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Analyzing Foreign Policy Crisis Situations: The Bay of Pig

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Success has many fathers, but failure is an orphan. The failure at the Bay of Pigs has received considerably less attention and study than the successfully completed, in the perspective of United States foreign policy, Cuban missile crisis.

The Bay of Pigs fiasco however was an invaluable lesson for President John F. Kennedy. It led him to make basic changes in his selection of advisors, his setup of procedures for dealing with decision-making, and his formation of policy.[1] The lessons the President learned aided him in avoiding similar pitfalls and errors during the missile crisis. I revealed to the President that he could not give his complete trust to the experts.[2]

In a previous study[3] the author offered a prescriptive model to provide the President with a coherent strategy and a workable decision-making pattern to deal with possible future nuclear age crisis situations. Here, the author will offer a view of the Bay of Pigs crisis within the analytical framework of the prescriptive model.

There are two major objectives for undertaking this study. The first objective is to further explore the Bay of Pigs crisis. The Bay of Pigs was a prelude to the Cuban Missile crisis. The handling of the missile crisis and the various models[4] of decision-making that have emerged from the study of that October crisis can possibly be best understood from a more careful viewing of Bay of Pigs. The second objective is to lay the groundwork for a comparative study of other similar crisis situations through the perspective of the prescriptive model.

The prescriptive model has two distinct aspects. The first aspect concerns the evolution of "general strategy" for dealing with crisis situations in the nuclear age. Each aspect of the model has a number of components and sub-components. These various components will be used as the illustrative tools of analysis to measure and elucidate the Bay of Pigs operation.

Planning the Invasion

On March 17, 1960 President Eisenhower authorized a Cuban "program." This included "a paramilitary force outside of Cuba for future guerilla action." In the of Fall of

1960, the CIA recommended going beyond a guerilla and preparing a force for a conventional invasion. An essential part of the plan was United States air cover.

The invasion plan was presented to the new President by three men held over from the previous administration. These three men were Allen Dulles, Director of the CIA; Richard Bissell, Jr., a Deputy Director of the CIA, who was in charge of the Cuban "program," and General Lyman Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On January 22, 1961 Dulles and Lemnitzer outlined the plan to leading member of the Kennedy Administration. Six days later Kennedy called his first White House meeting on what had become an invasion plan. The President was initially "wary and reserved in his reaction" to the invasion plan.

The late January gathering was to be the first in an ad hoc series that led to the crucial; early April meeting at which all of the Presents key advisers gave their approval to the invasion plan. At no time was there a full meeting of the National Security Council to analyze and debate the plan. The President, ad Bissell played the primary roles at the meetings. Although Bissell strongly and urgently argued for the invasion plan, the president was reluctant to give the United States air cover. The President set the tone of the group discussions.

The invasion, which was executed early in the morning of Monday, April 17, 1961, without air cover, turned into a total disaster. By Wednesday the remainder of the exile brigade was taken captive by the Cuban Army. Kennedy blamed "gaps in intelligence plus come errors in ship loading, timing and tactics."[5]

Evolving General Strategy

The composition and formulation of the general strategy components of the prescriptive model brings together a variety of diverse but related factors: use of a number of different aspects of communications; a careful pacing of crisis events combined with a controlled application of coerhcive diplomacy; flexibility, restraint, and sensitivity when dealing with adversary; attention to international law and concern for historically defensible positions; proper regard in dealing with allies; and effective crisis supervision and co-ordination. An analysis of general strategy development during the Bay of Pigs operation through the lens of the prescriptive model follows.

Communications Component

Communications during the Bay of Pigs operation was not handled well. The basic fault was the dismantling of the NSC and the withdrawal of air cover from the plan. Channels of communications were not open or improved and the number of parties that were aware of or contributing information to the plan was severely limited.[6] The CIA's tight control of the operation kept the President and the Cuban exile group basically

"uninformed of each other's thinking" and led to the rejection of "clear evidence of Castro's political and military strength which was available from British and State Department intelligence and even from newspaper stories." Essentially, communication about the operation was flowing from one group within the CIA that had used the problem of maintain secrecy to limit information, analysis, examination, and investigation of the invasion plan from various potential sources and channels.

Pacing Crisis Events Component

The pacing of crisis events was not well laid out and no real attempt was made to use "coercive diplomacy." The CIA people pushed for an end of April invasion. They offered multiple reasons for the necessity of an early invasion – new Soviet arms shipments to Castro, the start of the rainy season, pressure from the Guatemalan planter who was harboring the exile force, etc. Further, during and following the invasion itself any efforts to better pace crisis events were soon negated by the reality that the President had not properly led the invasion scenario. There was no real opportunity to properly pace the quickly unfolding disaster at the Bay of Pigs. Following the defeat Kennedy sent for Eisenhower, who asked whey air cover had not been given the invasion. Kennedy responded, "…the Soviets would be very apt to cause trouble in Berlin." Eisenhower responded, "That is exactly the opposite of what would really happen."[7]

Following the abortive attack the Cubans were treated with greater sensitivity. Kennedy displayed flexibility and restraint following the invasion in dealing with the Cubans. He would not be pressured or coerced into ordering a full-scale attack on Cuba when it became evident that the invasion plan had failed. Further, he order the "cancellation" of an attack against the Cuban Air Force which he believed would lead to severe political problems for the United States in the world community.[8]

International Law and Morality

President Kennedy could find little international law of moral justification for the invasion. Some arguments could be made for an historical and moral obligation to the Cuban people and exile fighters. However, it could not be easily presented to the world community in an acceptable fashion, it could not be seen as in accord with international law, and it could not be reconciled with our traditional concern for historically and morally defensible behavior in the international arena.

Dealing with Allies

There was a failure to properly deal with our allies. They were not consulted and their counsel was not solicited. Our Latin neighbors and our European alliance partners were rather peripheral to the entire operation. There was no opportunity to receive a

possible assessment or analysis of the Bay of Pigs invasion plan from our allies that could have provided us with a contrary or critical view of the proposed undertaking.

Crisis Supervision and Coordination

Crisis supervision and coordination proved to be most difficult for the President. Kennedy was distressed by the "gap" between decision and execution, between planning and reality. He was disturbed on finding that at such a high level of government, dangerous errors in the entire decision-making and execution structure should exist.

The President was led to believe certain things about the invasion that turned out to be false. There proved to be substantial differences between what he actually approved and what in reality occurred. He thought he was approving a "quiet reinfiltration" of Cubans back to their country. In reality the invasion was being highly publicized and overplayed. Kennedy believed that the exile group had been informed that the invasion would have to take place without American military support. In reality the CIA contacts to the exile army were telling the soldiers that American military intervention would come if it were necessary. Further, President Kennedy had been assured that the immediate area around the Bay of Pigs was suited for guerrilla warfare. In fact the area was swampy, well covered by Castro's army, and, as later become known, the exile soldiers did not have the necessary guerrilla training.

The President did not have trusted and well informed aides maintaining close supervision of the invasion and crisis scenario. There was little control of and coordination between those who were planning and carrying out the invasion and those who were making policy decisions. The Kennedy administration was "not yet fully organized" for crisis management, knew little of those in the CIA who had planned and were no strongly advocating the invasion, and was severely constrained by time and secrecy conditions. The administration never attained the necessary measure of control and supervision of the Bay of Pigs operation.[9]

Developing a Decision-Making Pattern

Crisis in the nuclear age requires that a President and those involved in decision-making establish a decision-making pattern that can deal with the complex and stressful decision-making situation they face. The decision-making components of the model join together a group of aspects intended to meet the needs of the President and the other decision-makers. These aspects include – selecting a proper decision-making management style; composing a decision-making body; putting this decision-making body in operation to achieve the best possible interpretation of information, analysis, assessments, diagnosis, diversity of views, etc.; and achieving maximum intergovernmental coordination between

the various actors, agencies, and branches of government somehow involved with the crisis and the implementation of crisis policy.

Decision-Making Management Style

The "collegial" style of decision-making management – which places emphasis on bringing together the best aspects of diverse points of view and approaches – was not employed in the Bay of Pigs operation. President Kennedy's advisers spoke "virtually with one voice." There was little effort to air or review the basic underlying assumptions of the invasion plan or to hammer out whether the invasion plan was the best response to dealing with the problem of Cuba. There was rather, an intense effort by its advocates to win approval of the invasion plan. Further, the President felt that there was a pronounced failure of responsibility by the State Department to debate or define the political considerations or consequences of the plan.[10]

Composition of the Decision-Making Body Component

The composition of the decision-making group was essentially "ad hoc" but dominated by intelligence and military experts who had an emotion and organizational commitment to their invasion plan. Kennedy knew little of the strengths and weaknesses of the men who were advising him. The secrecy imposed on the deliberations had the impact of limiting the number of people who knew of the operation or who would subject the invasion plan to a thorough analysis or investigation. The President was not able to go outside the ad hoc decision-making body to seek advice or assistance. It was only one element within the CIA and to an extent the joint chiefs that had the "opportunity to study and ponder the invasion plan." The decision-making group was limited and lacked flexibility. It was "wrong" for Kennedy to anticipate that the group with the CIA advocating the invasion plan would "provide the necessary objectivity and skepticism about their own plan."[13]

Operations of the Decision-Making Body Component

The operations of the decision-making body was marked by the lack of "multiple advocacy" and by the presence of the "group think" phenomenon. The invasion plan "grew, changed and forced decisions without any clear statement of policy or procedure." There were no strong or organized voices of "opposition" raised at any of the "key" meetings and "no realistic alternatives were presented."[12] There was little "skepticism" expressed and the President did not make "clear" that the "courage" of those on his staff that might oppose the plan should not be called into question by the advocates of the plan.

Other tracks of advisory reasoning and thinking were never explored and the decision-making body displayed little flexibility. Roger Hilsman notes that his "personal lesson" from the Bay of Pigs experience was that a responsible government official should

not have to "ask to be permitted" to conduct a study of a Bay of Pigs type operation. The "excessive" security restrictions imposed by the CIA severely limited the information and analysis flow to the Presidents advisers and decreased their ability to make sound judgments. The CIA and State Department were "without benefit of advice" from their own intelligence staffs. Robert Amory, Jr., the Deputy Director of the CIA for Intelligence, who was responsible for "intelligence, research and estimates, was not informed of the invasion plan. The decision-makers were therefore "denied the judgment of CIA's own estimates on the research side of the operation."[13]

Inter-Government Coordination Component

The President had difficulty with intergovernmental coordination. Kennedy felt that the military had only made a superficial review of critical, military related aspects of the invasion plan. When the staging area had been changed from the City of Trinidad to the Bay of Pigs they did not inform the President of their reservations. The invasion plan centered around the CIA, the Joint Chiefs, lacking responsibility for the plan, did not appear to apply the same rigid, critical examination it applied to its own projects.[14]

Those responsible for planning and carrying out the invasion plan seemed to care little for the goals of the Kennedy Administration or the standing of the Executive Office. They did not appear to support Kennedy and seemed to be propelled by their own bureaucratic initiatives and organizational commitments. On the other hand, in the final analyses, the failure of the President to have a full NSC hearing of the plans was basic in the failure.[15]

Conclusion

Viewing the Bay of Pigs operation from the perspective of the prescriptive model helps illuminate the decision-makers failure in strategy development and the inadequacy of their decision-making structure. It also suggests ways, through application of the components of the model, to strengthen the process of arriving at proper strategy and organizing and operating decision-making groups during crisis.

The prescriptive model illustrates and President Kennedy appears to have learned from the Bay of Pigs that in a future crisis he would have to be concerned with effective communications both from within the governmental advisory system and from without. He would also have to show more regard for the adversary and concern for the impact of decisions and actions on United States allies. Further, the international legal structure and the moral position of the United States could not be so fully ignored. He also came to recognize the importance of effective supervision and coordination of crisis actions.

The model also illustrates, as Kennedy saw, that the President has to extend the "range" of his advice and use a decision-making management style that is more oriented to

hammering out the best solution among several options. Further, the President should make use of people of general knowledge and intelligence whom he knows personally and has confidence in. Policy decisions in the Bay of Pigs were not placed in terms of the objectives of the Kennedy Presidency. The "prestige of the Presidential Office has been lightly regarded by men who primary loyalty was not to him or his administration." Neither Robert Kennedy nor Theodor Sorensen had been involved in any crucial meetings on the proposed invasion. These were men Kennedy "had worked with longest, knew best and trusted most." On the other hand Kennedy himself admitted his failure to convene "a full meeting of the NSC to discuss and criticize the plans." This was the basic error.[16]

The model indicates that there was a strong push for in-group cohesiveness. This stemmed, in part, from a desire to maintain established policy rather than face the hostility of those offended by shifts in these policies. Here the model can help the President become aware of the need to encourage more critical and independent thinking and analysis. It can also help him realize the need for "impolite" and tough questioning on the part of this staff to those operating the machinery of government.

It is the author's belief that this analysis of the Bay of Pigs operation, when combined with a study of a similar crises, can be used for comparison with the variable components presented in the prescriptive model. This comparative analysis can be helpful in revealing significant similarities and differences between the crises, in detailing points of weakness and strength in the handling of each crisis, in exploring the most common problem areas in crisis management, and in suggesting which of the variable components of the model appear to be most important in the successful handling and resolution of a crisis situation.

Perhaps the person who learned most from the Bay of Pigs failure was Kennedy himself. In his meeting with Eisenhower on April 22, 1961, after the Bay of Pigs debacle, Kennedy assured the old soldier, "I assure you that hereafter if we get in anything like this, it is going to be success."[17]

Notes

1. R. Gordon Hoxie indicates that despite President Eisenhower's emphasis on the "vital importance of the National Security Council" President Kennedy rendered the NSC "virtually inoperative" until after the "debacle" of the Bay of Pigs. R. Gordon Hoxie, *Command Decisions and the Presidency: A Study in National Security Policy and Organization* (New York: Readers Digest Press, 1977), p. 243.
2. For further discussion, on the changes generated by and the lessons learned from the Bay of Pigs operation, see Irving Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), Chapter 2: Roger Hilsman, *To Move A Nation* (Garden City, New York; Doubleday, 1967), Chapters 3, 4, and 5; and Alexander George, "The Case For Multiple Advocacy In Making Foreign Policy," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 66, No. 3 (September, 1972), pp. 751-758.
3. Joshua H. Sandman, "A Prescriptive Model For Handling Nuclear Age Crisis In the Executive Office," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. xiii, No. 1 (Winter, 1983), pp. 121-128.
4. Barbara Kellerman, "Allison Redux: Three More Decision-Making Models," *Policy*, vol. xv, No. 3 (Spring 1983), pp. 351-367 and Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).
5. For a historical overview and analysis of the Bay of Pigs operation, see Hilsman, *Nation*, Chapter 3; Theodore Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Bantam, 1966), Chapter XI; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days* (Fawcett Crest, 1967), Chapters X and XI, and Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower the President, II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), chapters 24-28.
6. Hoxie reports that there was a "communications gap" between President Kennedy and the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Hoxie suggests that a new President, as Commander in Chief, "quickly establish" good working relations with the Chiefs to insure proper military communications and input. Hoxie, *Command Decisions*, pp. 335-336.
7. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 342, Ambrose, *op. cit.,* p. 638.
8. Sorensen, *op. cit.,* pp. 335-338 and Hilsman, *Nation*, pp. 33-34.
9. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 330 and pp. 338-344.
10. Oral history interview with Richard Bissell, April 25, 1967, by Joseph E. O'Connor, John F. Kennedy Library, pp. 7-9; Hilsman, *Nation*, pp. 32-34; and Richard Tanner Johnson, *Managing The White House* (New York; Harper & Row, 1974), p. 145.
11. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, pp. 340-342 and Oral History Interview with Lyman Kirkpatrick, April 26, 1967, by Joseph E. O'Connor, John F. Kennedy Library, pp. 21-22.
12. It would appear, as Hoxie suggests, that despite the presence of a number of "outstanding academicians" the dismantling of much of the National Security Council machinery early in the Kennedy Administration negatively affected the operations of the decision-making body during the Bay of Pigs operation. Hoxie, *Command Decisions*, p. 330.
13. Hilsman, *Nation*, p. 31 and Sorensen, *Kennedy*, pp. 341-343.
14. The apparent lack of proper examination or reporting of reservations concerning the invasion plan on the part of the Joint Chiefs may be explained as Hoxie suggests by the "communications gap" that existed between the Chiefs and the President at that time. The "gap" prevented proper intergovernmental coordination. The above helps demonstrate the interrelated nature of components of the prescriptive model.
15. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 342; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 227; and Ambrose, pp. 638-639.
16. *Ibid*.
17. Ambrose, *op. cit.,* p. 639.