

CIA Forced to Release Long Secret Official History of Bay of Pigs Invasion

National Security Archive Lawsuit Yields Never-Before-Seen Volumes of Massive Study; Agency Continues to Withhold Volume 5

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Global Research, August 02, 2011

[National Security Archive](#) 1 August 2011

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

Washington, D.C. – Pursuant to a FOIA [lawsuit](#) filed by the National Security Archive on the 50th anniversary of the infamous CIA-led invasion of Cuba, the CIA has released four volumes of its Official History of the Bay of Pigs Operation. The Archive today posted volume 2, “Participation in the Conduct of Foreign Policy” ([Part 1](#) | [Part 2](#)), classified top secret, which contains detailed information on the CIA’s negotiations with Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Panama on support for the invasion.

“These are among the last remaining secret records of this act of U.S. aggression against Cuba,” noted Peter Kornbluh, who directs the Cuba Documentation Project at the Archive. “The CIA has finally seen the wisdom of letting the public scrutinize this major debacle in the covert history of U.S. foreign policy.” Kornbluh noted that the agency was “still refusing to release volume 5 of its official history.” Volume 5 is a rebuttal to the stinging [CIA’s Inspector General’s report](#), done in the immediate aftermath of the paramilitary assault, which held CIA officials accountable for a wide variety of mistakes, miscalculations and deceptions that characterized the failed invasion. The National Security Archive obtained the declassification of the ultra-secret Inspector General’s report in 1998.

Volume 2 provides new details on the negotiations and tensions with other countries which the CIA needed to provide logistical and infrastructure support for the invasion preparations. The volume describes Kennedy Administration efforts to sustain the cooperation of Guatemala, where the main CIA-led exile brigade force was trained, as well as the deals made with Anastacio Somoza to gain Nicaragua’s support for the invasion. CIA operatives, according to the study, took over diplomatic relations with Anastacio Somoza, pressuring the State Department to agree to loans to Nicaragua as a quid pro quo for covert support of the invasion.

[Volume 3](#) of the Official History was [previously declassified](#) under the Kennedy Assassination Record Act; and volume 4 was previously declassified to the CIA historian, Jack Pfeiffer, who wrote the study in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Archive will post a detailed assessment of the declassified history, along with two other volumes tomorrow.

Related Documents

[Lawsuit](#) – On April 14, 2011, the National Security Archive filed a lawsuit against the CIA under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to secure the declassification of several volumes of an Official history of the Bay of Pigs Operation compiled between 1974 and

1983. Nearly a decade after the failed invasion, on August 8, 1973, CIA Director William Colby tasked the Agency's History Staff to "develop accurate accounts of certain of CIA's past activities in terms suitable for inclusion in Government-wide historical and declassification programs, while protecting intelligence sources and methods." Historian Jack Pfeiffer assumed responsibility for this history, which was written over the course of 9 years and is divided into 5 volumes; it is based on dozens of interviews with key operatives and officials and hundreds of CIA documents. Volume III of the Pfeiffer report was declassified by the CIA in 1998, and the rest of the report is now the last major internal study that remains secret, fifty years after the Bay of Pigs.

[Document 1](#) – CIA, "Official History of the Bay of Pigs Operation, Volume III: Evolution of CIA's Anti-Castro Policies, 1951- January 1961"

Jack Pfeiffer, the chief historian at the CIA, researched and wrote a comprehensive history of the Bay of Pigs operation between 1974 and 1983. The CIA declassified only Volume III of the five-volume history in 1998, under the Kennedy Assassination Records Act. This three-hundred page report was discovered in the National Archives by Villanova professor of political science David Barrett in 2005, and first posted on his university's website. Volume III focuses on the last two years of the Eisenhower administration and the transition to the Kennedy presidency. It is newsworthy for clarifying the role of Vice-President Richard Nixon, who, the report reveals, intervened in the planning of the invasion on behalf of a wealthy donor.

This volume also contains the extraordinary revelation that CIA task force in charge of the invasion did not believe it could succeed. On page 149, Pfeiffer quotes minutes of the Task Force meeting held on November 15, 1960, to prepare a briefing for the new President-elect, John F. Kennedy: "Our original concept is now seen to be unachievable in the face of the controls Castro has instituted," the document states. "Our second concept (1,500-3000 man force to secure a beach with airstrip) is also now seen to be unachievable, except as a joint Agency/DOD action."

This candid assessment was not shared with the President-elect then, nor later after the inauguration. As Pfeiffer points out, "what was being denied in confidence in mid-November 1960 became the fact of the Zapata Plan and the Bay of Pigs Operation in March 1961"—run only by the CIA, and with a force of 1,200 men.

[Document 2](#) – CIA, October 1961, "Inspector General's Survey of the Cuban Operation and Associated Documents"

This internal analysis of the CIA's Bay of Pigs operation, written by CIA Inspector General Lyman Kirkpatrick after a six month investigation, is highly critical of the top CIA officials who conceived and ran the operation, and places blame for the embarrassing failure squarely on the CIA itself. The report cites bad planning, inadequate intelligence, poor staffing, and misleading of White House officials including the President, as key reasons for the failure of the operation. "Plausible denial was a pathetic illusion," the report concluded. "The Agency failed to recognize that when the project advanced beyond the stage of plausible denial it was going beyond the area of Agency responsibility as well as Agency capability." The declassified report also contains a [rebuttal to Kirkpatrick from the office of deputy director Richard Bissell](#), challenging those conclusions. Volume V of the Pfeiffer report, titled "Internal Investigation Report," which remains classified, also critiques

Kirkpatrick's conclusions.

[Document 3](#) – DOD, 5/5/1961, "Record of Paramilitary Action Against the Castro Government of Cuba, 17 March 1960- May 1961"

This May 5, 1961 report was written by Colonel Jack Hawkins, the paramilitary chief of the Bay of Pigs operation. His 48-page report cites poor CIA organization, and "political considerations" imposed by the Kennedy administration, such as the decision to cancel D-day airstrikes which "doomed the operation," as key elements of its failure. "Paramilitary operations cannot be effectively conducted on a ration-card basis," the report concludes. "The Government and the people of the United States are not yet psychologically conditioned to participate in the cold war with resort to the harsh, rigorous, and often dangerous and painful measures which must be taken in order to win." Hawkins also recommended that further covert operations to depose Castro, unless accompanied by a military invasion, "should not be made." Castro, according to the report, could "not be overthrown by means short of overt application" of U.S. force.

[Document 4](#) – CIA, 3/9/1960, "First Meeting of Branch 4 Task Force, 9 March 1960"

This is a memorandum of conversation of the first CIA Task Force meeting to plan what became the Bay of Pigs, a covert operation to recruit, train, and infiltrate paramilitary units into Cuba to overthrow Fidel Castro. The meeting is noteworthy because the chief of the Western Hemisphere division, J.C. King states that "unless Fidel and Raul Castro and Che Guevara could be eliminated in one package—which is highly unlikely—this operation can be a long, drawn out affair and the present government will only be overthrown by the use of force."

[Document 5](#) – CIA, 3/16/1960, "A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime"

This memorandum outlines the original plans for what became the Bay of Pigs. It was presented to and authorized by President Eisenhower on March 17, 1960. Components of the plan include the creation of a unified Cuban opposition, development of broadcasting facilities, and the training of paramilitary forces. The purpose of the operations, according to the proposal, is to "bring about the replacement of the Castro regime with one more devoted to the true interests of the Cuban people and more acceptable to the U.S. in such a manner as to avoid any appearance of U.S. intervention." The original proposed budget is \$4.4 million; by the time of the invasion the budget has risen to \$45 million.

[Document 6](#) – NSC, 3/11/1961, "Memorandum of Discussion on Cuba, March 11, 1961"

This top secret memorandum of conversation from a meeting of the National Security Council describes continued planning of paramilitary operations in Cuba. President Kennedy says he plans to authorize an operation in which "patriotic Cubans return to their homeland."

Document 7 – White House, 3/2/1963, [Audio conversation between President John F. Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy]

[\[Part 1 - mp3\]](#) [\[Part 2 - mp3\]](#)

In this telephone conversation between President Kennedy and his brother Attorney General

Robert Kennedy, they discuss concerns that a Senate investigating committee might reveal that the President had authorized jets from the US aircraft carrier Essex to provide one hour of air coverage, to create a no-fly zone for Bay of Pigs B-26 bombers the morning of April 19. Due to a timing mistake, the jets never met up with the bombers; 2 bombers were shot down, leading to the deaths of 4 Americans.

[Document 8](#) – White House, “Memorandum for the President: Conversation with Commandante Ernesto Guevara of Cuba,” August 22, 1961.

In this memorandum of conversation, aide Richard Goodwin recounts for President Kennedy his conversation with Ernesto “Che” Guevara, who seeks to establish a “modus vivendi” with the U.S. government. This document is noteworthy for the Bay of Pigs because Guevara “wanted to thank us very much for the invasion- that it had been a great political victory for them- enabled them to consolidate- and transformed them from an aggrieved little country to an equal.”

[Interview](#) – In October 1996, the National Security Archive’s Cuba Documentation project arranged for the two chief managers of the Bay of Pigs operation, Jacob Esterline and Colonel Jack Hawkins, to meet in a Washington DC hotel for a lengthy filmed interview on the invasion. The meeting marked the first time they had seen each other since the weekend of April 17-19, 1961, and the first time they had together recalled the events surrounding the failed invasion. This interview was conducted by the Archive’s Peter Kornbluh and is excerpted in his book, [Bay of Pigs Declassified](#) (New York: The New Press, 1998).

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