

# Did JFK Cuba gambit set stage for assassination?

Kennedy trumped Nixon's 'October surprise' in 1960



By **WND Staff**

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NEW YORK – Although the Bay of Pigs invasion is widely considered a Kennedy administration initiative, the historical record demonstrates the CIA hatched the plan during the last year of the Eisenhower administration.

The original plan would have provided Vice President Richard Nixon with an "October surprise" that he could use to defeat John F. Kennedy in the 1960 presidential election, writes WND's Jerome Corsi in his new book **"Who Really Killed Kennedy,"** published by WND Books.

The idea, Corsi writes, was that the American public would rally around Nixon's leadership of an Eisenhower administration effort to support a popular uprising of Cuban patriots invading Cuba from the United States to rescue their homeland from Castro and communism.

Nixon, according to the plan, would score a knockout blow over Kennedy as the American public saw Nixon using his superior foreign policy expertise to depose Castro through a popular uprising in Cuba stirred by the invasion.

The plan was disrupted, however, Corsi writes, when insider sources tipped off the Kennedy campaign that the Bay of Pigs invasion was planned for the last weeks of the 1960 presidential campaign.

Ultimately, Corsi contends, the gambit JFK successfully executed to prevent Nixon from invading Cuba before the 1960 presidential election, inadvertently set the stage for his own assassination.

"Who Really Killed Kennedy," released this week as the 50th anniversary of the assassination approaches, is bolstered by recently declassified documents that shed new light on the greatest "who-done-it" mystery of the 20th century. Corsi sorted through the mountain of evidence, including tens of thousands of documents, all 26 volumes of the Warren Commission's report, hundreds of books, several films and countless photographs.

## **Eisenhower plan**

In March 1960, President Eisenhower approved a plan to train a group of Cuban exiles to invade their homeland, with the anticipation that the Cuban people and various elements of the Cuban military would support the invasion.

The goal was to overthrow Castro and to establish a non-communist government favorable to the United States. Richard Bissell, the CIA deputy director for plans who had successfully developed the Lockheed U-2 spy plane program, spearheaded within the CIA the plan to invade Cuba that ultimately became the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

Bissell, a graduate of Yale University and the London School of Economics, had never spent a day in the U.S. military, though he was ensconced in a group of journalists and government officials that became known as the "Georgetown Set." The group included CIA officials Allen Dulles, James Angleton and Cord Meyer – three figures that played roles in the JFK assassination, Corsi says.

Once Eisenhower approved Bissell's plan to invade Cuba, the CIA set up training camps in Guatemala, where a small army was prepared for an amphibious assault landing and guerrilla warfare.

E. Howard Hunt, the same E. Howard Hunt who later became infamous as a Watergate burglar, was selected to head the training of the Cuban invasion army in Guatemala.

Hunt leaves no doubt, Corsi writes, that the Cuban invasion plan was being developed as a copycat of his efforts earlier during the Eisenhower administration to overthrow Arbenz in 1954 in Guatemala.

"As principal assistant to Bissell, Tracy Barnes told me, I was needed for a new project, much like the one on which I had worked for him in overthrowing Jacobo Arbenz," Hunt wrote in his 1974 book "Under-Cover: Memoirs of an American Secret Agent."

"My job, Tracy told me, would be essentially the same as my earlier one – chief of political action for a project recommended by the National Security Council and just approved by President Eisenhower: to assist Cuban exiles in overthrowing Castro."

Hunt also affirmed that Nixon was in charge of executing the plan.

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"Nixon, however, had little to say on the subject in public," Hunt explained.

"Secretly, however, [Nixon] was White House action officer for our covert project, and some months before, his senior military aide, Marine General Robert Cushman, had urged me to inform him of any project difficulties the Vice President might be able to resolve. For Nixon was, Cushman told me, determined that the effort should not fail."

Operating under the codename "Eduardo," E. Howard Hunt began organizing a government-in-exile that would form a provisional government in Cuba once Castro was deposed.

Hunt's principal assistant was Bernard "Macho" Barker, who had worked for years for the CIA station in Havana, a Cuban American who was also destined for infamy in Watergate.

Barker and Hunt chose then-27-year-old Manuel F. Artime to head the provisional government. Artime, a Jesuit-trained psychiatrist, had joined Castro's forces in the Sierra Maestra and served as a regional agricultural official after Castro ousted Cuba's ruling dictator, Fulgencio Batista.

Artime fled Cuba to Miami after becoming disillusioned with the number of anti-communist friends who were being executed by Castro even though they had supported the revolution.

Barker later turned up as one of the burglars apprehended in the break-in of Larry O'Donnell's Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate complex. Artime later figured in the many plots Robert Kennedy advanced in the Kennedy administration, right up to the time of the JFK assassination, to assassinate Castro in Cuba.

Robert Kennedy's goal was to replace Castro with the commander of the Cuban army, Juan Almeida, another Castro supporter who reportedly had turned against the revolution after Castro took power.

According to Hunt, the plan developed by Bissell and the CIA in the Eisenhower administration called for "a total wipeout of Castro air power by a series of strikes just prior to the invasion landing."

Once the invasion of Cuban exiles cleared the perimeter around the airstrip at the Bay of Pigs, Hunt planned to fly to Cuba with the provisional government.

From Cuba, the provisional government would broadcast to the world a declaration that it was a government-in-arms, making an appeal for aid in overthrowing Castro.

Following the declaration, a sizable contingent of U.S. Marines would wait offshore in the U.S. aircraft carrier Boxer.

Because the Eisenhower administration plan was illegal under international law, the entire Cuban project was run under the principle of "plausible deniability."

To hide the war planning, the CIA trained the Cuban exiles in Guatemala and utilized agency covers in the United States that included businesses and individuals who shared rentals with organized crime and radical right-wing paramilitary organizations.

"In time it became impossible to separate the wheat of intelligence from the chaff of the underworld," commented journalist Warren Hinkle and his co-author William Turner, a former FBI agent, in their 1981 book "The Fish is Red: The Secret War Against Castro."

## **Candidate Kennedy's gambit**

On July 23, 1960, CIA director Allen Dulles visited JFK at the family compound in Hyannis Port, Mass., on Cape Cod to brief the candidate on the Eisenhower administration's anti-Castro efforts, Corsi writes.

This put the Kennedy campaign on notice that an October-surprise invasion of Cuba was a possibility. Increasingly, the Kennedy camp became paranoid as rumors out of Miami talked of the creation of a CIA-sponsored invasion-force consisting of Cuban exiles.

After confirming an invasion of Cuba was being planned, the Kennedy campaign decided to step up the candidate's rhetoric. On Oct. 6, 1960, at a Democratic Party dinner in Cincinnati, Ohio, JFK declared "we must firmly resist further communist encroachment in this hemisphere – working through a strengthened organization of the American States – and encouraging those liberty-loving Cubans who are leading the resistance to Castro."

This sounded close to an endorsement of a U.S. policy assisting Cuban exiles in an effort to oust Castro, Corsi notes in "Who Really Killed Kennedy?"

On Oct. 20, 1960, on the eve of the fourth and final presidential debate, JFK put out a statement saying the U.S. "must attempt to strengthen the non-Batista democratic anti-Castro forces in exile, and in Cuba itself, who offer eventual hope of overthrowing Castro. Thus far these fighters for freedom have had virtually no support from our government."

While the statement stopped short of endorsing a U.S. government-sponsored invasion of Cuba, JFK was trying to pre-empt the aggressive rhetoric on Cuba, positioning himself to claim credit for the

idea, if Nixon and the Eisenhower administration were to go forward with the Cuban exile plan prior to Election Day.

Then, during the fourth debate, on Oct. 21, 1960, in New York City, in his opening statement, JFK again returned to the theme of Cuba.

"I look at Cuba, 90 miles off the coast of the United States," Kennedy began. "In 1957, I was in Havana. I talked with the American ambassador there. He said he was the second most powerful man in Cuba. And yet even though Ambassador Smith and Ambassador Gardner, both Republican ambassadors, both warned of Castro, the Marxist influences around Castro, the communist influences around Castro, both of them have testified in the last six weeks that in spite of their warnings to the American government, nothing was done."

The Kennedy campaign, Corsi writes, had correctly calculated that Nixon's training as a debater would induce him to take the opposite approach, urging a policy of restraint while charging Kennedy was being irresponsible in suggesting the wisdom of a U.S. military invasion of Cuba.

This is exactly what Nixon did in the fourth debate, calling JFK's Cuba policy the "most dangerously irresponsible recommendations he's made during the course of this campaign." Kennedy's calculated move effectively checkmated Nixon on Cuba. Nixon was furious.

## **Nixon fumes**

In his 1962 book "Six Crises," Nixon described how as he was preparing on Oct. 20, 1960, for the fourth debate, he saw huge black headlines in the afternoon papers that he characterized as reading: "Kennedy Advocates U.S. Intervention in Cuba, Calls for Aid to Rebel Forces in Cuba."

Nixon recalled that as early as Sept. 23, 1960, Kennedy had given an exclusive statement to the Scripps-Howard newspapers in which he said, "The forces fighting for freedom in exile and in the mountains of Cuba should be sustained and assisted."

When Nixon read the headlines in the newspapers, he reported he could hardly believe his eyes. Nixon asked his aides to call the White House and find out if Allen Dulles in his regular briefings of Kennedy as the Democratic Party candidate had disclosed to Kennedy the fact that for months the CIA had been training Cuban exiles in Guatemala for an invasion.

Within a half hour, Nixon discovered Dulles had briefed Kennedy on the subject.

"For the first and only time in the campaign, I got mad at Kennedy – personally," Nixon wrote. "I understand and expect hard-hitting attacks in a campaign. But in this instance I thought that Kennedy, with full knowledge of the facts was jeopardizing the security of a United States foreign policy operation. And my rage was greater because I could do nothing about it."

Nixon was particularly enraged that although the idea of providing the Cuban exiles cover training was actually his idea, somehow Kennedy managed to pull off the illusion he had thought of it first.

### **Nixon cornered**

In "Six Crises," Nixon acknowledged that the program to have the CIA provide arms, ammunition and training for the Cubans who fled the Castro regime had been in operation for six months before the 1960 campaign had gotten under way.



It was Nixon's program, but now he could not say a single word about it.

"The operation was covert," Nixon wrote. "Under no circumstances could it be disclosed or even alluded to. Consequently, under Kennedy's attacks and his new demands for 'militant' policies, I was in the position of a fighter with one hand tied behind his back. I knew we had a program under way to deal with Castro, but I could not even hint at its existence, much less spell it out."

Nixon wrote that he was faced with one of the most difficult decisions of the campaign, and he felt Kennedy had him at a tremendous disadvantage.

"Kennedy was now publicly advocating what was already the policy of the American Government – covertly – and Kennedy had been so informed," Nixon grouched. "But by stating such a position publicly, he obviously stood to gain the support of all those who wanted a stronger policy against Castro, but who, of course, did not know of our covert programs already under way."

Nixon concluded, much as the Kennedy camp predicted he would, that he had to protect the covert operation at all costs.

"In fact, I must go to the other extreme: I must attack the Kennedy proposal to provide such aid as wrong and irresponsible because it would violate our treaty obligations," Nixon explained.

## **Fatal price**

The Kennedy ploy had worked, writes Corsi.

By taking the aggressive position on Cuba, JFK effectively blocked an October-surprise Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba.

But that was hardly the end of the story, Corsi notes.

While the stratagem may well have been critical to preserving JFK's chance to beat Nixon in 1960, it ultimately backfired.

Once JFK was elected president, he suddenly became vulnerable to Bissell and the CIA blackmailing him over Cuba.

If JFK as president did not keep good on his campaign promise to support the Cuban exiles in their effort to regain their country, what would prevent Bissell and the CIA from leaking to the public the reality that JFK's Cuban statements during the campaign were nothing more than an effort to pre-empt or block a Nixon plan that might have worked?

Once JFK blocked Nixon from executing the CIA covert plan to invade Cuba, he committed himself to following through with the plan shortly after taking office, with no assurance it would work.