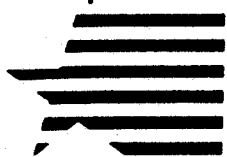


Chapter 4 BLOCKED LEARNING IN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH



In this chapter, I begin to restructure the case material to diagnose the barriers to government learning. As a first step, I draw from the historical record evidence of seven common, self-blocking patterns of behavior within the executive branch. Next, I will evaluate current theories that learning is blocked by inadvertent failures of rational analysis, i.e., that in major foreign policy decisions there are arguments (unheard) or facts (known but not made available) that would result in major improvements in intelligence and effectiveness if organizational changes made them available.

Earlier appointments determined later outcomes. President Kennedy determined whom to include in policy debates and whom to exclude. As when he appointed the Taylor Commission, he selected people who favored directions other plausible appointees would have opposed. Sensing what was wanted, others in the administration acted in the same spirit, producing a weight of advice favorable to presidential instincts that later experience proved too hasty and unrefined.

Originally, during the Bay of Pigs deliberations, people with personal ties to Kennedy (who might have been candid and alert to his political stakes) were excluded, especially his longtime counsel and speech writer, Ted Sorenson, and his brother Robert. Apparently, these exclusions resulted from the new president's formal decision-making process; those included were there by virtue of their formal bureaucratic positions. Others with more experience in foreign policy (like Dean Acheson or Washington lawyer Clark Clifford) were not brought in, presumably because of this formal criterion.¹ (There was only one exception: An outsider, Senator Fulbright, a Democrat and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was invited to the decisive meeting on April 4, apparently at the last moment.)²

Kennedy's preference in appointments can be read as a metaphor expressing different aspects of himself. He placed a premium on "quick, tough, laconic, decided people."³ He honored liberal idealism but in a secondary role, especially in foreign policy: Schlesinger and Goodwin were junior aides, Bowles was in the cabinet but as the number two man under Rusk, Stevenson was kept at a distance in New York.

Kennedy also weighted, by personal instinct, the advice he received. Like many men in public life, he tended to consider the adviser and his advice jointly and to discount advice if he was uneasy with the personal style of the adviser. He was inwardly impatient with moral objections from the idealistic liberals of his party. They (he said privately, never in their presence) "lacked balls."¹ Later he was to explain to Ted Sorenson that doubters were fundamentally scared—they were "grabbing their nuts." Adlai Stevenson, Chester Bowles, Fulbright, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., were treated with public graciousness and inner suspicion by Kennedy—and kept on the periphery.

Dean Rusk excluded two people. His top intelligence analyst, Roger Hilsman, learned of the plan from Allen Dulles and Richard Helms. Dulles casually mentioned the operation to Hilsman but gave few details; apparently he intended to keep a bureaucratic colleague on friendly terms while excluding him.⁶ Helms mentioned the Bay of Pigs scheme to Hilsman at the end of a meeting officially on another matter. Helms left Hilsman with an unstated message that the president would be seriously mistaken if he believed there would be an uprising.⁷ Hilsman, as Helms probably expected, went to Rusk and asked to have his Cuban staff evaluate the operation. Rusk said no, it was being too closely held.⁸

Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles first heard of the Bay of Pigs plan in late March when he attended a White House meeting in Rusk's absence. He sent Rusk a memo saying he was appalled, and he asked to see the president if the plan was approved. Rusk put him off.⁹

Rusk's personal style probably explains both exclusions. He did not lack an instinct for power: A man does not become secretary of state without one. But he was a diplomat, kept his own counsel, and believed in quiet diplomacy. (Once, asked if he intended to solve the Berlin problem, his eyes twinkled and he said no, he wasn't that vain, he simply hoped to pass it along to his successor.) He was not a man to do public battle and cross-examine people with acerbic intelligence as Acheson had done for Truman.¹⁰ Apparently, in the early deliberations he also misjudged, believing the folly would be obvious and the president would drop the plan, and he was too cautious to gear up for a major battle when there was no compelling need. Later, he believed that changing the dramatic Trinidad assault to a quiet night landing at an isolated site had solved the international noise-level problem and made further policy battle unnecessary.¹¹ He probably also judged that Bowles's passionate moralism—Bowles thought Allen Dulles should have been "thrown out of Kennedy's office" for even suggesting the plan—would be an embarrassment and ineffective, and he perhaps knew that Bowles's long-winded, idealistic arguments got on Kennedy's nerves.¹²

Finally, one of America's top experts on guerrilla warfare, Col. Edwin Lansdale, a man who would have been certain to spot the missing guerrilla fallback option, and who was deeply skeptical that peasants anywhere jumped

into mass uprisings, especially against a national hero, was cut out, but apparently by circumstances. He was being sent on an advisory mission to Vietnam.¹³

Among those cut out there is a common pattern: in national security affairs idealistic liberals were kept at the periphery. And that was not an accident. The kind of advice Kennedy had confidence in, he arranged to represent prominently in the inner circle.¹⁴

*Neither bureaucratically nor personally did anyone accept complete responsibility.*¹⁵ How a man defined his personal responsibility (typically, by his formal role) established—and limited—what he thought about, what he argued for, what he remained silent about, and his judgment of the plan.

"Defeat," Kennedy said at a press conference afterward, "is an orphan." The CIA certainly thought so. A collective government operation? No. General Gray, the Joint Chiefs liaison, told them after the D-Day cancellation, "There goes *your* invasion."¹⁶ Kennedy said, publicly, that he was responsible. Privately he thought about it differently and asked, "How could I have been so stupid to let *them* go ahead?"¹⁷

Such reactions were more than post-failure buck passing. If the "rational analysis problem" (or "national interest") was to overthrow Castro within the constraints of secrecy and no American involvement, it was bureaucratically "owned" by no one. The CIA wanted to overthrow Castro and was willing to sacrifice both secrecy and American noninvolvement. The State Department wanted secrecy and no American involvement and was willing to reduce the chance of military success to preserve both limits. The policy issue Kennedy defined was what to do with this holdover Eisenhower plan, how to reduce risk to himself—and, in a wider world, to America. When he gave the final order, the only objective he took responsibility to achieve was, as he put it: "If we have to get rid of these 800 (*sic*) men, it is much better to dump them in Cuba than in the United States, especially if that is where they want to go."¹⁸

Policy meetings were highly ritualized. Sophisticated participants judged no one would learn or rethink views in the light of arguments and evidence that could be presented.

Within the group of advisers, the way men dealt with one another, and what they expected from one another, reinforced the tendencies for a collective decision process to produce a policy which lacked intellectual integrity.

If we view the new Kennedy administration when all its members first heard of the plan—late January 1961—and then observe them again on the eve of the invasion, in mid-April, there was no fundamental change in anyone's thinking. The CIA people were still strong advocates. Kennedy was favorable on the surface, still instinctively seeking to adjust the plan so that he faced minimal risk, holding it at a distance, with ambivalence. Rusk still counseled

quiet and moderation. The Joint Chiefs appeared favorable, addressing only the limited technical question of whether the beachhead could be initially secured, given CIA assumptions. (And privately, of course, they felt this was *not* the way they would do the job.) Schlesinger, still silent in meetings, still wrote private memos to the president articulating his doubts.

Expectations of collective nonlearning in their meetings seemed widely shared. Participants thought about the "positions" other people were taking. They did not think of hypotheses or theories, but of "viewpoints" whose standing in the universe derived, in Schlesinger's terms, from the "weight" of the institutions they "represented."¹⁹ It was not a group of fifteen experienced men trying to make sense of a complicated world.

The Cabinet Room was a stage set; everyone's role was written, the forms of interaction were rituals. The arguments were not mutual dialogue, but a presentation for an audience of one, the president. The CIA and the State Department replayed the same roles from 1954: The CIA urged approval, the State Department criticized each move for its "noise level," the issues of legality and morality never elicited much inner-circle interest, the junior men kept their mouths shut. The military, as it was often to do, was willing to sign, privately grumbled that insufficient manpower and excessive political constraints made military victory uncertain, but so long as the president understood this, they had done their job and would go along.²⁰

Bureaucratically specialized viewpoints are not inappropriate, and a president whose diplomats become enthusiasts for war, or whose military officials are habitually uninterested to guarantee their own battlefield superiority, is a president who had best find new diplomats and new military commanders. However, when such agency viewpoints organized the analytical work at senior levels in the Cabinet Room, they also transformed this formal division of labor into a fragmented sense of personal responsibility.²¹

This awareness of their own sociology, and perhaps their personality assessments of others in the room, led men to doubt there was much interest in rethinking views of the world or learning. Given the known facts, could anyone really have expected to change Rusk's mind, or Bissell's, or Fulbright's, or Schlesinger's? These men were probably sophisticated enough to doubt that anyone would be persuaded to change from what he really wanted to do anyway. Attempting to affect such fundamental mind-sets by discussion was, one man later recalled, "like talking to a wall."²²

Viewpoint lock-ins, produced within a system, are not uncommon. But they are odd: on grounds of intellectual integrity, untried proposals and ambiguous realities should produce shifting positions, congealing to formulas only if the facts are clear. But that is not what these worldly men expected, and not how they played it with one another.

Thus, beneath the surface of the policy, there was no sense of a common enterprise, not even a common theory about how the operation was to suc-

ceed. The personal sophistication of individuals was high, but by any reasonable definition of collective learning, no process ever came together. Collectively, there was no intellectual integrity.

Lying within the executive branch, and deceptive, politically sophisticated behavior produced a system that moved incrementally further from reality. Politically sophisticated men often, as we have seen, "precalculated" likely responses and then obscured candid communication, to elicit a desired effect. But the entire system—which actually relied, in the long run, on realistic behavior by the people involved—slowly began to lose touch with reality.

In Table 4.1 I have drawn from the case material a list of major lies, and the intentional dissembling of "the truth but not the whole truth" (which was more typical).

Decision processes designed to affect choices rather than to clarify them inhibited learning. Kennedy did not use systematic procedures to assure the most thorough evaluations the executive branch could produce. He seems to have known in advance the nature of advice he would judge constructive and to have understood the decision process to be a *political* process as much as an intellectual one. Thus Stevenson's exclusion was not simply intellectual (i.e., because his assumed arguments were prejudged, found wanting, and he would

Table 4.1. Lying and Dissembling That Reduced the Intelligence and Effectiveness of Collective Action

1. The "fake-out," by national security secrecy, of most public officials about the realism of Castro's perceptions and actions, with consequent suggestion he was mad, thus unstoppable by rational means, and an easy pushover for clever psychological warfare.
2. Colonel Hawkins's "bonsai" message erroneously portraying the state of mind of the Cuban troops.
3. CIA failures to communicate upward their nonimplementation of Kennedy's strictures and orders (possibly in the belief he did not want to hear the truth).
4. Lying to Stevenson about the nature of the Cuban operation, the date, and the defector cover story.
5. Messages from headquarters to CIA operatives that failed to include the context of the message as a means of avoiding "upsetting" people: messages to Rip and Gray that did not tell of the D-Day cancellation, the veto of final appeals for jet support, the reason naval evacuation was being offered.
6. Incomplete briefing of the Pinar del Rio diversion commander.
7. Probable dissembling about the importance of the guerrilla escape option to retain the CIA's impression Kennedy's group was behind them.
8. CIA's "failure to be completely candid" to the president and his other advisers that there was no viable guerrilla option at the Bay of Pigs. And that there had been no training or planning for this fallback contingency.
9. CIA operatives misinforming the Cuban soldiers, during the Bay of Pigs and MONGOOSE, to keep up their morale and (some would say) serve them.

merely repeat them) but because inclusion would have placed a prestigious Democrat *on record* opposing a scheme Kennedy was already (according to a National Security Memorandum circulated in March by McGeorge Bundy) "expecting to approve" once a proper plan was developed.²¹ If allowed expression, Stevenson's formal opposition would then be overridden and later "place him in a difficult position," a polite way to predict that, when the plan was approved and Stevenson's opposition eventually leaked, it might create political problems for the president as well as undermine Stevenson as a credible U.N. spokesman for American policy.

Similarly, we may infer that the president did not want to be placed in the position of canceling the D-Day strikes *after* senior military advisers had formally opposed the cancellation (as would be expected). Thus, they were not given the opportunity to be consulted. In both cases Kennedy appears instinctively to have designed a decision process, with political sophistication, thinking two steps ahead.

In MONGOOSE, the circle of advisers was even further restricted. Even critics who earlier had raised valid objections (e.g., Schlesinger) were excluded. The most likely reason was that Kennedy suspected that critics, losing in the inner council, would take their case secretly to like-minded members of the press. And so, appreciating the broader political processes and allegiances of various men in his administration, Kennedy excluded from debate, and knowledge, all who might be critical. He lost no Cuban expertise, but did lose the emotional force a determined critic could have brought.

We may then observe political artistry in Kennedy's decision process (but note, too, the long-term costs he paid).²² Kennedy was not a neutral courtroom judge but was engaged in a different occupation. No doubt he believed that such precalculation was prudent, dealing with decided men in a contentious world, if he were to produce, politically, the policies he wanted.

Collective learning was inhibited because subordinates were at personal risk if they told the truth. If the inhibited critical analysis and muted emotional force observed by the Taylor Commission came partly from a perception Kennedy wanted "doers," not "doubters" or "worriers," this perception was not merely a fantasy. The Kennedy activist style was to lean on people to get the job done the way the Kennedys wanted it done. If you did not produce, they looked for someone else. Subordinates, "risk averse," attended to these risks. The consequences were self-created and predictable, not accidental.

Dovish advisers were intimidated and hid out in meetings. Schlesinger, who attended, wrote memos to the president rather than speak in open meetings. He said (later) he was intimidated because of his low official rank; he lacked the standing, as an assistant White House aide, to be a principal discussant. And as an idealistic liberal in these settings, he felt uneasy and vulnerable to criticism. Hard-liners had the rhetorical advantage in foreign policy: "they

could strike virile poses and talk of tangible things like fire power, air strikes, landing craft, and so on. I could not help feeling," he wrote, "that the desire to prove to the CIA and the Joint Chiefs that they were not soft-headed idealists but were really tough guys, too, influenced the State Department's representatives at the Cabinet table."²³

To keep his job, another man excluded himself voluntarily. Richard Helms, then Bissell's deputy (chief of operations) at the CIA, would ordinarily have played a key role. But he did not like the plan. He thought American involvement could not remain secret. He considered both the mass uprising and Guatemala scenarios unrealistic. He thought the planning was sloppy. Yet he was also a realistic judge of his bureaucratic position. Dulles and his own boss, Bissell, wanted this plan to succeed. Thus, they did not want doubters, they wanted people to put it together, to make it work. Helms judged the plan would be approved and, after it failed, their involvement would end the careers of the senior CIA planners associated with it. But he could not oppose the plan successfully: he would be ineffective and it would cost him his career. He maneuvered privately to alert Hilsman to make the case from within the State Department, but he personally stayed out.²⁴

In retrospect, Helms was right in each assessment, although even an optimal strategy almost cost him his job. Predictably, Bissell certainly did want a deputy who did more than stay out, and he went to Dulles to suggest that Dick Helms might find a job abroad—London, for example—more compatible. (Dulles did not approve. Firing Helms would raise questions. Too much visibility.) In the course of events, the plan was approved, secrecy came apart, the invasion failed, Dulles and Bissell did lose their jobs. And Richard Helms, the survivor, became director of the CIA (in 1966). A man used his intelligence to assess (realistically) the personal constraints imposed by his bureaucratic situation, and the system became less intelligent as a result.²⁵

The Joint Chiefs of Staff restrained themselves because deference was expected from the military profession concerning issues outside its formal area of expertise and bureaucratic responsibility. (Thus JCS Chief General Lemnitzer later argued, "You couldn't expect us to say this plan was no damn good, you ought to call it off. . . . That's not the way you do things in government . . . The responsibility was not ours.")²⁶

Kennedy's formality also intimidated mere expressions of nervous uneasiness. The deliberations were large, full-dress meetings chaired by the president. Dulles and Bissell, superbly prepared, briefed the participants, Bissell often with a pointer in hand. With an agenda structured primarily by Bissell, the meetings shifted quickly to practical detail. Bissell's own gifts probably contributed both to the tendency to trust him and to uneasiness about challenging him by people not sure of their ground. He was a man who seemed to have an answer to every question. He was candid about uncertainties and never estimated more than a two-to-one chance for success. Walt Rostow

called him "the most articulate man that has ever been." Even men of substantial ability and intellectual accomplishment admired him, and they continued to respect him after the failure.²⁹

Personal effectiveness in large, formal meetings chaired by the president typically requires hard questioning or boldly made arguments. Astute men who value their reputations seldom will become advocates in such settings without a well-informed view to defend, certainly not outside their areas of "official" expertise. And their expertise was dubious, given the nature of the problem: Bissell and Dulles were the recognized experts on covert operations. They put their double signature on the check to the president. No other adviser had overthrown a government, judged the likelihood of a mass uprising, or been part of an inner group that discussed such matters. What most of them knew of Cuba came from the *New York Times* and what the CIA told them. Robert McNamara stayed out for this reason: had the topic been the defense budget, he would have intellectually dominated any discussion. But this was not his field. The same was true to a lesser degree of the president. He too initially deferred to his best experts in a field in which he was an amateur. As he put it: "If someone comes in and tells me this or that about the Minimum Wage Bill I have no hesitation about over-ruling them. But you always assume that the military has some secret skill not available to ordinary mortals."³⁰

As a consequence of their position in the executive branch, subordinates felt inhibited from delivering critical messages, with emotional force, upward. Admiral Arleigh "Thirty Knot" Burke, a forceful man (downward), later fumed about the second air strike, "What the Chiefs could have done is pound the desk and insisted. . . . We should have been tough but we weren't."³¹ (But his open assertiveness was retrospective, in retirement: deference and fear of the consequences of talking straight to a new, and still unknown, commander in chief, made it unthinkable at the time.) Kennedy heard direct moral criticism, face to face, only from Senator Fulbright, a man with an independent power base.

Richard Bissell too acceded deferentially, against his better judgment, to decisions by the president that increased the chances for Kennedy's approval but reduced the project's chances for success: from the bold psychological impact of a daylight assault at Trinidad to a covert, nighttime landing at the Bay of Pigs, from a massive D-Day strike to two strikes to reduce the noise level (but allow Castro to arrest 100,000-200,000 suspected traitors), from sixteen airplanes to six on the first strike, dropping the second strike. Indirectly promised the directorship of the CIA after Dulles retired, Bissell never drew the line and said: "If you do that, Mr. President, we can't guarantee success. You should drop it." A subordinate does not easily give such ultimatums which imply he cannot do the job, because the boss (and this was quite probably true of Kennedy) could attribute the problem to lack of ability or com-

mitment, or to coercive manipulation or just plain willfulness on the part of the subordinate – and not, as the subordinate saw it, to the nature of the problem or the lack of crucial resources.³²

Thus, as a consequence of locations within bureaucratic systems, people kept reservations to themselves. If they were lower down – such as Bissell's subordinates at the CIA – they swore about it, perhaps talked about resigning (as several of Bissell's key aides did after the D-minus-two reduction), they said (to each other) the president was "criminally irresponsible" (General Lemnitzer), but they did not tell him this, and as "good soldiers" they tried to make the best of it.³³

Were these men unrealistic – individually – to size it up this way? Later, after the trauma of defeat had jarred them to recognition of the need for candor and the mutual support of one another's best efforts – in the Missile Crisis – I think they would have been. Here, in this situation, I think each was right about the personal risks of being a lone protagonist, especially when lacking expertise. If one were successful, there would be resentments and a suspicion of inadequate courage (strange, given the courage needed to take a bold stand for "intangibles" in such a situation); the disposal problem and soft-on-communism issues would hurt the president and his programs; people would remember – and leak to the press – who caused the plan to be dropped. Was a new, activist administration ready to give standing to a counselor who said things could not be done? And why engage in this policy battle if the right questions had been raised (and they had been), the president had heard the CIA's answers, and the worst outcome, if the CIA were wrong, was a quiet guerrilla dissipation?³⁴

No, each man was probably right to keep doubts to himself, given an understanding of his problem as a personal survival problem (i.e., job and power survival).³⁵ The one man who might have killed the invasion was Dean Rusk; only he had the institutional resources, had he sought to use them, to direct acknowledged expertise against key assumptions of the CIA plan. Had he used his intelligence analysts to cloud further the issue of a mass uprising, he might have taken the steam out of the plan. He could have elaborated the scenario of international press coverage of a prolonged civil war and counseled against overt military actions until the Berlin problem was resolved. And a secretary of state with the implicit backing of the New York foreign policy establishment, arguing on these grounds, might well win (and survive), because it was in a sense his job to serve the president by making these arguments. Had he put his job and prestige on the line, he almost certainly could have blocked the plan (although later, he would probably have discovered his resignation "accepted"; no president is willing to be blackmailed on policy by his own appointees).

He did none of these things. It was not his style. He was a survivor, a team player for the long haul with other, more important, battles to join. And his

agenda was to preserve, in his own mind (and publicly) an image of himself as the president's senior foreign policy adviser. (It was not an inappropriate self-image. The secretary of state is often described in such terms. Rusk, older than the president and most of the others, had been assistant secretary of state during the Korean War when most beginners around the table—including Kennedy—had still to be trusted with serious responsibility, by anyone, for national decisions.) His self-image and role he retained by reserving views for the president alone: they were not voiced in public confrontation in open meetings.

The natural consequence of fear and pressure was that, "swearing and making the best of it," subordinates ignored orders, corners were cut, and reality was kept from the president. Leaned on with too many demands, or contradictory demands, people calculated what would be on their final exam. CIA field operatives did not convey the president's decision to forbid American involvement, under any circumstances, because they knew high morale and a successful operation were impossible if troops understood President Kennedy might abandon them.¹⁶ Breaking Kennedy's explicit orders, the CIA handlers led the assault because they judged military success depended on it, that was their job, and lapses would be overlooked if the operation succeeded. Under conflicting pressures, Tracy Barnes chose not to brief Stevenson candidly.

Such problems may be endemic: Programs may not work, and subordinates may see why they do not work, yet senior officials are kept in the dark. Social science research at the Department of State, and other studies of bureaucratic behavior, suggest the "official" norms for mutual aid in collective problem solving are often a facade for maneuvers to stay out of trouble.¹⁷ The real norms absorb uncertainties in upward reporting, undercutting bases for open communication, effective top-level monitoring, and collective intelligence.¹⁸ "Cover your ass," "don't make waves," and "keep your skirts clean" are apparently taken by many people in bureaucracies to be good maxims. Bureaucrats may be timid, uncreative, and strategically evasive because they are intimidated, a natural consequence of conventional structures of power and control.¹⁹

An analogy with a classroom may be useful. Professors typically feel students should speak up and feel free to disagree or express uncertainty. But students may experience reality differently and in fact may speak only to score points. If they are confused, unsure of themselves, feel inadequate or in trouble, they may tend to maintain a bold front, or avoid teachers, and thus (to their mind) avoid a bad reputation or doubts about their ability.

Bureaucratic assessments were more realistic "upward" than "downward"; subordinates were erroneously taken for granted. The men at the top made astute assessments of one another. Allen Dulles, for example, presented a

Cuban operation to Eisenhower in such a way that while Eisenhower was never enthusiastic about it, the CIA still received a presidential mandate to begin. Dulles's briefing to Kennedy after his election omitted mention of a "disposal" problem Kennedy would face if he did not stop the CIA. Nor did Dulles provide alternative disposal options to the president (although afterward he implied he might have found ways to effect a quiet disposal).⁴⁰ Committed to the plan, believing in it, and wanting to try it, neither he nor Bissell reported the doubt within the CIA that America's hand could remain a secret. Nor did he and Bissell alert the president that the Bay of Pigs had no route for guerrilla escape.⁴¹

Often underestimated and overlooked because of his quiet and unassuming manner, Dean Rusk also exhibited unusual ability for astute calculation and bureaucratic effectiveness. Unobtrusively, he effected every major retrenchment he wanted by elucidating doubts and sentiments that the president accepted. He produced the D-Day cancellation by the proposal that it be cancelled unless there were "overriding considerations," a deft and reasonable phrasing that accorded with Kennedy's own sentiments. At Rusk's urging, four days before the invasion, the president held a press conference in which he ruled out, categorically, any use of American troops in Cuba. The CIA thought this a sophisticated "disinformation" tactic, but Rusk later used the public commitment he had elicited, on Sunday, as an added reason why American credibility was threatened and required the air-strike cancellation he urged.⁴²

While experienced bureaucrats in Washington developed great sensitivity about superiors, their main constituents, they were less gifted when monitoring and appraising behavior downward, within their own agencies. The work Bissell did in Washington (the conceptual mastery, interlocking parts, and mathematical logic of the plan) was impressive. But his predictions and judgments about the behavior of human beings were less impressive and seemed to rely, perhaps a common failing, on the assumption that others down the chain would be brilliant, responsible, and perfectionist about the details of their work.

Bissell had a passion to use intelligence to create order and improve the world. One of his hobbies was railroads. He knew, and could draw from memory, all the major lines in the country. He knew distances and elevations, and on trips he would mentally reroute inefficient lines, calculating elevations, grades, and distances. The lack of absolute perfection in design offended him. When the cost of building the clandestine airstrip at Happy Valley escalated substantially over original estimates, he ordered the man responsible back to Washington and chewed him out: Castro would be overthrown *and* within budget.⁴³

Bissell's expert analytical mind, energy, and attention to detail contributed vitally to make the operation possible. Had he personally run everything, the

oversights and sloppiness of people who were less meticulous might have been avoided. The different nose assemblies of the B-26s made sense – unless you cared enough and were bright enough to see a problem the alleged defector might face when his plane arrived in Miami. The new aluminum boats with untried outboards would not have hurt the operation had the man on the spot checked them before departing instead of merely assuming they would work. Loading almost all the ammunition on one boat was alright – unless you had the imagination, perhaps the obsession, to worry about extremely bad luck. “Best guess” intelligence estimates, converted to confidence for transmission upward (seaweed instead of a reef, an uninhabited landing site) would have been flagged for their uncertainty and added work undertaken to refine the judgment. But the frustrating reality of a large government operation was that subordinates commonly overlooked details, or assumed (hoped) they would not matter and things would work out.

There is a deeper cause of the treatment of subordinates, misperceptions of them, and oddly naive miscalculation of their responses to the pressures they were under: They were overlooked and taken for granted. I will want to explore this further in chapter 6.

INTELLIGENT AND EFFECTIVE POLICY: EVALUATING PROPOSALS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

The Bay of Pigs invasion was a widely acknowledged fiasco. Operation MONGOOSE abandoned ideals and wreaked violence without an end game while Castro and the Soviet Union, fearful there *would* be an end game, had incentive to collude in a risky (but undeterred) nuclear deterrence gambit which became extraordinarily dangerous for the United States. After such foreign policy failures critics argue: “they should have listened to adviser x” or “they should have recognized fact y.” Such criticism can be only ad hoc, but they also suggest that organizational improvements in eliciting and evaluating arguments and evidence might significantly improve the intelligence and effectiveness of major American foreign policy decisions. In this section I want to assess several theories of inadvertent failures in the policymaking process, asking of the case material: Were there arguments (unheard) or available facts (unknown) that would have substantially changed or reversed the president’s decisions?

I will assess the following propositions to evaluate whether failings in technical, rational analysis could have been corrected to produce better policies: (a) the decision process failed because it lacked multiple advocacy; (b) the decision process failed because it lacked good institutional memory; (c) the decision process failed because the CIA was poorly organized to provide reliable forecasts; (d) the decision process failed because it was insular and the decision makers exhibited a “groupthink” syndrome.

Failure of Multiple Advocacy

The political scientist Alexander George has recommended that presidents formally assign advocates to argue policy options systematically, as in the courtroom, to assure that both advocacy and criticism are the best the president can obtain.⁴⁴ The case material shows, I believe, this would have been a wise idea: Although it probably would not have affected the major directions of policy, nevertheless such procedures would have produced a better invasion plan; and they might have prevented the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Most of the erroneous beliefs and misjudgments associated with the Bay of Pigs and Operation MONGOOSE (chapters 2 and 3) would have been unchanged by a courtroom-like decision process. The president erred, but I doubt even the best technical social science, using the facts available at the time, would have changed his beliefs and judgments. President Kennedy knew the CIA’s estimate of the probability of an uprising; Castro enjoyed majority support, there was no assurance of any mass uprising. (Kennedy *chose* to believe he could change this, but his judgment – in the face of ambiguity – was not a factual question.) The *available* arguments that a D-Day cancellation *could* be disastrous were conveyed to Kennedy on Sunday evening; the unforeseen operational problems that combined to make disaster certain – the reef, and the misinterpreted withdrawal order from CIA headquarters – had not yet occurred on that Sunday evening. The hope that America would retain its “fig leaf”? In hindsight this was erroneous, but no one was better positioned than the president to know the facts and assess arguments about the likely behavior of the American press. The belief that Castro, a “psychotic personality,” might lose his nerve, was wrong, but it is doubtful that further analysis would have reversed the idea: Castro’s fiery provocations appeared manifestly irrational, and who could say what the psychological effects of the invasion itself might be?

But at two major points accurate presentation of available facts, or new arguments, probably would have altered perceptions: (1) Kennedy’s wishful image that the Cubans were solely volunteer patriots could probably have been changed to a more realistic appraisal if he had been told candidly of his error; (2) A skeptical analysis of worst-case possibilities would have revealed the guerrilla escape no longer existed. In both cases, the CIA created erroneous impressions, or allowed them to continue; multiple advocacy would have kept the men more honest and forthright with each other.⁴⁵

During Operation MONGOOSE, setting aside the issue of whether assassination was consistent with the CIA’s directives, there is no evidence the president’s basic decision to battle Castro would have been reversed by available (unpresented) evidence or arguments. But it is possible that the merits of earlier, clearer, and more dramatic deterrent warnings to Khrushchev, consistent with the earlier message-sending methods used in Laos and Berlin, could have been argued, and to good effect.⁴⁶

Poor Institutional Memory

One reason the American government does not learn is the absence of institutional memory. Administrations change, both through elections and, between elections, by personnel changes among a president's appointees.⁴⁷ The historian Ernest May has suggested that a systematic capacity to survey historical experience could improve foreign policy decisions.⁴⁸ Were there clear failures of institutional or historical memory, and what were their consequences?⁴⁹

If we reconstruct American policy toward Fidel Castro, it does suggest a limited search of precedents, selectively attentive to scenarios of dramatic setbacks (from inaction) or successes (from bold action) that could apply in dealing with the type of man Castro appeared to be. I will discuss four themes: the danger of messianic leaders, the fraudulent idealism of communism, the importance of message sending, and the expectation of inevitable American victory.

The Danger of Messianic Leaders

Kennedy and his advisers belonged to a generation that had bloody warnings seared into personal memory: Hitler's fascist megalomania and World War II shaped their early lives. Kennedy's older brother was killed in the war, and he almost lost his own life in the Pacific theatre. He won public recognition for his book *Why England Slept*. Major Dean Rusk was a staff officer in the China-Burma-India theatre. Lieutenant McGeorge Bundy landed on the Normandy beaches on D-Day plus one.⁵⁰

Hitler, however, was not an anomaly, and their apprehension of charismatic leaders — of whatever political persuasion — who captured imaginations and used violence to shape history was reinforced by later experience. A similar, brutal pattern continued after World War II as other messianic leaders, now of Communist persuasion, battled for power. Millions died violently as Mao's armies fought to victory in China. In the next step, American soldiers paid the price of Mao's victory as this newly consolidated power base was deployed in the Korean War — which (it is important to recall) ended only seven years before President Kennedy was elected.

The Fraud of Communist Idealism

American leaders have always recognized that Communists *preach* ideals. But, in practice, Stalin's brutal and repressive system in Russia appeared to be the invariant result; in each observed case, revolutionary leaders of single-minded ambition who shot their way to power and purged opponents brutally, never surrendered power or risked doing so in free elections. They produced *totalitarian* regimes with secret police and a controlled press, and they suppressed dissent internally and in spheres of international influence (e.g., the violent suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956). Talk of "people's

democracy" was a sham; Communist elites aided one another (in those days, men perceived a Sino-Soviet bloc), and thus loss of territory was not an isolated geopolitical loss, but a loss of territory to movements that used the best of human ideals as a cloak for the worst of human impulses and collectively challenged the core values of civilized behavior.

Message Sending

"Message sending" to the Russians figured prominently in both the Bay of Pigs and MONGOOSE decisions. Would America be perceived as "tough" or "weak"? Kennedy himself acknowledged that many elements contributed to Castro's success, but if this success were *perceived* to be a Communist advance, American forbearance (especially, deviating from the Monroe Doctrine) could send a message to the Soviets to encourage their assertiveness in other areas. Thus, Kennedy felt he could not accept "visible" defeat in Laos, Berlin, or Cuba else a process begin that would destabilize world order. And the Soviets were thought to respect toughness, to have backed down when confronted by it (e.g., the Berlin airlift crisis), and to have acted aggressively (and with misperception) when America had failed to send messages which accurately conveyed its resolve. The Korean War was thought by many to have been precipitated by public statements that Stalin misinterpreted and that led him to believe the United States would not go to war to defend South Korea against North Korean invasion.

Inevitable Victory

Finally, in the American self-image, America always won, in both major wars (World Wars I and II), Korea, and in numerous past interventions in Latin America (most recently in Guatemala), as indigenous governments collapsed easily. Undoubtedly some Latin Americans were upset by these effective demonstrations of power, but if past interventions gave America a "bad reputation" in Latin America, critics could present no cases in which the long-term costs outweighed the short-term victories — at least in the sense of citing cases where later interventions failed as a result.

Against this background, the potential impact of inadequate historical memory can be tested by asking whether the substantial majority of historical cases were in the *opposite* direction? Was there *clear*, knowable, and preventable error? Probably not. Certainly Kennedy and his advisers, had they thought about it, would have recognized several counterexamples to each lesson — for example, revolutionaries who spoke in universal ideals, but who were essentially nationalistic and constructive in their political goals. (The European underground during World War II, which fought against Hitler's domination, was an important case; many of its leaders, after the war, became influential and constructive in shaping the European Economic Community.)

But it is doubtful that the four basic beliefs would have been reversed. Especially, the assessment of Castro would have been unchanged; as I will

review in the next chapter, he did appear to want to challenge American hegemony and to become a dominant political force in the southern hemisphere, and he did appear interested to spread violent revolution. His actions over a two-year period fit the Hitler/Mao model too well for him not to be considered dangerous.⁵¹

However, I do want to call to the reader's attention an important qualification which bears upon an argument I will make in chapter 6. In the *imagination* Castro fit the Hitler/Mao model, but he was only a dictator on a poor, isolated island without an appreciable navy or air force and surrounded by massive American conventional superiority. He would always lack the military capability to mount and sustain credible invasions, especially if these were opposed by the U.S. navy. If he was dangerous it was because he might be *persuasive* to others, inspire revolutions against repressive governments by their own people. The danger might be real but it was more psychological in its mechanism than Hitler's tanks, and whether one thought such a distinction vitally important (as Eisenhower did, in his equanimity) depended critically on how one assessed the role of imagination in determining power relationships.

However, even without a major difference in policy outcome, better historical knowledge would still have been beneficial. The needs of beginners are dual: They do not have a complete stock of historical scenarios to consult for possible *answers* to policy problems; perhaps more important, they also lack the comparative perspective afforded by potential counterexamples, which informs them of critical *questions* to pose.

Institutional memory (classified, in the early 1960s) about covert operations belonged to the CIA, and Kennedy and his new advisers did not have the personal knowledge to ask critical questions concerning a transfer of the Guatemala plan. In 1954, a skilled ambassador and staff maintained relations with key army officers and others with antipathy to Communism who expected to suffer losses in a Communist state. In Cuba, America could sustain no such presence (diplomatic relations had been broken), and the prominent anti-Castro and anti-Communist elites, the core of any indigenous opposition, were now living in Miami. Castro was an experienced guerrilla, with faith in himself and his cause, and had never lost his nerve when hopelessly outnumbered in his war to liberate Cuba from Batista's control. Nor was the leadership of the Cuban army likely to rattle or defect; most of the troops were untested, but Castro had replaced the high command (recognizing, from the Guatemala precedent, this crucial vulnerability) and these men were personally loyal and experienced guerrilla fighters. At a minimum, such considerations (after the Mafia failed in early April) might have warned Kennedy more vividly against his belief in an antiseptic victory and made him aware that stalemate or a bloodbath might ensue.

Kennedy also needed a review of the CIA's record of planning and execution. Many of their covert operations had not been successful: A CIA attempt

to repeat its Guatemala success in Indonesia had failed. Had Kennedy known the full history of CIA operations, he would have recognized that clandestine field agents were notorious for disobedience to Washington's orders, playing the same games of deception with headquarters (e.g., not reporting candidly and fully on their activities) that they played, officially, with the rest of the world. In the 1950s, President Eisenhower's Board of Consultants on Foreign Intelligence Activities had appointed a panel, chaired by Robert Lovett and David Bruce, to conduct a full-scale review of CIA covert operations. The agency recruited young college graduates and sent them around the world to overthrow governments, bribe newspaper editors, rig elections, spend huge sums of money; the coordination and oversight, financial or otherwise, was minimal.⁵² The panel's report was highly critical, but there was now a generational lag: Kennedy and his advisers had to know the report existed, and their trusting reliance on the men at the top of the CIA suggests they did not know of this detailed history. The failure also had a personal element: President Kennedy's father, Joseph P. Kennedy, had served on the blue-ribbon panel. But Jack Kennedy, now in his 40s and president, did not ask his father's advice about the CIA's clandestine plans. Later, when he heard of the invasion's failure, Joseph Kennedy's first question was whether it had been run by CIA clandestine operations people. Told it had, he snorted, "I know that outfit, and I wouldn't pay them a hundred bucks a week."⁵³

On these matters, the contribution of institutional memory to critical review would have been of vital importance to the president. The CIA's artful manipulation of the president was egregious, albeit bureaucratically sophisticated.⁵⁴ The slipshod cover story at the Bay of Pigs produced a chain of events that effectively scuttled the operation even before the first team of frogmen hit the beaches. Control of lower level CIA operatives was weak; at critical times, the men did not obey Kennedy's orders. The first men to hit the beaches were Americans (against the president's explicit order), and the CIA's commanders, in the final hours, were violating orders and en route to beach their boats, with additional supplies, to continue a fight. Again, although still against presidential orders, we now know American CIA operatives continued to enter Cuba during MONGOOSE operations.⁵⁵ In 1962, the head of paramilitary operations for MONGOOSE was fired after a confrontation with a murderously angry Robert Kennedy: at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, it was discovered, the man had violated direct orders and allowed the MONGOOSE operations he had previously scheduled to continue.⁵⁶

Poor CIA Organization

After the invasion, a popular solution was to split the CIA, divorcing its Plans division (which ran covert operations) from its Intelligence division.⁵⁷ The underlying theory was that President Kennedy had been seduced by fanciful CIA promises of mass uprising and these false estimates were produced,

consciously or unconsciously, because the CIA planners had a vested interest to believe their plan would succeed and provide intelligence estimates that would sell it.⁵⁴

The CIA reorganization plan was never adopted, apparently for good reason. In reality, we now know its two divisions *were* independent in their appraisals (so much so that Castro's realism about plots against him was evidence, to the Board of National Estimates, that he was paranoid). Bissell's own estimates of indigenous Cuban support were capably made and confirmed by the Taylor Commission. There were errors aplenty, but not errors of bureaucratic organization.

Entrapment in a Small Group

Irving Janis, a psychologist, has argued that the Bay of Pigs decision may have resulted from a syndrome he called "groupthink." In the "groupthink" phenomenon decision makers bind themselves together into a relatively cohesive group to reduce stress and thus introduce systematic deficiencies in their decision making. They do not carefully survey all alternatives, exhaustively search for information, examine pros and cons of each alternative in an unbiased way, or finally face up to the question, "which course of action will best meet all the essential requirements to solve the problem?"⁵⁵

The specific symptoms of the hasty concurrence-seeking of groupthink are in three categories: *overestimation of the group* (illusions of invulnerability and belief in the inherent morality of the group), *closed-mindedness* (collective rationalizations, stereotypes of out-groups), and *pressures toward uniformity* (self-censorship, illusion of unanimity, direct pressure on dissenters, and self-appointed mind guards who act to block troubling issues from being raised or pursued).⁵⁶

Instances of each deficiency can be cited for the Bay of Pigs, the Taylor Commission, and Operation MONGOOSE. Yet assessing the extent to which they were produced by a single cause—concurrence seeking to reduce stress—is a subtle problem. Adequate personal data are lacking to reach a formal conclusion about the weight to be given to such a causal path. However, several observations can be made to indicate that other causal paths were more significant, and can serve to draw together the main points of this chapter's analysis.

First, Janis's "groupthink" analysis was originally proposed when, by the data available in the 1960s, the invasion decision appeared to have been a mindless aberration: 1,200 men were put ashore against 250,000, erroneous assurances (supposedly by the CIA) of a spontaneous mass uprising were never critically evaluated, and the options for dropping the operation were never developed.

Today we know the plan had a more sophisticated rationale than it first

seemed. We know of the earlier Guatemala success, the plan for a coordinated Mafia assassination, that the CIA was cautious in the mass discontent numbers it provided, and that the president and most of his advisers did not approve the plan expecting it would surely succeed, and were willing that it fail if it did so invisibly.

Also, we have seen the *primary* cause of activist like-mindedness was political—the nature of the president's own appointments—and this variable was determined before any meetings of the adviser group. There is no basis, in a before-after comparison, to conclude that the general ways these men thought about Communism, Castro, the moral virtue of American foreign policy, the competence of people with opposed views, or the need for tough, activist policies were either produced or changed substantially after January 1961.

Too, we know now that discussions *were* partly critical. Critics *were* persuasive, eventually making the president uneasy enough to whittle down the plan and undercut it. Even before the April 4 meeting that gave unanimous approval, on which Janis specifically focused, critics were *not* suppressed or unheard, they simply lacked ultimate persuasiveness. *Every* key issue later identified as relevant *was* identified and discussed: "noise levels," the Russian response, uprisings, guerrilla escapes, morality. The Cubans in Guatemala—*one-for-all-and-all-for-one*, with zeal and "team spirit"—were "groupthinkers," but in the White House the president did survey the critical questions, and he heard the answers of his experts.

If one picked a normal, "non-groupthink" baseline for foreign policy decision making, it would probably not be a systematic and thorough review envisioned by Janis but what has been termed a "cybernetic" process.⁵⁷ This description proposes that decision makers respond to changes of a prior status quo, that they typically make only a limited canvas of alternatives, and—rather than exhaustively analyze any alternative—they "satisfice" (i.e., carry the analysis to a natural stopping point where they identify a viable solution they are willing to accept). The Bay of Pigs process was such a "limited search," engaged by the need to decide—yes or no—on a packaged proposal. When they were told the Zapata area "was suitable for guerrillas," they made a sophisticated judgment about further debate: *it really doesn't matter*. That is, if America stayed below the threshold needed to trigger Russian military reaction elsewhere and public outcry, there was no point to pursue other questions of whether ultimately the plan would succeed. No one (except the CIA and the expatriates themselves) was committed to its success. The extent of critical scrutiny reflected the issues of power in the case being considered rather than group processes that simply inhibited analytical thinking. (This too, was the assessment made astutely by Dulles and Bissell: if the group believed a sudden or disastrous defeat would not occur, they would agree and give the CIA's plan a chance, even without full confidence it would succeed.)

Similarly, if we compare the MONGOOSE decision and other decisions, the exhaustiveness of the decision process generally reflected substantive political variables (especially fear of the opponent). For MONGOOSE, Kennedy insisted on secrecy and no direct use of American troops—that is, the criteria he thought meant no risk to himself or to America—and within those parameters gave a blank check and demanded the bureaucracy then devise the means to eliminate Castro. To his mind, there was no *reason*—that is, no expected utility—to have further debate. By contrast, I have argued, the Missile Crisis decision process was prolonged and searching—as were the Berlin and Laos crises considered by this same adviser group—because these involved the Russians directly, and Kennedy could find no simple formula for minimal risk by which the decision process could reach an earlier stopping point.

My argument is that the decision was not primarily the result of a small-group entrapment. For example, I list in Table 4.2 the indications that Kennedy was not primarily a “groupthinker,” a proposition which Janis himself acknowledges. In fact, the more Kennedy thought about the Bay of Pigs plan, the less enthusiastic and the more ambivalent he became, a “slope” of his enthusiasm curve which is the opposite from what a group entrapment, beginning in January, would be predicted to show.⁶²

Table 4.2. Aspects of Groupthink: Kennedy as an Exception

Uncritical Assumption of Virtuous Self

Kennedy made consistent efforts to change the plans to improve America's moral standing and render America's role “nonaggressive.” He invoked a hard-line test of his moral position by requiring that the Cubans formally understand and agree to do it alone.

Uncritical Assumptions of Invulnerability

Kennedy consistently expressed worries about vulnerabilities and ordered steps to reduce them, at variance with plans presented by the CIA and favored by other advisers: the shift from Trinidad, the D 2 cutback from 16 to 6 planes, the D-Day cancellation. His worries about consequences produced stubborn resistance to the efforts of advisers to elicit American force commitments.

Suppression of Dissidents

Kennedy formally solicited the views of all his key advisers, appeared equally open to all viewpoints (accepting Schlesinger's memos and going out of his way to solicit his thinking), and was willing to hear dissenting views and evidence (inviting Fulbright to a crucial meeting, soliciting information from a journalist recently returned from Cuba).

Self-Censorship of Doubts

Active, skeptical, probing in group discussions.
Initiator, in group settings, of a series of orders (above) expressing explicit criticisms of the plans being presented.

Cohesiveness with Group and Euphoria

Moody and distracted before giving “go” signal on Sunday. Resists consultations with most group members on D-Day cancellation decision.

As the analysis in this chapter suggests, collectively self-blocking behavior within the executive branch has determinants which are deeper and more pervasive than small-group dynamics. Prior personal (especially anti-Communist) commitment and “subordinate think” are a better characterization of the nexus of inhibition for most of the advisers. Given their backgrounds, roles, and the standard norms, the conduct of most advisers was already determined: the CIA men were advocates, the Joint Chiefs never spoke on political issues, Berle and Mann had advocated the Guatemala operation, Schlesinger was a junior aide. Only four men in the room—Kennedy, Bundy, McNamara, and Rusk—were the uncommitted “principals.” Of these four, Kennedy, as we have seen, was not primarily a “groupthinker.” What of the three others? McNamara was a fierce and probing critic in his area of expertise in other meetings with these same men. His lack of experience and expertise, not any general, anxious search to blend invisibly into group concurrence, primarily explains reticence in the Cuba meetings: This was not his field.

Thus, to assess whether simple concurrence seeking was a primary cause becomes a question about the two quintessential team players of the Establishment, Rusk and Bundy. Former college deans, they both built careers on ability and the respect of associates—that is, good judgment without being controversial protagonists. But this was an enduring *personal* style—at least a public style—of men who wished to be team players, respectable and non-controversial. It *manifested* itself in this small group but did not begin here.⁶³ Moreover, both men, albeit keeping their own counsel in large, public meetings, retained a healthy independence of mind, channeling their criticisms privately, directly to the president on Sunday. Far from being captives of an enthusiastic group consensus, their back-channel advice was independent, and they acted to minimize public controversy and rein in the CIA.

Although an insular, concurrence-seeking, small-group process may have had a modest psychological effect, the perspective of an additional twenty years—as well as the analysis presented in this book—suggests most of the 1961 syndrome correctly observed by Janis is likely caused at a larger, systemic level. Every newly elected administration since Kennedy has also assumed national power with a tendency to overconfident euphoria (Castro did too: the CIA's psychiatrists thought it evidence of a mental disorder). By the 1980s, research has shown that many of President Johnson's early Great Society programs did not work; each economic recovery program announced almost annually in the 1970s did not work, the bold Reagan economic policies in the early 1980s followed the same pattern of initially overconfident prediction. Inherent assumptions of moral purpose, a shared programmatic mind-set, and an “over-mind” fantasy which ignores or attempts to manage the dissent of outsiders—and then a record of overconfidence and substantial error—appear to be common and predictable in the American political system.⁶⁴

Finally, on detailed examination, this was not a cohesive executive branch group. Ambitious men shared a common bond, in their imaginations, with institutions of national power and valued highly their positions in the inner circle, but there was no personal cohesiveness with one another in these early days. Especially, the evidence suggests, a sharp cleavage divided the Eisenhower holdovers, primarily at the CIA (to a lesser degree the JCS) from the "inner" inner circle of new people loyal to Kennedy. The plan was "their" (the CIA's) plan. The politics of this intragroup split likely explains why the CIA game-planned the guerrilla issue, why Kennedy and his own advisers who "placed great importance" on a fail-safe plan nevertheless did not explain this to the CIA and analyze the guerrilla escape plans candidly, and why Kennedy chose to decide the D-Day cancellation issue by conference only with "his" people (Bundy and Rusk).⁶⁵

The System Worked?

At this point, to aid our summary appraisal of the American foreign policy process, I want to evaluate the bold argument of Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts characterizing decisions made during the Vietnam War later in the 1960s. Their conclusion was: *the system works*. They perceived a high level of technically sophisticated, rational analysis provided to decision makers. Successive presidents were consistently told an American victory in Vietnam was unlikely. A continuing presidential purpose—to prevent a visible American defeat—was sustained until the American domestic political consensus changed.⁶⁶

This analysis usefully corrects a popular tendency solely to blame or scapegoat government officials for the Vietnam War (or other aggressive, especially unsuccessful, policies). Gelb and Betts analyze the effects of international "compulsions" to "save face" and "keep your word," but they ultimately point the finger backward, to the American voter and the competitive nature of American politics. Successive American presidents anticipated that a visible "defeat" in southeast Asia would place them at risk of electoral defeat at the hands of voters aroused by opponents who would use such an outcome against them.⁶⁷

For these Cuban cases, did the advising system work? In many ways, in the short term, it did: The CIA's plans for the Bay of Pigs and MONGOOSE, although they did not work, under the circumstances and constraints were probably about the best to be devised rationally. However, the Gelb and Betts thesis is not wholly true, and in each decision loop there was at least one point of critical failure: the (disguised) absence of an "invisible" dissipation of the Bay of Pigs, and the failure to effect a credible deterrent prior to the Missile Crisis.

Yet, testing these ideas of inadvertent errors and technical remedies, I

Table 4.3. Repeated, Self-Blocking Behavior Within the Executive Branch

1. Earlier appointments predetermined policy outcomes.
2. Neither bureaucratically nor personally did anyone accept complete responsibility.
3. Policy meetings were highly ritualized. Sophisticated participants judged no one would learn or rethink views in the light of arguments and evidence that could be presented.
4. Lying within the executive branch and deceptive, politically "sophisticated" behavior produced a system that moved incrementally further from reality.
5. Decision procedures designed to affect choices rather than clarify them inhibited learning.
6. Collective learning was inhibited because subordinates were at personal risk if they told the truth.
7. Bureaucratic assessments were more realistic "upward" than "downward"; subordinates were erroneously taken for granted.

believe we arrive at an important conclusion: Flaws of technical analysis had little effect on the major direction of policy, and the major cause of American policy was motivational. Had he found a way to prevent the costly press publicity attendant on a Bay of Pigs failure, President Kennedy, under the same circumstances, probably would have made the same basic decision again.⁶⁸

In Table 4.3 I list major generalizations concerning the vector of reduced intelligence and effectiveness we have considered in this chapter such as the behavior of presidents and advisers in the executive branch when making major foreign policy decisions.

NOTES

1. And perhaps because, from pride, this new and younger president wanted his administration to do it alone. Dean Acheson did speak to Kennedy about the plan, saying it was obvious that 1,500 Cubans weren't as good as 25,000 Cubans, but he was not directly involved. At the time, he was primarily active with a task force to develop options for the Berlin problem. See H. Parmet, *JFK: The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Dial Press, 1983), p. 163.
2. Kennedy, as a matter of courtesy, invited the senator to share an airplane ride to Florida when he discovered, in casual conversation, they both had engagements there. Fulbright used the occasion to give Kennedy a memo opposing the operation. It turned out they both planned to return the same day. A second invitation was extended, and accepted, and just before the plane landed Kennedy told Fulbright he was going directly to a meeting about Cuba and invited him to attend. Fulbright's advice was not solicited by Kennedy before or after this April 4 meeting and Kennedy did not discuss Fulbright's memo with him during either plane trip. See P. Wyden, *Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979) pp. 122-123, 146.

In his oral history Robert Kennedy (Kennedy Library, Martin interview, vol. 1, p. 60) asserted Fulbright later received a more complete military briefing and appeared to rescind or modify his opposition. Fulbright (personal communication) has denied Kennedy's story.

3. A. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965) p. 483.
4. Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, p. 120.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
7. T. Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA* (New York: Pocket Books, 1979), p. 135. Note that Helms's comment to Hilsman quoted in Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, p. 98: "I'm with you on this . . . but I've been cut out." did not candidly explain (i.e., he lied about) Helms's position and personal strategy. It is possible also to analyze the behavior of Bissell, Helms, and Kirkpatrick as career strategies in which positions toward the Bay of Pigs operation were maneuvers to become director after Dulles's departure. See Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, pp. 95, 324; Powers, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
8. Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, p. 98.
9. Parmet, *JFK*, p. 162, reports Bowles did once confront the president personally, but Bowles makes no mention of this in his memoirs.
10. T. Sorenson, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 270-272; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, pp. 435-438.
11. See C. Bowles, *Promises to Keep: My Years in Public Life, 1941-1969* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 328-329. Rusk volunteered to tell Bowles if the original plan were to be reinstated so he could take his objections to the president personally.
12. Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, pp. 120-121.
13. Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, pp. 71-73.
14. Kennedy also used pragmatism as a criterion. He excluded Douglas Dillon. Dillon, under Eisenhower, was directly involved in Cuban planning. He was now secretary of the Treasury and not invited. He had firm, known, views that the president should be ready to use American forces or should drop the operation.
15. See H. Arendt, *The Origin of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973) for a general discussion.
16. Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, "orphan," p. 305; "your operation," p. 204 (italics added).
17. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
18. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, pp. 257-258. The comment was to Schlesinger. As noted above, Kennedy expressed different aspects of his mood and thinking to different advisers; at times, he was likely also more militant than this minimal commitment.
19. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 255.
20. For a discussion of bureaucratic viewpoints and politics see D. Caldwell, "Bureaucratic Foreign Policy Making" *American Behavioral Scientist* 21 (1977): 87-110. and references cited there, M. Halperin, P. Clapp, and A. Kanter, *Bureaucratic Behavior and Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1974); G. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).
21. A further reason for such behavior was probably the deferential assumption that the president was the "over-mind" of the executive branch, the single rational actor, the judge who would hear all points of view and then decide. Each man understood himself to be playing but one "part" in the process, appropriately presenting his agency's perspective, that is, its responsibility for one set of considerations, one "part" of the problem. See L. Bloomfield, *The Foreign Policy Process: A Modern Primer* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), p. 160.

22. Harvard Professor John Plank, recently returned from Cuba, whom Schlesinger asked to brief several participants; quoted in L. Vandenbroucke, "'How Could I Have Been So Stupid?' A Methodological Inquiry into the Decision to Land at the Bay of Pigs" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association-West/Western Political Science Association Meetings. San Diego. (Photocopy, 1982, footnote 63, p. 36.)
23. NSAM 31. This document was circulated after the March 11 meeting at which Kennedy rejected the Trinidad plan.
24. Kennedy manipulated the Bay of Pigs decision process to keep at arm's length the arguments and considerations he did not want to hear; he cut out Stevenson and invited Senator Fulbright to only one meeting; he blocked people with military expertise from the D-day cancellation decision. To the Taylor Commission he appointed men of shared, activist mind set—and no critics of his original decision.
25. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 256. The "tough guy" reference is to A. A. Berle, also an early advocate of Guatemala, 1954.
26. Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*, p. 135 et *passim*.
27. Helms might be judged to be right solely by being a uniformly cautious man. It is not clear, then, whether he had better judgment *per se*.
28. Quoted in Vandenbroucke, "So Stupid," footnote 27, p. 33.
29. Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, pp. 17-19.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 317.
31. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 319.
32. See the later discussion of attribution theory (chapter 6) and D. Kahneman, P. Slovic, and A. Tversky, ed., *Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982).
33. Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, pp. 158-159 discusses the threatened resignations at the CIA following an earlier cut-back in the operation.
34. And the deaths of Cubans, on both sides. But these, it must be inferred, counted for less.
35. See A. Wildavsky, "The Self-Evaluating Organization" in J. Shafritz and A. Hyde, ed., *Classics of Public Administration* (Oak Park, IL: Moore Publishing, 1978), pp. 412-417; C. Argyris and D. Schon, *Organization Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978) for a general discussion of this problem within organizations.
36. Perhaps, too, they did not believe it true and felt they were not expected to pass the message.
37. C. Argyris, *Some Causes of Organizational Ineffectiveness Within the Department of State* (Washington, DC: Department of State Center for International Systems Research, 1967).
38. Argyris and Schon, *Organization Learning*.
39. Wildavsky, "The Self-Evaluating Organization", and H. Wilensky, *Organizational Intelligence: Knowledge and Policy in Government and Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1967) address these issues. A general review, which does not, however, evaluate the evidence for these general maxims, is D. Katz and R. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley, 1978). See L. Etheredge, "The Hypnosis Model of Power" *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Science* 3 (1980): 415-451 and "Dual-Track Information Processing in Public Policy Decision Making: Models of Strong Imagination Systems." (Symposium paper presented to the American Psychological Association meetings, Toronto. Photocopy: 1984.) for a suggestion, and discussion, of possible direct effects of hierarchic visual imagery on motivation.

40. A private conversation reported to the author: Dulles said the *only* thing he felt guilty about was his failure to take account of Kennedy's youth and to appreciate that Kennedy's early youthful enthusiasm in November eroded as time progressed. Dulles said that as the older man, he failed a duty to be more perceptive and to develop the options for disposal.
41. Also, nothing crucial went into writing: security against leaks to the press, but also a way to restrict and control the decision process.
Allen Dulles was considered, generally, a master of bureaucratic infighting, "adept at the arts of polite exchange when murder was in his blood." Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*, p. 105.
42. Kennedy said, "There will not be, under any circumstances, any intervention in Cuba by the United States armed forces, and this government will do everything it possibly can — and I think it can meet its responsibilities — to make sure that there are no Americans involved in any actions inside Cuba . . . [T]his administration's attitude is so understood and shared by the anti-Castro exiles from Cuba in this country." Quoted in Sorenson, *Kennedy*, p. 298. Kennedy was wrong about his ability, as president, to prevent CIA agents from entering Cuba.
43. Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, pp. 12-17, 37.
44. A. George, "The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy" *American Political Science Review* 67 (September 1972): 751-785; A. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980). See also I. Destler, "Comment. Multiple Advocacy: Some Limits and Costs" *American Political Science Review* 67 (1972): 786-790; I. Destler, "National Security Advice to U.S. Presidents: Some Lessons from Thirty Years" *World Politics* 29 (1977): 143-176; I. Destler, "National Security Management: What Presidents Have Wrought" *Political Science Quarterly* 95 (1980): 573-588.
45. But a president who cannot trust his top appointees to be completely honest with him, and on issues of major national importance, has a more serious problem than should be addressed solely by multiple advocacy assignments in the Cabinet Room.
46. We do not, however, have detailed information concerning the deliberations of Soviet intentions. Conceivably, no analyst in American government, given the available information, could have made the case persuasively.
47. H. Heclro, *A Government of Strangers: Executive Politics in Washington* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1977) reviews these problems.
48. The argument must be assessed partly by conjecture because we do not have verbatim records of the discussions. As well, the men were well educated and well read: many precedents may have occurred to them. See, for example, E. May, *'Lessons' of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. xii, for a brief discussion of President Kennedy's knowledge of European history.
49. For several efforts to analyze recent experience see, among others, L. Bloomfield and A. Leiss, *Controlling Small Wars: A Strategy for the 1970's* (New York: Knopf, 1969); B. Blechman and S. Kaplan, *Force Without War: The U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1978); A. George, D. Hall, and W. Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); A. George, ed., *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983); A. George and R. Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1974), and the broad, quantitative review by F. Beer, *Peace*

- Against War: The Ecology of International Violence* (San Francisco, CA: W. H. Freeman, 1981).
50. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, pp. 211-212.
51. Too, these considerations had been raised (albeit without a counting of historical cases): Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told the president that Castro was "a thorn in the flesh, not a dagger at the heart" and implicitly dismissed the notion that forbearance would undermine the structure of world order.
52. A. Schlesinger, *Robert F. Kennedy and His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), pp. 455-459.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 456.
54. And the failure to provide a worst-case, guerrilla-option appendix to the Joint Chiefs for review.
55. T. Branch and G. Crile, "The Kennedy Vendetta: An Account of the CIA's Entanglement in the Secret War Against Cuba" *Harper's* (August, 1975), pp. 49-63.
56. Martin, *Wilderness of Mirrors*, pp. 144-145.
57. G. Allison and P. Szanton, *Remaking Foreign Policy: The Organizational Connection* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), pp. 201-203 discuss this proposal.
58. And the Plans divisions agents and spy-networks in the *field* — who might wish to convey misleading messages to Washington, would not be the only network providing information.
59. I. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, second ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), p. 298; see also I. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).
60. Janis, *Groupthink*, second ed., p. 245.
61. J. Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974) presents this model. It may be descriptively accurate, but likely reflects many underlying mechanisms: a typically limited sense of personal responsibility, laziness, time pressures, bureaucratic inhibition, low returns to further calculations until after an opponent makes a responding move, etc. I will argue in chapter 6 that the main determinants of the stopping points are power calculations.
62. I do, however, believe that Kennedy and his preselected advisers, under stress, appear to have become "groupthinkers" during the MONGOOSE period.
63. Recall that both men, along with the president, trusted the CIA's assurances of a "quiet" disposal and they probably felt no need to devise a plan that would succeed. This was not a case of *either* approving a plan that would succeed or calling it off; they were willing to approve a plan that might not succeed.
64. See the discussion of imagination systems in chapter 6: it is possible we are observing mood effects caused, subjectively, by the new experience of being "above" and "at the top."
- The theory of small group entrapment also omits history and learning (including the absence of Janis's book and knowledge of its thesis) from the causal equation. The bases of key lessons decision makers needed to learn had not yet, in their experience, occurred. To be forewarned and engage in vigorous intellectual "hot pursuit" of every detail of the CIA's plan, they needed to know CIA experts might seek deliberately to mislead them. This they did not yet realize: the Bay of Pigs disaster had not yet happened, and National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy — the key man to organize such a review — was dealing with a man he personally admired, an early mentor. Walt Rostow (now Bundy's assistant) had graded papers for him.

65. Janis surely is correct, and Maxwell Taylor would agree with him, that strong individuals who care deeply about issues, have the courage to express their doubts as well as their convictions, and are willing to pursue the truth without support, in face of fears (perhaps realistic) of isolation, rejection, and loss would make vital contributions to any decision process, public or private. Concurrence seekers and people who believe, with a limited sense of personal responsibility, "it really doesn't matter," undermine collective strength. But such solutions, as I will discuss in chapters 6 and 7, demand more of the character, integrity, and autonomy of individuals, and wider supportive changes than in small group processes alone.
66. "the decisionmaking system . . . *did achieve its stated purpose* of preventing a Communist victory in Vietnam until the domestic balance of opinion shifted and Congress decided to reduce support to Saigon in 1974-75 — that is, until the consensus, and hence the purpose, changed and the United States decided to let Vietnam go." L. Gelb and R. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1979), p. 24.
67. In a broader assessment, however, the Gelb and Betts thesis falls apart; presidents consistently maneuvered to *prevent* domestic opposition to their conduct of the Vietnam War from arising, to the point of systematic lying and deception. A complete review of the Gelb and Betts book would be a separate project. As chapter 6 will outline, I believe they have misdiagnosed the deeper cause and that the over dramatized system of imaginings (bold overconfidence, fear, and especially the compulsion to dominate events and forces in the imagination) were the principal story. The advisory system, working only analytically, substantially failed both presidents and the nation.
68. Note that the president was *not* trying, in either case, to effect Castro's elimination. He was willing to approve the best acceptable plan that had a *chance*; recall Eisenhower, too, had approved the Guatemala resupply with only a 20 percent estimated probability of success.