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From the Bay of Pigs arcana

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Just as the Bay of Pigs veterans were meeting in Miami to observe the 25th anniversary of that attack on Cuba, there happened to come into my hands from the Kennedy Library in Massachusetts some just-released documents on that important event.

The papers are bittersweet and telling, especially the famous "CIA Document 21," which informs Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor about the last-minute and ultimately crucial decision not to give the 1,450 Cuban exiles any American air cover.

"At about 9:30 p.m. on April 16, I was called in the CIA headquarters," Gen. C.P. Cabell, of the U.S. Air Force, wrote in the memo. At that time, he was notified by White House aide McGeorge Bundy "that we would not be permitted to launch air strikes the next morning. . . ."

U.N. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson had been strenuously against the air cover for "political" reasons, the memo says, before Gen. Cabell delineates how they then needed to dispatch the orders with speed "to stop the planned air strike and to require replanning and rebriefing of crews." The order virtually "caught the crews in their cockpits."

The papers are filled with interesting tidbits, even instructive revelations, both of policy and of character, for today's not dissimilar world.

There is John F. Kennedy top adviser Adolph Berle, considered by many to have been one of the real wise men around Washington, saying that the United States was quite within its rights in backing the Bay of Pigs operation against Fidel Castro's regime.

"The conventions protecting against intervention did not apply," Mr. Berle argued, "because the Communists had intruded into this hemisphere and, second, because Castro's government was an openly constituted totalitarian government which is clearly outside the provisions of the treaty of Rio de Janeiro."

Then, Mr. Berle added prophetically, "Some sort of clash was bound to come, and it was probably better if it came with one country,

rather than later with two or three countries."

In yet another part of the fascinating papers, titled *A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime*, approved by President Eisenhower as early as March 16, 1960, the objective of the Bay of Pigs operation was couched in what we now can see were suicidally impossible terms:

"The purpose of the program outlined herein is to bring about the re-

placement of the Castro regime with one more devoted to the true interests of the Cuban people and more acceptable to the United States in such a manner as to avoid any appearance of U.S. intervention."

Finally, a note both of levity and of sobriety was found in the U.S. Navy's name for the bungled operation: "Bumpy Road."

Those were prescient words, indeed. On April 17, 1961, the 1,450-plus Cuban exiles landed in

Cuba's Bay of Pigs. In less than three days, the operation that was to "free" Cuba was crushed. President Kennedy appointed a board of inquiry to "study our governmental practices and programs in the areas of military and paramilitary and guerrilla and anti-guerrilla activity which fall short of outright war, with a view to strengthening our work in this area."

In effect, it all really started there: America's twisting and bumpy relationship with the revolutions of the world; America's unwillingness to appear the direct "aggressor" or "interventionist" and thus its support of imperfect exile groups; America's unwillingness to intervene decisively in these revolutionary situations that have strained us as a nation from Cuba to Vietnam, and now to Libya.

The Bay of Pigs became a kind of metaphor, but for what?

It symbolized America's self-righteousness in backing off and letting the people it supported swing in the wind, whether they be Bay of Pigs exiles, Laotian tribesmen in Laos, or (perhaps at this moment) Nicaraguan "contras."

When I ask myself what are the lessons, I see a half-impulse and a half-imperative on the part of the United States to intervene but never enough really to win a decisive battle.

I see a lot of wishful thinking, such as the belief that, even after a charismatic leader like Fidel Castro or Muammar Qaddafi is in place, those men can be replaced easily by some remote, exiled leader.

And I see a belief that single forays — forays without using the decisive power, for instance, of air cover — can solve problems or swing historic events.

But I also see some changes in American perceptions along these lines since that ill-fated Bay of Pigs debacle in 1961. There is today a deeper understanding than in 1961 that the United States is in these situations, in Libya and in Nicaragua, for instance, for the long run. There had better be.