

Maxwell D. Taylor Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 4/12/1964
Administrative Information

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Interviewer: Elspeth Rostow
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Biographical Note

Maxwell D. Taylor (1901-1987) served as General of the U.S. Army; Military Representative of the President (1961-1962); Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1962-1964); Ambassador to Vietnam (1964-1965); Special Consultant to the President (1965-1969). In this interview Taylor discusses his early memories of meeting John F. Kennedy, the 1960 Presidential campaign, and his involvement with the Committee to investigate the Bay of Pigs invasion, among other topics.

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Maxwell D. Taylor
MAXWELL D. TAYLOR

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Maxwell D. Taylor – JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

Maxwell D. Taylor

April 12, 1964
Fort Myer, Virginia

By Elspeth Rostow
(Also Present: Lieutenant Colonel W.Y. Smith)

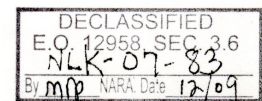
For the John F. Kennedy Library

TAYLOR: *The Boston Globe* of 10 February 1948 carried on its front page a photograph of Major General Maxwell D. Taylor, Superintendent of West Point and Representative John F. Kennedy. It also carried an article describing a speech made by the General as guest speaker at the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Post Veterans of Foreign Wars anniversary dinner at the Copley Plaza Hotel. The article goes on to say that the General spoke about the Normandy invasion and in an interview before the dinner spoke about supporting universal military training along with Eisenhower and Bradley at least until the UN or some similar organization can make the world safe.

This account indicates my first meeting with John F. Kennedy. He wrote me at West Point some time before this dinner and invited me to come to the meeting and be the guest speaker. I knew Representative Kennedy by his war reputation and had a great interest in meeting him. Consequently, I accepted the invitation and appeared as scheduled.

My first impression was that of an enthusiastic, energetic and able young Congressman. Obviously one of long term promise. However, I would be less than candid not to say that it never occurred to me that I was sitting beside a future President of the United States. I found on this trip that President Kennedy was an old friend of Mr. Thomas White of Boston who as a captain had served as my aide in the 101st Airborne Division throughout World War II. Mr. White later became active in Boston in Senator Kennedy's campaign.

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I did not have further personal contact with John Kennedy until I returned to Government in 1961. During my four years as Chief of Staff of the Army (1955-1959) I might well have expected to work with him in his capacity as Senator from Massachusetts. As a matter of

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fact, he was a member of the Senate Military Affairs Committee before which I appeared many times in those four years. However, I do not recall that he was ever present at a meeting of this committee when I attended. I did have occasion to meet him socially once or twice in this period, but had no exchanges of views or any discussions of any significance.

Following my retirement in 1959, I went to Mexico City and lived there until January 1961. Hence, I was absent from the U.S. throughout the Presidential campaign. Obviously, I followed it as best I could through the press, and since I returned to the U.S. about once a month for business, I feel that I received the full flavor of the campaign, at least as well as one can as a private citizen.

I must say that initially I was not at heart a Kennedy man in this campaign. As a professional soldier I really have no politics, although I should have inherited a good standing in the Democratic party from a long line of Democrats in my family. However, as I did not really know John F. Kennedy, I was more interested in Senator Johnson's [Lyndon B. Johnson] campaign and that of Vice President Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]. I had observed the Vice President at close range during my four years as Chief of Staff and had a high opinion of his administrative ability. I had noticed how President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] had given him excellent training and provided him with a background which would have been of great value to him as President of the U.S. However, this acquaintance with Mr. Nixon did not make me a Nixon man. I had been on one side of the debate on strategic matters and he had been on the other. Also, I had the feeling that he opposed the Joint Chiefs of Staff speaking out candidly on strategic matters when their views were in opposition to the President.

Senator Johnson and I had seen frequently in sessions of his Committee and he had always seemed an energetic supporter of national security measures. I liked his manner of doing business and I expect that had I had a vote to cast in the primary, it might well have gone for Johnson as the Presidential candidate.

What I have said relates to events prior to the convention. Once John F. Kennedy became the Democratic candidate and began to speak out on national and international issues, there was no doubt in my mind that I was a Kennedy man. I was particularly interested in early indications that President Kennedy had sensed the deficiencies

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of a national strategy based primarily on Massive Retaliation. I also noted with interest a few quotations in the press which indicated that President Kennedy was aware of the views of such individuals as General James Gavin and General Taylor. I was pleased to note that Jim Gavin, an old time friend of mine, had been called in by the Kennedy team to give military

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advice to the Presidential candidate. However, I personally had no contact with Mr. Kennedy or his advisers in this period.

None of his advisers contacted me until the night preceding the inauguration. By this time I had moved from Mexico City to New York where I had just taken the presidency of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. I happened to be in Washington on 18 January, the day preceding the inauguration. My presence was due to the retirement of Army Secretary Wilber Brucker with whom I had worked for nearly four years. During his farewell review at Fort Meyer I received a note that Mr. Dean Rusk was trying to contact me. After the ceremony I returned to the Officers' Club and tried to place a call to Mr. Rusk at his hotel in Washington. As might have been expected on pre-inauguration night, I was never able to contact him and I returned to New York the next day, still not knowing the reason for his call. Let me correct the dates just given. The inauguration was on January 20, I went to Washington on the 19th and returned to New York on the 20th.

I did not hear further from Dean Rusk until I received a call at my apartment from him on Sunday, 22 January. To my astonishment Mr. Rusk asked me if I wished to be Ambassador to France. This was not difficult to answer, however, as I knew that (1) I had a five-year obligation to Lincoln Center, having just signed the contract, and (2) this assignment would cost me my wife who had always said she would not be an ambassador's wife any place. Hence, although I appreciated the honor, I had no difficulty in begging off. This was my first and only indication up to that time of any interest in me by the Kennedy Administration.

As early as 1959 I recognized that Senator Kennedy perceived the inadequacy of a national military strategy based on Massive Retaliation. The primary reason for this impression came from an exchange of letters relating to my book *The Uncertain Trumpet*, which had been published shortly after my retirement from the Army. My editor was Harper Brothers and the Vice President in charge of its publication was Mr. Evan Thomas, who became a good friend of mind in the course of our work together. He wrote me a letter inclosing a

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copy of a letter he received from John F. Kennedy dated December 17, 1959. It read as follows:

“Dear Evan: I have had some moments at last to look at General Maxwell Taylor's *The Uncertain Trumpet*.

This volume is characterized by an unmistakable honesty, clarity of judgment and a genuine sense of urgency. It is free of rancor and recrimination, but it leaves no room for doubt that we have allowed important aspects of our national military strength to erode over the past years. This book makes it clear that we have not brought our conventional war capacities into line with the necessities of our foreign policy. It is a book which deserves reading by every American.

With every good wish, I am – Sincerely, John F. Kennedy”

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Naturally this statement was music to my ears and convinced me that John F. Kennedy was indeed sound on strategy matters.

Consequently, sometime in mid-Spring of 1960 I wrote Senator Kennedy and thanked him for his kind words. He replied to me on April 9, 1960 as follows:

“Dear General Taylor: Thank you very much for your kind note. I was more than happy to give your book my endorsement, since I am convinced that its central arguments are most persuasive. I feel quite sure that your book has radiated considerable influence, and it has certainly helped to shape my own thinking.

With every good wish, Sincerely, John F. Kennedy”

During the campaign I became aware that advice might be sought from certain retired military leaders on the part of Mr. Kennedy. A specific example was a UP article of August 30, 1960 which contained the following paragraph: “Kennedy said advice also would be sought from such retired military leaders as Generals Maxwell D. Taylor and Matthew B. Ridgway, former Army Chiefs of Staff; Admiral Robert B. Carney, former Chief of Naval Operations; and Lt. Gen. James Gavin, former Army Research Chief. Most of these men have at one time or another raised questions about U.S. defense policy.”

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I had rather expected to be contacted sometime during the campaign. But the fact that I was out of the country in Mexico obviously made me physically difficult to get at. When the campaign was over and I had played no part in it, it never occurred to me that I might get involved in the Kennedy Administration.

From January 1961, I was very busily engaged learning my new job in New York as President of the Lincoln Center. Early in April as a normal reader of the press I became aware that something was going on in Cuba; however, the events of mid-month did not appear to me to be unduly serious and I certainly missed the significance of what was taking place. On April 21, two days after the collapse of the landing in the Bay of Pigs, I was attending a meeting of the Board of Directors of Consolidated Edison in New York City. I had just been elected a director and was receiving a briefing at luncheon by the management on some of the problems of the company. In the course of the luncheon I was passed a note that the White House operator wanted to contact me. I have been in Washington long enough to know the White House is a large establishment and that the switchboard connects with many agencies of government. I was not particularly excited over the prospect of calling the White House. Hence, I decided to finish my lunch, or at least wait until dessert was served, and then slip out to the office of the President of the company and place my call. This I did. The White House operator asked me to wait a moment and very quickly thereafter a man's voice came on the line. I said, “Who is this,” and to my tremendous surprise the answer was “President Kennedy.” The President immediately jumped into the subject which was on his mind. He said he was sure that I could see that we were in trouble in this Bay of Pigs operation and he was in need of my assistance. Would I come to Washington and let him

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explain what the problem was? I answered I would come at once – when did he want me? It was agreed that I would appear at the White House the following day, April 22, at 1000.

I arrived on schedule and was taken immediately into the President's office. There were the President, the Vice President, McGeorge Bundy, and perhaps one or two others whom I don't recall. I was seated for the first time alongside the famous rocking chair and received from the President his own statement of what had occurred. He explained in broad outline the Bay of Pigs operation, what it had intended to do, and how it had ingloriously failed. I had the impression from the President, the Vice President, and all those in the room, of talking to a group of

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men deeply shocked and stunned by an unexpected turn of events. I have had this same impression in the command post of a military unit which had just sustained a serious defeat. The President seemed completely at a loss to explain how and why this loss had occurred. He repeated over and over again that every one of his advisers had recommended the operation and had assured him of a high probability of success. In substance, what he wanted me to do was come to Washington, review this operation, and tell him what had gone wrong, and why. He emphasized that he was not angry at anyone, that he did not have in mind punishing anyone, but he did feel it was essential to know the causes of this failure. He also expressed great concern over the fate of the prisoners who had been taken at the Bay of Pigs. Several Cuban leaders in exile had just been talking to him before my arrival, and one or more of these men had sons who were among the captives. At that time it was far from clear whether Castro would execute them summarily or merely give them long prison sentences.

In the course of the conversation, Allen Dulles, and old friend of mine, arrived and joined the discussion. He, too, was clearly shaken by the turn of events. The President told him what he had in mind, and Allen immediately said that he had known me for a long time and that he was indeed very happy that I would lead the investigation that was being proposed. The President also indicated that he was thinking of having several additional members assigned to my survey in order to assist me. He mentioned his brother [Robert F. Kennedy], the Attorney General, but, as I recall, it was not decided at this meeting as to who the other members would be. He asked me when I could go to work, and I said I was sorry I could not begin that day as I had a speaking engagement at Harvard that evening. I was scheduled to address Dr. Henry Kissinger's law forum. The President very kindly offered me a White House plane to make the trip with the understanding that I would return the following day and start operating. I pointed out to him my obligations to Mr. John Rockefeller in Lincoln Center. He immediately picked up the telephone and called Mr. Rockefeller in New York, explained the problem, and asked for the load of my time. I whispered that I thought a month would be enough, but I noted that the President asked Mr. Rockefeller to consider two or three months as the possible period of absence. I thought at the time that this had a rather ominous sound.

Before leaving the White House I agreed to head the investigation as civilian consultant to the President beginning work on Saturday, 22 April. In the meantime, the President's military aid, General Clifton [Chester V. Clifton, Jr.],

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had contacted the Pentagon and arranged for me to be provided with bachelor quarters at Fort Myer, Virginia. Also, he requested office space for me in the area of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. As a result, on Saturday morning I found a suite of rooms awaiting me in the Joint Staff area. Before starting the day, I called at the White House and received for the first time the word that my associates in the review of the Bay of Pigs would be the Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy; Admiral Arleigh Burke, CNO, from the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Allen Dulles, Director of CIA. Also, I was asked to concur in a letter directive which the President later signed.

Although I was at first puzzled by the Committee's composition, I soon perceived the rationale behind it. The Attorney General was to be present to look after the interests of the President himself in the course of the investigation. Both Burke and Dulles represented two agencies deeply involved in the Bay of Pigs operation, namely the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CIA. I must say that I anticipated difficulties from my colleagues. It looked to me as if I was the only true bystander with no interest in the outcome. As I will indicate later, my fears were not justified.

The key elements of the President's letter of April 22 were the following. He said:

"It is apparent that we need to take a close look at all our practices and programs in the areas of military and para-military, guerrilla and anti-guerrilla activities which fall short of outright war. I believe we need to strengthen our work in this area. In the course of your study, I hope that you will give special attention to the lessons which can be learned from recent events in Cuba.

Since advice of the kind I am seeking relates to many parts of the Executive Branch, I hope that you will associate with yourself, as appropriate, senior officials from different areas. I have asked the following to be available to you in this fashion: Attorney General Robert Kennedy from the Cabinet, Admiral Arleigh Burke from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Director Allen Dulles from the Central Intelligence Agency. I hope that each one of them will have an opportunity to review and comment on your conclusions. But in the end what I want is your own report, drawing from past experience, to chart a path towards the future. I hope that I may have a preliminary report by May 15th."

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You will note that there is language in this letter which really gave me authority to write the conclusions. Hence, my concern over the possible attitudes of my associates was somewhat allayed. The preliminary report was due May 15 – this requirement was inserted at my suggestion as I was very anxious to get this investigation over as rapidly as possible and felt that to have an interim date would goad us to action.

We began work on Monday, April 24, and continued at full speed until the termination of the report in mid-June. Because of their other heavy duties, I was surprised that my three associates were willing to make this task their primary job in this period. As a

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result we met daily for at least a half a day five days a week. These meetings occurred in my Pentagon office and were covered by a single office reporter. We began with a briefing by CIA at their command post in one of the temporary buildings along the Tidal Basin. This building had served as a command post for the Bay of Pigs Operations. Having received the story from the responsible officials of CIA, we then interrogated every important participant in government. In the course of our testimony we also talked to many junior officers who had been involved in the training and the conduct of the Bay of Pigs Operation. Our preliminary report on May 15 was an oral report given to the President at a luncheon at the White House. Only the President and the four members of the team were present. We were able to tell him at that time the general direction which our investigation was taking and some preliminary feeling of our conclusions.

I do not recall that he expressed any views other than satisfaction that we were proceeding on schedule. The final report was prepared and submitted on June 13. Because of its high sensitivity I was directed to prepare a single report to be deposited in the White House. In drawing up the conclusions and recommendations I was pleased to have relatively little difficulty in getting the concurrence of my colleagues. In the questioning, the Attorney General had been very aggressive in pressing for full revelation of the facts. I must say that although virtually every witness had some degree of responsibility for the failure of the enterprise, every man gave the indication of wanting to assist our investigation and tell me all that he knew. My greatest difficulty was with my old military colleagues of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They were highly sensitive to the turn of events which had gotten them in the vulnerable position where they were. In general, their defense was that it had been impossible to follow the development of the Cuban plan because of the way matters were conducted. Our investigation verified, as they

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states, that the meetings of officials were held without a prepared agenda and that no record was kept of the meetings. Hence, there was always doubt in the minds of the participants in the planning as to where the plan stood at any given moment. It was constantly changing, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were in a position of looking over the shoulders of the officials of the CIA, trying to keep abreast of the status of the plan but apparently unable to react in time to be able to apply effective influence in its shaping.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were nonetheless vulnerable for not having advised the President of the military fragility of the Bay of Pigs plan. The President himself was fully conscious of this failure of the Chiefs and in private conversation with me often asked me how experienced military officers could have allowed this thing to take place. It still is an unanswered question in my own mind. When I saw for the first time the operational plan for the Bay of Pigs laid out a map I was aghast that qualified military officers had every expected such a plan to succeed. I know that this is the wisdom of hindsight, and I often reminded myself that those who see an elephant born and grown up from day to day are not surprised when it reaches full manhood. However, he who sees a full grown elephant for the first time obviously has reason for surprise. When I saw the Bay of Pigs plan I was the man seeing an elephant for the first time.

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The Joint Chiefs of Staff in their testimony were inclined to explain their failure to advise the President on the grounds that this was not their plan. This was the CIA's department. However, this, of course, was not a good answer and the deficiency in their support of the President was later laid out clearly in a manner which I shall describe later.

The primary reason for my surprise over the plan of the Cuban operation was to find that our Government had expected that an amphibious landing on a hostile shore by amateur soldiers directed by U.S. amateurs could succeed under the circumstances of the landing at the Bay of Pigs. In all the staff schools of the Armed Services we are taught that such an operation is the most complicated and difficult operation in war. Yet we turned the Bay of Pigs Operation over to the CIA – we expected them to organize and train covertly Cuban volunteers capable of carrying out the landing plan. The beachhead chosen would have required by normal criteria at least a division to hold against the forces which might be brought against it. Instead, a Cuban brigade of some 1,200 men was thrown into this situation in the hope that they might either succeed or trigger an

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internal uprising against Castro. The more one looked into the details of the plan, the logistics arrangements, the command and communications arrangements, the more one saw the fragility of the entire operation and the high probability of failure. Yet somehow, at no time did any advisers, civilian or military, look the President of the United States in the eye and tell him these obvious facts.

It should have been clear very early that a para-military operation of this magnitude could not possibly have been prepared and conducted in such a way that all U.S. support of it and connection with it could be plausibly disclaimed. Yet this desire to keep the operation covert and the U.S. out of sight as a supporter of the operation had a predominant role in the manner in which the operation was planned and conducted. We investigators felt that by November 1960 the plan had expanded to the point that the Government should have perceived the impossibility of running it as a covert operation under CIA. We felt that about this time the decision should have been taken to recognize the limits to which the covert aspect could be retained and to assign responsibility for the military phase, namely the amphibious operation, to the Department of Defense. In that case, the CIA could have assisted in concealing the participation of Defense. But the military operation then would have been planned and conducted by professionals with access to all the necessary military resources to assure ultimate success.

Next, we were very much impressed with the need for a decision by the Government prior to embarking upon such an operation to make sure that it would succeed. On the contrary, in point of the fact we allowed operational restrictions designed to protect the covert character of this operation to impair any chance of ultimate success. Thus the leaders were obliged to operate inside of changing ground rules laid down for non-military considerations which often imposed serious operational disadvantages.

We of the Committee also had the feeling that the leaders of this operation were very anxious to carry it through and to obtain approval, accepted restrictions upon their operations without explaining their implications clearly to the President and the senior officials. This remark applies particularly to the circumstances concerning the cancellation of the D-day air

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strike. You will recall that the plan originally had two air strikes, one on D-1 and then a strike on D-day. However, the D-1 day strike created such international noise and such debate in the UN that in the course of D-1, on April 16, the President, at the request of the Secretary of State Rusk, decided to cancel the air

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strike on the morning of D-day. This fact was communicated to the CIA leaders by McGeorge Bundy, who gave them the opportunity to re-claim to Secretary Rusk. They did so and Mr. Rusk stood firm, but offered them the opportunity to speak to the President. This they did not elect to do and, hence, the indispensable air strike for D-day morning was never flown. While this fact was not perhaps a decisive factor in causing the ultimate failure of the operation, nonetheless it contributed in a significant degree.

Another impression we had was the marginal character of the entire operation. Everything was small in relation to the probable requirement, so that everything had to work ideally to assure success. The landing force was very small in relation to the 36-mile beachhead and the probably enemy reaction. The air support was short of pilots if the beach was to require cover over a long period. There was no back-up to offset such Castro airplanes as might escape our initial air strike. There were very few Cuban replacements for the battle losses which were certain to occur on the ground and in the air. We had the feeling that the approval of marginal operations by many officials was influenced by the feeling that the Cuban Brigade itself was a waning asset which had to be used quickly, and that this operation was the best way to realize the most from it.

One question we asked was what would have been the result of the landing had it been militarily successful.

In reply, one must estimate the popular reaction of a successful beachhead. Also, one must define what success means. Had we lasted a week, would that have been sufficient? Must it have been a struggle to maintain a beachhead indefinitely? All of these questions are hard to answer. The facts are that although there had been considerable evidence of strong pockets of resistance against Castro throughout Cuba, the short life of the beachhead, namely three days, did not trigger any visible popular reaction, and Castro's repressive measures following the landing made a coordinated uprising of the populous impossible.

At the moment of failure, the President and many senior officials were surprised to find that an option did not exist which they had previously anticipated. This option was for the Cubans who had landed to pass to a guerrilla status if their landing was unsuccessful. The President had been assured that such was the case, yet when we interrogated the U.S. trainers in Guatemala we found that this word had never gotten to them. Hence, the concept of fading into the hills,

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if necessary, was never a part of the plan upon which the Cuban leaders were trained and briefed. Actually, the terrain chosen was highly inappropriate for the implementation of the so-called guerrilla option. The very fact that we had chosen an area difficult to approach from the land side, with the only roads through swamps by which the enemy might approach the

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position – this fact also tended to hold in the landing forces and prevent them from going to the hills.

Another important conclusion was that the operation suffered greatly from having been over-controlled from the distance of Washington. As a result, decisions arrived late, and frequently they were inappropriate to the situation at the time. Because of the distance and the limited reports which came to Washington once the landing started, it was not possible to have a clear understanding in Washington of the events taking place in the field.

In the post-mortem public discussion of the Bay of Pigs there has always been much criticism of the quality of the intelligence upon which the operation was based. Our investigation did not tend to show that any weakness in intelligence contributed importantly to the failure of the operation. Perhaps the most important defect was the under-evaluation of the effectiveness of the T-33 jet trainers which Castro had introduced into his Air Force. These turned out to be the most effective planes which the Castro Air Force had, and accounted for the heavy losses inflicted upon the propeller planes of the landing force.

In the light of considerations such as these, our committee expressed the opinion that the Government did not have but should acquire the capability of conducting paramilitary operations such as the Bay of Pigs landing. To do so, numerous improvements in procedures and operational methods would be required. Such operations should be planned and executed by a governmental mechanism capable of bringing into play, in addition to military and covert techniques, all the forces – political, economic, ideological and intelligence – which can contribute to its success. We noted that no such mechanism for planning such operations presently exists in our government structure, and suggested as a prime recommendation the organization of some such mechanism in order to give our government the capability of conducting paramilitary operations in the future.

In their final report, the Committee submitted six recommendations to the President. I have already alluded to the first one, namely, the establishment of a mechanism for the planning and coordination of cold

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war strategy and paramilitary operations. The mechanism recommended was the formulation of a permanent standing committee reporting to the President, headed by a chairman of his appointment and including as permanent members the Under Secretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and the Director of CIA. This committee was modeled after, in fact suggested by the so-called Special Group (5412) Committee which existed then and still exists as the permanent committee to monitor the covert activities of the CIA. This committee had steered the development of the Bay of Pigs plan in its formative period. Now it seemed desirable to formalize its structure, provide it with an intelligence agency which we called tentatively the Cold War Indications Center and use this machinery as a sort of Joint Chiefs of Staff organization for the conduct of cold war operations.

The second recommendation related to the assignment of responsibility for paramilitary operations. We had concluded that one cause for failure was the assignment of responsibility for the Bay of Pigs plan to the CIA. It exceeded the capabilities of that agency, its personnel and resources and should, we thought, have been assigned to the Department of Defense at some point. We noted that the word covert had come to be considered

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synonymous with "the province of the CIA." Yet, in point of fact, many agencies of the Government are constantly engaged in covert operations in the sense that they take actions which they do not wish to have attributed to the U.S. Government. We therefore proposed the following statement and recommended its inclusion in current directives and procedures. "Any proposed paramilitary operation in the concept stage will be presented to the Strategic Resources Group for initial consideration and for approval as necessary by the President. Thereafter, the SRG will assign primary responsibility for planning, for interdepartment coordination and for execution to the Task Force, department or individual best qualified to carry forward the operation to success, and will indicate supporting responsibilities. Under this principle, the Department of Defense will normally receive responsibility for overt paramilitary operations. Where such an operation is to be wholly covert or disavowable, it may be assigned to CIA, provide that it is within the normal capabilities of the Agency. Any large paramilitary operation wholly or partly covert which requires significant numbers of military trained personnel, amounts of military equipment when exceed normal CIA-controlled stocks and/or military experience of a kind and level peculiar to the Armed Services is properly the primary responsibility of the Department of Defense with the CIA in a supporting role."

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Our third recommendation related to the improvement of effectiveness in the paramilitary field. We recommended that at the outset there be an inventory of the paramilitary assets of the government and a determination of probable paramilitary assets of the government and a determination of probable paramilitary requirements for the future. Then, having determined assets and requirements, we should make provision for deficits between the two.

Our fourth recommendation bore upon the relation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the President in Cold War operations. I previously mentioned his feeling that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not give him adequate support and advice in the Bay of Pigs operation, a view which we of the Committee tended to share. Hence, we recommended that the President inform the Joint Chiefs of Staff exactly what he expected from them. Such a statement was drafted and transmitted which included the following points:

a. The President regards the Joint Chiefs of Staff as his principal military advisor responsible both for initiating advice to him and for responding to requests for advice. He expects their advice to come to him direct and unfiltered.

b. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have a similar responsibility for the defense of the nation in the Cold War as in conventional hostilities. They should know the military and paramilitary forces and resources available to the Department of Defense, verify their readiness, report on their adequacy, and make appropriate recommendations for their expansion and improvement. President looks to the Chiefs to contribute dynamic and imaginative leadership in contributing to the success of the military and paramilitary aspects of Cold War programs.

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c. The President expects the Joint Chiefs of Staff to present the military viewpoint in governmental councils in such a way as to assure that the military factors are clearly understood before decisions are reached. When only the Chairman or a single Chief is present, that officer must represent the Chiefs as a body, taking such preliminary and subsequent actions as may be necessary to assure that he does in fact represent the corporate judgment of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

d. While the President looks to the Chiefs to present the military factor without reserve or hesitation, he regards them to be more than military men and expects their help in fitting military requirements into the over-all context of any situation, recognizing that the most difficult problem in Government is to combine all assets in a unified, effective pattern.”

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I might say that this last statement was viewed as being very significant. Certainly the Joint Chiefs of Staff today consider the statement as the cornerstone of their performance of duties and of their relation with the President. For the first time, an old debate was settled as to whether the Joint Chiefs of Staff should comment only upon military factors in the governmental problems. I have heard this point argued many times in the past in the arena of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the military view itself has been divided. There was no doubt, however, in President Kennedy's mind. He wished the Joint Chiefs of Staff to come to the council table and give their advice freely across the entire board, consistent, of course, their varying degrees of competence. He favored a generalist approach to the problem of advising the President as opposed to an emphasis on specialized advice.

We felt it important that the President's closest advisors understand and appreciate the lessons of the Bay of Pigs operation. Hence, our committee recommended that a critique be made of this operation to include the following officials: the Vice President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Attorney General, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of Central Intelligence Agency, and the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, and General Taylor. It was also proposed that at the time of the critique the President himself should make a statement in which he would give his comments on the course of recent events and express his sense of urgency for better governmental preparations to cope with cold war situations.

Finally, we recognized the need for governmental guidance to all agencies with regard to the future policy toward Castro. We felt that there were only two ways to view the Castro problem – either to hope that time and internal dissent would eventually lead to his overthrow, or to take active measures to force his downfall. Hence, we recommended that the Cuban situation be appraised in the light of all presently known factors and new guidance be provided to all interested agencies of the government for political, military, economic, and propaganda action against Castro.

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Our report, including the conclusions and recommendations were submitted to the President on Tuesday, June 13, 1961. We gave it to him orally using charts as appropriate to illustrate our points. I would say that the President seemed quite satisfied with our report and approved all recommendations except the first. His overall impression

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was surprise to learn many of the facts which he had not been aware of. Without discussion, he accepted the need to go over the entire operation with his principal advisers. In short, he accepted our recommendation that a critique be held.

We held the critique shortly thereafter and went over line by line the sad story of the entire operation, and pulled no punches in pointing out where the faults seemed to lie. A very interested discussion followed but no sign of dissatisfaction or acrimony. When it was over, and all had filed out, the President turned to me with a grin and he said, "Well, at least nobody got mad."

The recommendation concerning operations in cold war was a very important one affecting all branches of the government. The State Department could not be enthusiastic over it since it suggested abdicating their primacy in the field of cold war operations. Although not accepted at the time, as a matter of fact, the concept was adopted in modified form as I shall describe later in relation to planning for Southeast Asia and Cuba.

The President also asked me to go to Gettysburg and brief ex-President Eisenhower on the Bay of Pigs. I helicoptered to Gettysburg with Allen Dulles as a bodyguard on June 23. I had not seen General Eisenhower since he had retired as President but I knew that I was far from popular with him by virtue of my military writing following retirement. On the helicopter, I suggested to Allen Dulles that he should toss my hat in the office first and see how it was treated. However, as I might have anticipated, General Eisenhower was his usual friendly and sunny self and expressed happiness that I had been willing to return to the government. But this time, it was becoming public knowledge that I was going to stay on permanently in the White House.

Also, the same week I briefed Senator Russell and Congressman Vinson, both of whom at the end of the briefing expressed incredulity over some of the events about which they were hearing for the first time. However, the result was no demand for a Congressional investigation and on the whole, a sympathetic appreciation of the President's problem by the Congressional leadership.

Before putting aside the discussion of the Bay of Pigs, I would like to make two comments. First, with regard to the allegation that the United States Government or its representatives had assured the members of the Cuban brigade that they would receive U.S. air

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support for the Bay of Pigs operation. Our investigating group found absolutely nothing to verify this contention. Certainly none of the officials in Washington ever agreed to committing U.S. armed forces to this operation. In retrospect, it would have been far preferable to have done so rather than to have allowed the operation to fail. However, no promises were given, and there were no grounds for allegations to the contrary.

A second observation bears upon the absence of team play in the new Administration – team play which was essential to the success of such a complex operation involving as it did many agencies of the Government. But we must bear in mind that the Administration consisted largely of strangers. The President did not personally know his Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were completely unknown to the civilian leadership. I think that this factor accounts for much of the uncoordination and lack of dovetailed planes and arrangements which were important factors in determining the lack of success of the operation.

I was impressed at the time and in the subsequent months how the Bay of Pigs failure affected mutual confidence within the Administration. At the outset the blow was heavy indeed and it took weeks and, indeed, months for proper relationships be restored among the officials who were responsible for the Bay of Pigs. The Administration never entirely recovered until October 1962 when its members turned in a magnificent performance in handling the threat of missiles in Cuba.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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