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JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF SPECIAL HISTORICAL STUDY

THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF AND US MILITARY RESPONSES TO THE THREAT OF CASTRO'S CUBA



HISTORICAL DIVISION
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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
AND
US MILITARY RESPONSES TO
THE THREAT OF CASTRO'S CUBA

Historical Division
Joint Secretariat
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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF AND US MILITARY RESPONSES TO
THE THREAT OF CASTRO'S CUBA

Introduction

(U) Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba in 1959. Since that time, he has installed a communist regime in his own country, has accepted Soviet military aid, welcomed Soviet military forces, and furnished bases for their use. He has attempted to export communism to neighboring countries in the Western Hemisphere by supporting local communist insurrections and seeking to topple anti-communist regimes. And he has repayed his debt to Moscow by furnishing expeditionary forces and military advisers for action in Africa.

(U) As a consequence of some or all of these activities, the United States has been led to take military action on three separate occasions: in 1961 by seeking to overthrow the communist regime by inserting an anti-Castro paramilitary force at the Bay of Pigs; in 1962 by forcing the Soviet Union to withdraw offensive missiles from the island; and in 1965 by invading the Dominican Republic to prevent a communist takeover.

The Bay of Pigs

(TS) Fidel Castro revealed his intention to lead Cuba into the Soviet orbit within months of his coming to power. He quickly drove democratic leaders from office, expropriated US property, signed extensive trade agreements with the Soviet Union, and openly boasted that his "Fidelismo" would sweep Latin America.

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As a result, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, on 17 March 1960, approved a CIA "Program of Covert Actions Against the Castro Regime." During the remainder of the year, the CIA organized anti-Castro exiles into a "paramilitary" force. By December, CIA planners had selected March 1961 as the time for attack and the town of Trinidad, on Cuba's south central coast, as the site where the exile "Brigade" could land unopposed and, ultimately, spark a general uprising. In mid-January 1961, a State-Defense-CIA Working Group was created to see whether additional measures might be required. At that point, Joint Staff officers finally received a full briefing on the CIA plan. The JCS representative on this Group, Brigadier General David W. Gray, evaluated several possibilities and then, on 19 January, gave the Group an answer that had been approved informally¹ by the JCS Chairman, by General Lyman L. Lemnitzer. The only course certain of success, he said, would involve overt US military intervention, either unilaterally or in conjunction with Cuba volunteers. On 27 January, the Joint Chiefs of Staff appealed to Secretary Robert S. McNamara for "immediate and forceful action" to prevent Cuba's permanent communization, which would betoken "disastrous consequences" for the Western Hemisphere. In their judgment, the CIA's plan provided neither for the "direct action" that might be needed to avert failure nor for the "follow-up" efforts to exploit success. Accordingly, they urged inter-departmental development of an "overall US plan of action."¹

1. (TS) "Chronology of JCS Participation in Bumpy Road," CJCS Files. (TS) JCSM-44-61 to SecDef, 27 Jan 61 (derived from JCS 2304/19), JMF 9123/9105 (10 Jan 61).

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(TS) President John F. Kennedy requested a Defense-CIA review of the Trinidad plan. A JCS Working Group, created to carry out this task, concluded (1) that Trinidad was "the best area in Cuba" for accomplishing this operation and (2) that the Brigade could seize and hold a beachhead for four days, given complete surprise and total air supremacy. On 3 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff transmitted these conclusions to Mr. McNamara and advised him that, while initial military success seemed probable, "it is obvious that ultimate success will depend upon political factors; i.e., a sizeable popular uprising or substantial follow-on forces." Yet, despite apparent logistical shortcomings, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that "timely execution of this plan has a fair chance of ultimate success and, even if it does not achieve immediately the full results desired, could contribute to the eventual overthrow of the Castro regime."²

(TS) On 11 March, after canvassing his senior advisers, President Kennedy said he was willing "to take the chance of going ahead," but deemed the Trinidad plan "too spectacular." He wanted a "quiet" operation, preferably a night landing, which the world would accept as being essentially a Cuban undertaking. Early on 14 March, CIA planners gave the JCS Working Group new proposals. Next morning, the Group offered its opinions to the Joint Chief of Staff who promptly

². (TS) "Memo of Discussion on Cuba," 28 Jan 61; (TS) DM-120-61 to CJCS, 1 Feb 61; CJCS 091 Cuba. (TS) JCSM-57-61 to SecDef, 3 Feb 61, CJCS Files. General Gray told the Director, Joint Staff that he estimated the odds on ultimate success to be "thirty in favor and seventy against." The Director, apparently, did not apprise the JCS of this estimate. Peter Wyden, Bay of Pigs (1979), p. 89.

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approved and passed to Secretary McNamara the findings summarized below:

Alternative I: A night landing at Trinidad, while offering a "fair" possibility of attaining initial objectives, would stand "small chance of ultimate success" due to lack of air support and difficulties of resupply.

Alternative II: An invasion of Oriente Province, in Northeast Cuba, posed numerous problems.

Alternative III: This consisted of a night landing at the Bay of Pigs in the swampy Zapata peninsula, 80 miles west of Trinidad. Resupply might be difficult, but there would be usable airfields and Zapata's remoteness would slow Castro's reaction. The Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that the Brigade could land successfully and sustain itself--provided replenishment of essential items was accomplished--for several weeks.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff judged Alternative III, Zapata, to be "the most feasible and the most likely to accomplish the objective." But they did not consider any of the three as desirable as the original Trinidad plan. Next day, President Kennedy approved "continued preparation and final planning" for a landing at the Bay of Pigs. He insisted, though, that plans be prepared on the basis of no US military intervention. About two weeks later, when General Lemnitzer told Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Mann that Zapata was a poor site compared to Trinidad, Mr. Mann answered (1) that political considerations were over-riding

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and (2) that the President had made his decision, so further discussion was pointless.³

(TS) Two strikes by Nicaragua-based B-26s, the first on D minus 2 and the second on D-Day, 17 April, were supposed to eradicate Castro's air power. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had opposed any pre-invasion attacks on grounds that they would be indecisive and might alert Castro's forces, and their Zapata proposal had provided for none, but the political need for a plausible "defection" tale dictated otherwise. The D minus 2 strikes, however, raised such a storm at the United Nations that, on the evening of 16 April, President Kennedy cancelled the D-Day bombing runs scheduled for next morning. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were neither informed nor consulted. Around midnight on 16-17 April, a CIA officer told General Gray that a combat air patrol (CAP) over the beachheads and early warning ships (EW) were urgently needed. A carrier task group had been positioned within aerial range of the landing site. Accordingly at 0300, after consulting General Lemnitzer, General Gray advised that both would be made available. President Kennedy approved EW alone.⁴

(TS) At the Bay of Pigs, in the pre-dawn hours of 17 April, the Brigade seized two beachheads. But,

3. (U) "Narrative of the Anti-Castro Cuban Operation Zapata," 13 Jun 61, pp. 8-10, Att to Memo, GEN Taylor to President, same date, John F. Kennedy Library. (TS) JCSM-166-61 to SecDef, 15 Mar 61 (derived from JCS 2304/23), JMF 925/310 (3 Feb 61). Interv, Walter S. Poole with GEN Lemnitzer, 12 Feb 76.

4. (U) "Narrative of the Anti-Castro Cuban Operation Zapata," 13 Jun 61, pp. 12-13, John F. Kennedy Library. (TS) "Chronology of JCS Participation in Bumpy Road", CJCS Files. Wyden, Bay of Pigs, p. 205. (TS) Msg, JCS 994222 to CINCLANT, 171050Z Apr 61, JMF 9123 (24 Mar 61) sec 2.

that morning, Castro's surviving planes sank two ships, one of which carried the Brigade's ammunition reserve; President Kennedy's decisions to cancel the D-Day strike and withhold CAP had grim consequences. In mid-afternoon, the President finally authorized a CAP to fly 15 miles offshore. The Brigade held its ground, but Castro quickly concentrated sizable forces and arrested thousands of potential dissidents. Next day, as the Brigade lost one beachhead and its hold on the other became tenuous, Admiral Arleigh Burke told President Kennedy that the "cover" was completely gone and the US role known to all. He recommended that armed US reconnaissance planes overfly the beaches; the President ultimately allowed unmarked jets to do so. Around midnight, in the face of imminent disaster, the Chief Executive conferred in the Oval Office with his senior advisers. Admiral Burke ardently advocated a strike by US carrier aircraft aimed at destroying Castro's jets; the President finally authorized US planes to escort a B-26 sortie at dawn. Tragically, this effort miscarried because the bombers, flying by Nicaraguan rather than Cuban time, reached the beachhead before US escorts were airborne, and two B-26s were downed by Castro's jets.⁵

(TS) "Please send help," ran Brigade Commander San Roman's appeal on the morning of 19 April. "We cannot hold." General Lemnitzer, who spent much of this day

5. Wyden, Bay of Pigs, pp. 269-271, 235-243. (TS) Msg, JCS 994379 to CINCLANT, 190837Z Apr 61, JMF 9123 (24 Mar 61) sec 2. (TS) "Narrative of Events," p. 14, Encl E to Memo, CINCLANT to JCS, 5 May 61, same file, sec 1.

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at the White House, later recalled that many far-fetched ideas for saving the Brigade were floating about the Oval Office. He himself remembered what one British officer had said during a crisis in the 1943 Salerno landing--no operation was more difficult than withdrawal from a beleaguered beachhead. Early that afternoon, President Kennedy ordered US destroyers to "take personnel off the beach and from water to the limit of their capability." But the ships came too late, and found Castro's men waiting on the beach; practically the whole Brigade was captured.⁶

(U) The Cuban debacle stunned the Administration--and the entire nation. President Kennedy promptly created a Study Group, chaired by retired General Maxwell D. Taylor, to learn what had gone wrong and why. All the Joint Chiefs of Staff members testified before this Group, and their opinions as to who bore responsibility for the operations varied widely. General David M. Shoup remembered spending "sleepless hours" before D-Day because he knew that the Brigade could not be extricated in case of collapse. But, believing his knowledge of the operation was incomplete and feeling that the responsibility lay elsewhere, he had not pursued the problem. General Thomas D. White emphasized the consequences of canceling the D-Day air strike. "On those things which we had cognizance of," he asserted, "I believe the Joint Chiefs accomplished their task." According to General Lemnitzer, the JCS role "was one of appraisal, evaluation, offering of constructive criticism, and assisting CIA in looking

6. Interv, W.S. Poole with GEN Lemnitzer, 12 Feb 76. (TS) Msg, JCS 994392 to CINCLANT, 191812Z Apr 61, JMF 9123 (24 Mar 61) sec 2.

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at the training and detailed plans. . . . I don't regard our actions as approval as such." But Admiral Burke, who testified last, took a decidedly different view:

Question: Did the JCS approve Zapata?

Answer: "Technically, no; morally, they did."

Question: Was there de facto JCS approval?

Answer: "Yes."⁷

(TS) Early in June, when the Study Group circulated a draft report, General Lemnitzer strongly objected to a statement that there was "no question" as to the Chiefs' "de facto" approval of the final plan. General Taylor's report to the President Kennedy said simply that "the Chiefs . . . did not oppose the plan and by their acquiescing in it gave others the impression of approval." Still, as General Taylor learned firsthand, "Regardless of their own opinion as to the adequacy of their performance, there was no doubt that John F. Kennedy felt that they had let him down." General Taylor's appointment, on 26 June, as "Military Representative of the President" showed that JCS standing with the Commander in Chief had sunk to a low ebb. Two days later, he circulated a directive aimed, obviously, at correcting errors of omission and commission that he felt the Joint Chiefs of Staff had made. President Kennedy told the Joint Chiefs of Staff: that henceforth he expected to receive their views "direct and unfiltered"; that he wanted them to take a much more prominent role in "Cold War" operations; that he wished them to "present the military viewpoint . . . in such a way as to insure that military factors are

7. (U) "Memorandums for Record of Paramilitary Study Group Meetings," 9th, 12th, 17th, and 18th meetings, Kennedy Library.

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clearly understood before decisions are rendered"; and, finally, that he regarded them as "more than military men" and expected their help in fitting military requirements into the overall context of any situation."

(U) As time passed, the President's anger cooled. He was particularly impressed when the Joint Chiefs of Staff kept silent while a series of anti-JCS stories, possibly leaked by White House staffers, appeared in Newsweek magazine. During a summer sojourn in Hyannisport, the President told his military aide that, when the critical meetings occurred, he had not been in office long enough to establish a proper rapport with his military advisers. So, he said, the Joint Chiefs of Staff weren't at fault that much. He hadn't known enough to ask the right questions, and they hadn't volunteered opinions as he thought they should have done.⁸

(U) Years later, Admiral Burke readily acknowledged that the Joint Chiefs of Staff could be faulted (1) for displaying a certain naivete and (2) for failing to voice their reservations more forcefully. He added, however, that there were important extenuating circumstances. First, they did not realize that President Kennedy conducted business somewhat in the manner of a college seminar; decisions could be reviewed and changed up to the moment of execution. Thus the Joint Chiefs of Staff thought matters were settled when, actually, they were still open to discussion and

8. (TS) CM-235-61 to GEN Taylor, 7 Jun 61, CJCS 091 Cuba. (U) "Narrative of the Anti-Castro Operation Zapata," p. 11, 13 Jun 61, Kennedy Library. Maxwell D. Taylor, Swords and Plowshares (1972), p. 188. (U) NSAM No. 55 to CJCS et al., 28 Jun 61, Att to JCS 1977/140, JMF 3310 (28 Jun 61). Interv, W.S. Poole with MG Chester V. Clifton, USA, 14 Aug 79.

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revision. Second, the Administration had installed in the Office of the Secretary of Defense a group of civilians who were determined to reduce the military's influence upon foreign policy. Consequently, the Joint Chiefs of Staff became reluctant to volunteer opinions on any matters that lay beyond their own professional cognizance. General Lemnitzer's afterthoughts were less charitable. The new civilian hierarchy, he concluded, was crippled not only by inexperience but also by arrogance, arising from failure to recognize its own limitations. Thus, without consulting the Joint Chiefs of Staff, they switched the landing site from Trinidad to Zapata, canceled the D-Day air strike and then blamed the Joint Chiefs of Staff when matters went badly.⁹

(TS) Meanwhile, on 20 April, only a day after the beachhead collapsed, President Kennedy asked for a plan that would encompass Castro's overthrow by US military power. In reply, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended swift, decisive measures, on grounds that the communists would accept a fait accompli and the free world would regain faith in US leadership. On 29 April, Secretary McNamara and the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff showed President Kennedy a plan whereby, after 25 days of preparation, 60,000 troops would invade Cuba and gain complete control of the island within 8 days. Although President Kennedy approved this as a contingency plan, the NSC on 5 May decided against military intervention at this point. Nonetheless, contingency planning continued. The Joint Chiefs

⁹. Interv, W.S. Poole with ADM Burke, 28 Oct 75, and GEN Lemnitzer, 12 Feb 76.

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of Staff ordered CINCLANT to prepare a plan that could be implemented (1) upon five days' notice and (2) at any time over a prolonged period, once the required forces were in position. CINCLANT, however, warned that quick-reaction capability could not be maintained indefinitely without impairing readiness, training, and morale. He favored, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff accepted, an operation allowing 18 days' preparation. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff assured Secretary McNamara that, in an emergency, a two-division airborne assault against the Havana area could be mounted within 8 days.¹⁰ Here, for the time being, planning at the JCS level ended. The Administration promoted a series of covert anti-Castro activities, but the Cuban leader survived and continued to be a thorn in President Kennedy's side.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

(TS) During the late summer of 1962, Soviet materiel and technicians began flowing again into Cuba after a suspension of several months. Early in October, amid mounting apprehensions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed contingency plans (1) for air strikes against Cuban military targets and (2) for an invasion of that island. When they reviewed matters with Mr. McNamara on the afternoon of 15 October, the Secretary said that President Kennedy wanted, if possible, to avoid

10. (TS) JCSM-278-61 to SecDef, 26 Apr 61 (derived from JCS 2304/30); (TS) Memo, SecDef to JCS, 1 May 61, Encl to JCS 2304/34; JMF 9123/3100 (20 May 61). (TS) Msg, JCS 995627 to CINCLANT, 9 May 61, JMF 9123/9105 (9 May 61) sec 1. (TS) Ltr, CINCLANT to JCS, 19 May 61, Att to JCS 2304/37; (TS) JCSM-414-61 to SecDef, 16 Jun 61 (derived from JCS 2304/39); same file, sec 2.

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military measures against Cuba during the next three months. But, that very evening, the Joint Chiefs of Staff learned that pictures taken by high-flying U-2s had revealed three medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) sites. These MRBMs had ranges of about 1,000 nautical miles.

(TS) At 1000 on 16 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff held their first meeting on the missile crisis. They quickly agreed that the threat was most serious, and that the missile sites must be smashed by air attacks. Admiral George W. Anderson, Jr., and General Earle G. Wheeler favored a surprise air strike followed by invasion. General William McKee, representing General Curtis E. LeMay, thought that an efficient application of aerial attack and naval blockade might obviate the need for invasion. Likewise, the JCS Chairman, General Maxwell Taylor remarked that invasion and occupation might not be necessary. What threat was Cuba, he wondered, once the island was stripped of missiles and aircraft? The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that nothing should be done until additional information on the MRBMs' number and location had been amassed. Their tentative plan of action, which the Chairman presented at a White House meeting later that day, ran as follows: first, acquire more information; then launch a surprise air attack against ballistic missiles, airfields, surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), torpedo boats, and tank parks; reinforce the U.S. base at Guantanamo; mobilize reserves and make preparations for an invasion

(TS) Mr. McNamara, at this point, favored immediate strikes against as many MRBM sites as had been located, before any missiles could become operational. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, by contrast, wanted to wait for

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U-2 overflights, and held that all significant military targets must be attacked. Would they still, the Secretary asked them on the afternoon of 16 October, want to bomb the sites after the missiles became operational? Answers were affirmative. Later, at an evening White House conference, President Kennedy seemed attracted toward a "surgical" strike against the MRBMs alone, because he thought it almost certain that an all-inclusive attack would lead to an invasion. Accordingly, on 17 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff formally and for the record gave Mr. McNamara their opinion that the surgical strike represented "an unacceptable risk." Sparing enemy air power would expose the United States to aerial attack and could cause unnecessary casualties among the garrison at Guantanamo and the forces assembling for invasion. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed in bombing not only MRBMs and nuclear storage sites but also tactical missiles, ships, tanks, and other appropriate targets, all combined with a "complete" blockade.¹¹

(TS) On 18 October, U-2 pictures revealed the beginnings of permanent sites for intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs), with ranges of perhaps 2,200 nautical miles. The President's advisers saw this development as adding an even grimmer aspect to the crisis. But most of the civilians, including Secretary McNamara, now leaned toward beginning with political actions plus some form of blockade.

(TS) On Friday morning, 19 October, President Kennedy asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to confer with him at the White House. General Taylor suggested, before hand, that they speak in favor of (1) a

11. (TS) JCSM-794-62 to SecDef, 17 Oct 62, JCS Hist Div Files.

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surprise attack on comprehensive targets, preceded by several hours' warning to major US allies, (2) continued surveillance, and (3) complete blockade. As for invasion, General Taylor endorsed preparations alone at this point. His colleagues, however, saw little likelihood of avoiding actual occupation. The 45-minute White House conference proved inconclusive. General LeMay argued quite forcefully about the danger of delaying military action, and professed certainty that the Soviets would remain quiescent no matter what happened in Cuba. The Chief Executive thought otherwise.¹²

(TS) Saturday, 20 October, was the day for decision. When the Joint Chiefs of Staff convened at 1000, General Taylor told them that the President might order a surgical strike as early as Sunday morning. They could see no need for acting so hastily and, instead, authorized the Chairman to argue for an attack against all offensive weapons and supporting defenses, to take place on Tuesday, 23 October, which apparently was the last day before some of the missiles would become operational. When the NSC convened at 1430, General Taylor presented the case for a surprise attack. The longer we wait, he argued, the more costly a resort to force will be. But, Mr. McNamara countered, air strikes would lead to invasion, probably to Soviet retaliation, and possibly to general war. The President agreed with that assessment. So he opted for starting with a quarantine of offensive weapons, and authorized preparations for (1) a surgical strike by Sunday or Monday and (2) an invasion of Cuba. He also was willing to remove JUPITER IRBMs from Turkey, should the Soviets raise that issue. Knowing that the military would be displeased by his decision, the President

¹². Robert F. Kennedy, Thirteen Days (1969), pp. 36-37.

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asked General Taylor whether he could count on full JCS support. The Chairman frankly admitted his disappointment, but pledged complete cooperation.¹³

(TS) The Joint Chiefs of Staff now began issuing orders positioning Navy ships, Marine units, and tactical air forces. Next day, Sunday, General Taylor and General Walter Sweeney, USAF (CG, Tactical Air Command) talked with President Kennedy and finally persuaded him that, since a surgical strike could not eliminate all Soviet missiles, the initial attack must embrace aircraft as well. On Monday, the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared a world-wide alert, dispersed SAC, and directed that an armored brigade move to the Atlantic coast and a Marine brigade be loaded for movement from California to the Caribbean.¹⁴

(U) On Monday evening, President Kennedy told the nation about the Soviets' "deliberately provocative and unjustified change in the status quo which cannot be accepted by this country, if our courage and our commitments are ever to be trusted again by either friend or foe." The quarantine entered into force at 1000 on Wednesday, 24 October. At 1025, when

13. (TS) "Minutes of 505th Meeting of the National Security Council on Saturday, October 20, 1962, 2:30-5:10 PM, Oval Room," Box 313, National Security Files, Kennedy Library.

14. (TS) "Notes on 21 October 1962 Meeting with the President," by SecDef, Box 313, National Security Files, Kennedy Library. (TS) JCS 6830 to CINCAL et al., 211814Z Oct 62. (TS) Msg, JCS 6848 to CINCLANT, 221111Z Oct 62. (TS) Msg, JCS 6857 to CINCSAC, 221637Z Oct 62. (TS) Msg, JCS 6864 to CINCAL et al., 221809Z Oct 62. (TS) Msg, JCS 6891 to CINCPAC and CINCLANT, 230311Z Oct 62. (U) Msg, JCS 6917 to CINCSAC, 232306Z Oct 62.

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interception seemed imminent, some Soviet ships nearest to the quarantine line stopped dead in the water. By dawn on Thursday, 14 ships had reversed course. At this point, Brazilian diplomats pressed upon UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson the possibility of solving the crisis by denuclearizing all Latin America. When the Joint Chiefs of Staff learned of this, they sent Secretary McNamara a trenchant critique:

The issue is now clear cut--the missiles should come out of Cuba. As soon as that sharp focus is blurred by other matters, . . . then we have lost control and may well have lost our objective. . . .

The longer we talk, the more diffuse become the inevitable arguments, the weaker becomes whatever may be the final agreement. And when this happens, as it has in the past, we will have lent credence to the impression that we may be a strong country but we are a country unwilling to use its strength. . . .

We have the strategic advantage in our general war capabilities; we have the tactical advantage of moral rightness, of boldness, of strength, and of control of this situation. This is no time to run scared.¹⁵

(TS) On Friday, the crisis seemed to ease somewhat when Premier Khrushchev proposed to untie "the knot of war" by withdrawing Soviet missiles in return for a US no-invasion pledge. But Saturday, 27 October, became filled with nerve-wracking moments. First, Premier

^{15.} Public Papers of the Presidents, John F. Kennedy, 1962 (1963), pp. 806-809. Kennedy, Thirteen Days, pp. 68-72. (U) JCSM-828-62 to SecDef, 26 Oct 62 (derived from JCS 2422/1), JMF 3050 (25 Oct 62).

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Khrushchev sent another message insisting that US JUPITERS be withdrawn from Turkey.¹⁶ Second, early that afternoon, a U-2 was shot down over Cuba. The Joint Chiefs of Staff passed this day in practically continuous session. According to the latest intelligence, construction at the missile sites was continuing unabated. General LeMay argued for a surprise air strike on Sunday or Monday. General Taylor suggested, instead, recommending an attack after a "reasonable" period of time. At 1415, the Chairman went to a White House meeting. After he left, the Service Chiefs quickly agreed upon a memorandum to be sent through Mr. McNamara to President Kennedy. The Soviets, they said, were trying to "delay direct action by the United States while preparing the ground for diplomatic blackmail." Consequently, air strikes should be executed "not later than Monday morning, 29 October, unless there is irrefutable evidence in the meantime that the offensive weapons are being dismantled or rendered inoperable." An invasion of Cuba should follow one week later. This paper was passed to General Taylor, who read it to the NSC.¹⁷ That evening, pictures from Saturday's missions over Cuba revealed that missiles were now on the launchers, and a reload capability was ready. Concurrently, Attorney General Robert Kennedy bluntly told the Soviet Ambassador, "We have to have a commitment by tomorrow that these bases would be removed." As for the JUPITERS in Turkey, he added, that matter "could be resolved satisfactorily" within "four or five months." At this point, President

16. Dept of State Bulletin, 12 Nov 62, pp. 741-743.

17. This became (TS) JCSM-844-62 for President through SecDef, 28 Oct 62, CJCS 091 Cuba (Oct 62).

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be firm without becoming provocative. "I am not," he told his brother, "going to push the Russians an inch beyond what is necessary."¹⁸

(U) As Sunday, 28 October, dawned, formidable forces stood poised for action. One hundred seventy-two ATLAS and TITAN missiles and 1,200 bomber were on 15-minute alert; 850 tactical aircraft and 183 interceptors were concentrated in southeastern states. Four Army divisions had been earmarked for invasion, and an armored brigade was proceeding to ports of embarkation. A force of 5,868 Marines garrisoned Guantanamo; three more batalions were afloat near Cuba.¹⁹

(TS) Sunday morning brought a dramatic denouement, as Moscow Radio broadcast Premier Khrushchev's agreement to "stop building bases, dismantle the equipment, and send it back home. This can be done under U.N. supervisions."²⁰ General LeMay worried that the Soviets might make a charade of withdrawal while keeping some weapons in Cuba. A no-invasion pledge, Admiral Anderson feared, would leave Castro free to make mischief in Latin America. But the need for immediate action had evaporated. General Taylor advised Secretary

18. (U) Memo, Attorney General to SecState, 30 Oct 62, President Office Files, Cuba, Kennedy Library. Kennedy, Thirteen Days, p. 127. The President also notified Premier Khrushchev that he was willing to give a non-invasion pledge, following the verified withdraw al of offensive weapons. Public Papers: Kennedy, 1962, pp. 813-814.

19. (U) "Cuba Fact Sheet," Att to Memo for Record by MG Clifton, 27 Oct 62, Box 36, National Security Files, Kennedy Library.

20. Moscow Radio broadcast a summary. For the full text, see Dept of State Bulletin, 12 Nov 62, pp. 743-745.

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McNamara that, while "we should maintain continuous readiness" to launch air attacks and invasion, "I do not recommend taking the decision to execute now."²¹

(TS) In November, tension flared again when (1) Premier Castro refused to allow on-site verification and (2) President Kennedy insisted that IL-28 bombers also be withdrawn. The Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed their "unqualified approval" of the President's position. Should the Soviets refuse to trade removal of the bombers for lifting of the quarantine, the JCS advocated "a general extension of the quarantine to include a complete blockade of POL products." If that failed, "we should be prepared to take [the IL-28s] out by air attack." They also wanted the Administration to "generate now all the pressure possible" to get Soviet military personnel out of Cuba. On 20 November, as a showdown seemed imminent, Premier Khrushchev agreed to remove the IL-28s within 30 days; Soviet combat units would follow "in due course." President Kennedy ended the quarantine but, since there was no on-site inspection, withheld a non-invasion pledge.²²

(U) To all appearances, the military machine in its manifold parts had performed superbly. But Khrushchev's retreat did not completely obliterate the distrust born at the Bay of Pigs. To a civilian aide, for example, the Chief Executive remarked that "an invasion would have been a mistake--a wrong use of our power. But the military are mad It's lucky for us that we have McNamara over there." In

21. (TS) CM-61-62 to SecDef, 28 Oct 62, CJCS 091 Cuba (Oct 62).

22. (TS) "Chairman's Talking Paper for Meeting with the President," 16 Nov 62, Encl C to JCS 2304/110; JMF 9123/3100 (5 Nov 62) sec 2. Public Papers: Kennedy, 1962, pp. 830-831.

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mid-November, another visitor heard from President Kennedy "an explosion about his forceful, positive lack of admiration for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, except for Maxwell Taylor, whom he calls 'absolutely first class'."²³ The civilians evidently saw in the successful application of "graduated pressure" a vindication of their thinking and a guidepost for the future.

The Dominican Intervention

(U) Even after the Russians had removed their offensive missiles and bombers from Cuba, Fidel Castro's shadow still loomed large over the Caribbean and remained a major problem for US policy makers. In every challenge to Latin governments' authority, there was always the danger that hard-core communists might maneuver themselves into positions where they could control insurgent movements and thus take revolutionary regimes down a pro-Soviet path. Such was the danger that increasingly obsessed the Johnson Administration as, on 24 April 1965, the Dominican Republic plunged into civil war.

(S) Fighting centered in the capital city of Santo Domingo. On one side were the "Constitutionalists," who wanted to see reform-minded Juan Bosch return to the Presidency that he had briefly held; on the other, the "Loyalists," many of them military officers, who had tried to forestall fighting by creating a ruling junta, an arrangement to which they professed "loyalty." The State Department immediately began worrying that "extreme leftist elements" were appearing in the Constitutionalists' ranks. Also, State asked the Defense Department to prepare for a possible evacuation

23. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days (1965), p. 831. Benjamin F. Bradlee, Conversations With Kennedy (1975), p. 122.

24. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days (1965), p. 831. Benjamin F. Bradlee, Conversations With Kennedy

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of US civilians. On 25 April, at the direction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCLANT deployed 6 ships that carried the 6th Marine Expeditionary Unit and had the capacity to carry 3,600 evacuees.

(S) Around 1500 on 28 April, the Loyalists asked for "unlimited and immediate" US military assistance. At 1540, Ambassador W. Tapley Bennett sent Washington a message urging that Marines be landed forthwith. The Loyalists, he said, were on the point of "quitting," the police force was collapsing, and American lives were in danger. After consulting his senior civilian advisers, President Lyndon B. Johnson decided that US troops should be sent to protect Americans in Santo Domingo. That evening, about 500 Marines landed and secured an area around the Embajador Hotel, thus protecting the Americans who had gathered there. Simultaneously, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered two battalions of the 82d Airborne Division to prepare for instant departure, and placed four more battalions on alert.²⁴ On 29 April, at President Johnson's order, the remainder of the 6th MEU (about 1,000 Marines) reinforced the Embajador perimeter. At this point, Vice Admiral K.S. Masterson, Commander JTF 122, took command of Dominican operations.

(U) The mission was still limited to protecting American lives. But Ambassador Bennett now advocated direct US intervention in the Dominican fighting. The Loyalists had been unable to mount any kind of

^{24.} (S) Msg, State 633 to Santo Domingo, 25 Apr 65, JCS IN 30100. (S) Msgs, Santo Domingo to DIRNSA, 282015Z and 202040Z Apr 65, summarized in (TS) "Chronology of the Crisis in the Dominican Republic," JCS Hist Div Files. (S) Msgs, JCS 9731 to CINCLANT, 25 Apr 65, and 9988 to CINCLANT, 28 Apr 65; (C) Msgs, JCS 1023 and 1037 to CINCLANT, 29 Apr 65; CJCS 091 Dominican Republic.

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offensive, and there was evidence that hard-core communists had gained positions of influence among the Constitutionalists. That evening, President Johnson and his advisers, who now included the JCS Chairman, General Wheeler, "reached complete agreement that we must prevent a Communist takeover." To accomplish this objective, they planned to interpose US forces between the Constitutionalists and Loyalists in order to bring about a cease-fire and allow the Organization of American States (OAS), which had already agreed to consider the matter, time to arrange a peaceful settlement.²⁵

(S) At the Joint Chiefs' direction, Admiral Masterson prepared a plan for accomplishing the separation of the antagonists by cordoning off the Constitutionalists in the southeastern part of the city, using the Marines already ashore and two battalions of the 82d Airborne Division, which the President had ordered to be deployed. These battalions were originally directed to fly to Puerto Rico and make a morning parachute landing outside Santo Domingo. Instead, the planes were diverted enroute, at President Johnson's order, and flew directly to San Isidro Airfield outside Santo Domingo. The President acted, according to General Wheeler, from the fear that "the whole thing was going to fold up unless we could get some troops in. If we were to wait until dawn, we might not have anything to support." The two battalions began landing at 0230 on 30 April.²⁶ Paratroopers and Marines, acting in accordance with Admiral Masterson's plan, took the first steps to cordon off the Constitutionalists.

25. (U) Lyndon B. Johnson, The Vantage Point (1971), pp. 199-201.

26. (C) Msgs, JCS 1089 and 1095 to CINCLANT, 30 Apr 65, CJCS 091 Dominican Republic. (S) Msg, State 689 to Santo Domingo, 30 Apr 65, JCS IN 36996.

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(S) On the morning of 30 April, President Johnson and his advisers reviewed the situation. Mr. John Bartlow Martin, a former Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, remarked that the worst possible outcome would be one in which US troops killed Dominicans. No, President Johnson retorted, the worst result would be to have Castro take control of the country: "I want you"--pointing to General Wheeler and Secretary McNamara--"to see that it doesn't happen, and I want the rest of you to make it smell sweet." He approved commitment, if necessary, of the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) and the entire 82d Airborne Division. The Joint Chiefs of Staff now ordered Lieutenant General Bruce Palmer (CG, XVIII Airborne Corps) to go to Santo Domingo and take command, under CINCLANT, of all US ground forces in the Dominican Republic.²⁷

(TS) Shortly after his arrival, General Palmer reported that the containment cordon around the Constitutionalists was incomplete because the Loyalists had not plugged the gap between the paratroopers and Marines, deployed respectively north and south of the city. He asked for additional troops, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff responded by ordering deployment of two more airborne battalions and the 4th MEB. General Wheeler also directed Admiral Masterson and General Palmer to recommend measures to close the gap in the containment line. Admiral Masterson proposed, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff accepted, a plan to begin forging a linking corridor at dawn on 3 May; a build-up to 15 battalions, ultimately, would be required.

²⁷. (C) Msg, JCS 1113 to CINCLANT, 30 Apr 65. (S) Stability Operations, Dominican Republic, Vol I, Pt I, Ch II, p. 1, JMF 9128.4 (4 May 65) sec 1A

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Because of a misdirected transmission, General Palmer saw neither the Chairman's query nor the Admiral's reply. When he finally did, he sensed that the task could be accomplished with far fewer forces. General Palmer promptly cabled the Chairman, described the looting, starvation, and anti-American propaganda that were spreading through the city, and persuaded him that the move should start at midnight on 2-3 May. General Palmer's judgment proved right. Four battalions (three airborne, one Marine) created a corridor in little more than an hour, surrounding 80 percent of the rebel forces. Meanwhile, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved additional deployments that, by 4 May, raised US strength to 12 maneuver battalions and 21,000 men.²⁸

(S) The US policy of seeking a political solution to the crisis, meanwhile, began to bear fruit. On 30 April, the OAS Council had called for a cease-fire; the following day it established a five-member committee to arrange it and investigate "all aspects of the situation in the Dominican Republic." Both sides accepted the cease-fire the next day, but sporadic sniping continued. On 6 May, the OAS Council voted to extend its involvement by organizing an Inter-American Force (IAF). The Joint Chiefs of Staff endorsed this idea, and said they were willing to accept a Latin commander, provided he had a

28. (C) Msgs, JCS 2118, 2119, 2120 to CINCLANT, 1 May 65; (TS) Msgs, JCS 1237, and 1251 to CINCLANT, 2 May 65; (TS) Msg, CJTF 122 to JCS, 020717Z May 65; (S) Msgs, JCS 1250, 1252, 1255, and 1258 to CINCLANT, 2 May 65; (C) Msg, JCS 1262 to CINCLANT, 3 May 65; CJCS 091 Dominican Republic. (TS) Msg, LTG Palmer to CJCS, 022145Z May 65, JCS Hist Div Files.

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U.S. deputy. The IAF formally came into existence on 23 May. A Brazilian officer became its commander; General Palmer served as his Deputy. Brazil contributed 1,100 troops to the IAF; Nicaragua, Paraguay, Honduras, and Costa Rica sent token detachments. When field commanders protested against putting the entire US contingent into the IAF, General Wheeler told them that the Administration could hardly do otherwise, since "we devised the IAF concept for the purpose of giving an international cover to American military involvement . . . and to legitimize our activities in world opinion by identifying them with the OAS."²⁹

(C) Meanwhile, US diplomats persuaded the Loyalist junta to resign in favor of a new "Government of National Reconstruction" (GNR). But the "rebels," as U.S. officials now called them, spurned this solution. On 15 May, General Palmer warned the Joint Chiefs of Staff that "this country could slip away from us while we dance on the head of the needle." Next day, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pressed for strong, swift action to clear the rebels from Santo Domingo's industrial northern sector. The Administration, instead, launched a mediation effort to draw Juan Bosch and his backers into a coalition. On 17 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again advised Secretary McNamara that "unilateral US military action should be taken immediately to reduce the rebel stronghold" in northern Santo Domingo. Such a step would consolidate

²⁹. Dept of State Bulletin, 17 May 65, pp. 739-741. (C) JCSM-344-65 to SecDef, 8 May 65 (derived from JCS 2338/12-1); (U) JCSM-397-65 to SecDef, 20 May 65 (derived from JCS 2338/18); JMF 9128.4 (3 May 65). (S) Msg, JCS 2997 to CINCLANT and USCOMDOMREP, 27 May 65, CJCS 091 Dominican Republic.

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GNR gains, "aid immeasurably" in restoring stability in Santo Domingo, and confine rebel forces to the city's southeastern sector, thereby reducing their ability to carry revolution into the countryside. The Inter-American Force then was being organized, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted it to take charge at a time when the rebels were either eradicated or forced to negotiate from weakness. Otherwise, unilateral US action after the Force had been created could "seriously impair" the IAF's functioning. Senior U.S. diplomats in Santo Domingo took quite a different tack, suggesting that US troops demonstrate their impartiality by interposing themselves between GNR and rebel forces. Although General Wheeler had reservations about doing so, he reminded field commanders that "the governing factors in this chaotic situation are largely political rather than military." But, at this point, GNR leaders took matters into their own hands. Their troops breached the proposed interposition line and, by 21 May, swept rebel forces from the city's northern sector.³⁰

(U) Negotiation from strength now was possible. OAS mediators induced both sides to accept, on 31 August, an "Act of Reconciliation" that liquidated the rebel zone, promulgated a general amnesty, created a provisional government, and provided for general elections within nine months. On 1 June 1966, much to Washington's relief, centrist Joaquin Balaguer defeated leftist Juan Bosch in a

³⁰. (U) Msg, USCOMDOMREP to JCS, 140606Z May 65, CJCS 091 Dominican Republic. (C) JCSM-372-65 to SecDef, 15 May 65 (derived from JCS 2338/16); (C) JCSM-377-65 to SecDef, 17 May 65 (derived from JCS 2338/17); JMF 9128.4 (14 May 65). (C) Msg, JCS 2484 to CINCLANT and USCOMDOMREP, 20 May 65, CJCS 091 Dominican Republic.

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reasonably free election. This time, intervention had worked. Success, apparently, resulted from a bold application of a combination of military and political pressures: immediate military intervention in sufficient force to prevent an undesirable outcome; followed by political intervention, under a cloak of international respectability provided by the OAS, to bring about elections for a new and reasonably democratic government. Particularly noteworthy was the fact that, although the United States intervened to prevent a potentially Communist-controlled faction from winning, it did not try to put the anti-Communist but unpopular Loyalist officers in control. Both factions were denied power, while a political process was put in train that returned a middle of the road regime commanding sufficient popular support to preserve the peace.