases correctly the lessons to be learned from this experience."

As for the invasion itself, Bissell contends that "there was solid reason to believe that it had a good chance of at least initial success."

Bissell also complained that the ongoing clash between maintaining deniability of U.S. involvement and effectiveness of the operation made prompt decisions hard to obtain.

#### Costs vs. benefits

"The constant weighing of costs and benefits in the effort to satisfy the military requirements for success without excessive impairment of the political requirement of deniability explains why the final plan . . . was a compromise," writes Bissell.

"The question that is highly relevant to the policy-making pro-



Read the complete text of the CIA inspector general's report.

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cess is how and why the project was allowed to become overt and, when this had happened, why it remained the responsibility of the agency."

The Kirkpatrick report stirred a firestorm of internal criticism from the handful of people who saw it.

In a memo to his boss, Bissell's deputy, Tracy Barnes, characterized the document as "an incompetent job," "malicious" and "intentionally biased."

Cabell, the CIA's deputy director, observed that "this is not a useful report to anyone inside or outside the agency."

Even Dulles, the outgoing director, complained in a memo to his successor John McCone that "at no time during the preparation of his report did the Inspector General request any information from me and he makes certain serious errors in areas where my direct responsibility was clearly involved."

The most measured assessment of the contradicting Kirkpatrick and Bissell positions came from McCone, a businessman without

an intelligence background.

"It is my personal opinion as a result of examinations I have made of this operation after the fact, that both the report and the rebuttals are extreme," McCone wrote in a letter to the chairman of the President's foreign intelligence advisory board. "I believe an accurate appraisal of the Cuban effort and the reasons for failure rest some place in between the two points of view expressed in the reports.

"I believe it is safe to say the failure of the Cuban operation was government-wide and in this respect the agency must bear its full share [though not the entire] responsibility," McCone concluded.

#### Quest for top job

Sam Halpern, a retired senior agency officer who had no role in the Bay of Pigs but knew Kirkpatrick well and had worked with him, said in an interview that the report was "basically Kirk's vendetta against Bissell, aiming for the highest job. He had been a real rising star. Once he had polio he got sidetracked and became a bitter man."

To an extent, however, Esterline said the Kirkpatrick report reinforces the conclusion that he and Jack Hawkins, a Marine colonel detached to the Bay of Pigs project as its paramilitary chief, had reached in recent years: That Bissell had lied to them — especially regarding air cover — and at the least withheld information from President Kennedy.

"It's now clear, based on documents released to the National Security Archive over the last few years that Bissell lied constantly or withheld vital information. We know now that Bissell had already agreed with President Kennedy that the expected air support would not be forthcoming," said Esterline.

The report, Esterline said, "also raises the very strong possibility that Bissell had not been direct and forthright with President Kennedy in giving Hawkins' and my own very strong views in what the inevitable result would be if the project were not fully supported.

"It's difficult to take positions after all these years on people who are now dead," said Esterline, "but what has emerged to me in depth . . . is the intensity of the rivalry between these two men. That, coupled with my increased knowledge of both has disillusioned me with both."