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23 April 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT : First Meeting of General Maxwell Taylor's Board of Inquiry on Cuban Operations Conducted by CIA

TIME AND PLACE: 1400-1800 hours, 22 April 1961, Quarters Eye

PARTICIPANTS : Investigating Committee Members

General Maxwell D. Taylor
Attorney General Robert Kennedy
Admiral Arleigh Burke
Allen W. Dulles

Department of Defense

Major General David W. Gray
Colonel C. W. Shuler
Commander Mitchell

CIA Personnel

General C. P. Cabell
C. Tracy Barnes
Colonel J. C. King
Jacob D. Esterline
Edward A. Stanulis
Colonel Jack Hawkins

1. After a discussion of procedural matters, it was decided that all papers and documents stemming from the inquiry would be retained by General Maxwell Taylor. Colonel J. C. King, Chief, Western Hemisphere Division, was designated recorder of the first meeting.

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2. Mr. Dulles, in his opening remarks, cited the document which authorized CIA to conduct paramilitary operations. This document, NSC 5412, was described as one of the most secret documents in the U. S. Government. Mr. Dulles said that under this authority CIA is directed to engage in activities such as the Cuban operation under the general supervision of the National Security Council. General Taylor indicated that he wanted a copy of this document to be made available to him for his study. General Gray indicated he had a copy and would give it to General Taylor.

3. Colonel King was then asked to describe Agency activities on the Cuban problem prior to the establishment of the Task Force, i. e., Branch 4 of the Western Hemisphere Division on 18 January 1960. In his remarks Colonel King stated that in late 1958 CIA made two attempts (each approved by the Department of State) to block Castro's ascension to power. The first attempt was made in November 1958 when contact was established with Justo Carrillo and the Montecristi Group. The second attempt was made on or about the 9th of December 1958 when former Ambassador William D. Pawley, supported by the CIA Chief of Station in Havana, Mr. ~~██████████~~ and Colonel King, approached Batista and proposed the establishment of a Junta to whom Batista would turn over the reins of government. Colonel King was queried by the Attorney General as to the approximate date that the Agency concluded that Castro was unacceptable to the U. S. politically, if not actually a Communist, and when this conclusion reached the Secretary of State and the President. Colonel King commented that there were reports as early as June or July 1958 during the period that sailors from Guantanamo were held by Castro forces which indicated beyond a reasonable doubt that the U. S. was up against an individual who could not be expected to be acceptable to U. S. Government interests. Admiral Burke also made reference to the fact that he had been in at least one meeting with Colonel King on or about 29 December 1958 in which officials of the Department of State, except for Under Secretary Robert Murphy, appeared to feel that Castro was politically compatible to U. S. objectives. Considerable discussion involving all members of the Investigating Committee followed on this point with the Attorney General requesting assurance that Agency reports at that time reached the highest authority. 06

4. Reference was made to the first few days of January 1959 in Havana when a primary target of the advance guard was the Communist files in BRAC.

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5. Mr. Stanulis reported that on 21 September 1959 he assumed the responsibility for planning for potential Agency action in contingency situations that might evolve in Latin America. He stated that this was a staff position that conducted liaison with existing desks in an attempt to identify the existence or non-existence of basic information which was an essential preliminary to the planning of clandestine operations within any given country. Most of the countries of Central America (Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador) were identified as potential contingency problems because of the instability of their governments. The Isle of Hispanola -- Haiti and the Dominican Republic -- was a high priority target. In South America, Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina were included among the countries which required review and potential action. Cuba, quite naturally, emerged as the number one target for contingency planning. Because of the national policy affecting Latin America, it was ascertained early in the survey that the operating desks did not have available in collated fashion the type of information that was required for planning purposes for covert operations. As a result of this discovery, the entire intelligence community was given a requirement to produce certain information on the various countries involved with special emphasis on Cuba as rapidly as possible. In time, a three-volume study was produced which included basic intelligence, political and psychological information, operational data, geographical information, selected potential areas for clandestine operations, and related operational data.

6. The Cuban situation continued to deteriorate rapidly and in December 1959, it was decided that CIA needed to consider urgently the activation of two programs:

A. The selection, recruitment and careful evaluation (including medical, psychological, psychiatric and polygraph) of approximately thirty-five (35) Cubans, preferably with previous military experience, for an intensive training program which would qualify them to become instructors in various paramilitary skills, including leadership, sabotage, communications, etc.

B. The instructor cadre would in turn, in some third country in Latin America, conduct clandestinely a training of additional Cuban recruits who would be organized into small teams similar to the U. S. Army Special Forces concept, and infiltrated with

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communicators, into areas of Cuba where it had been determined numbers of dissidents existed who required specialized skills and leadership and military supplies.

At this time, the basic Agency concept of operations was that the members of the instructor cadre would never be committed to Cuban soil. The members of the paramilitary leadership groups would be introduced covertly into the target area.

7. As a result of this fundamental decision, Mr. Stanulis went to Panama in mid-December 1959 to survey certain isolated areas of Fort Sherman to determine the potential usefulness of these areas for the training of the instructor cadre. In addition to the survey, Mr. Stanulis held meetings with CINCCARIB Lt. Gen. Ridgely Gaither, and CGUSARCARIB Major Gen. Charles Dasher, to familiarize them with the basic Agency thinking in the Cuban matter. 06

8. Mr. Esterline outlined the organization of the Task Force and the steps which led to the paper presented to the President on 14 March 1960 and approved 17 March 1960, which was the first authorization to mount an operation to get rid of Castro. General Taylor requested the original T/O of that Task Force. He also requested other T/O's, including the present one, which will illustrate the buildup of the Force.

9. Mr. Bissell discussed the 17th of March approval. The concept then presented persisted for approximately 10 months. There were four major courses:

A. Creation of a political opposition. This took 4 to 5 months and during that period it was found less and less possible to rely on the Cuban politicians.

B. Mass communications to the Cuban people.

C. Covert intelligence and action originating inside Cuba.

D. The building of an adequate paramilitary force outside Cuba which called for cadres of leaders.

10. The original budget did not provide for the mounting of an organization of the type which eventually developed.

11. General Taylor then requested that the exact procedure

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followed in the clearance in this basic paper of 17 March 1960 be described.

12. Through 1958, 1959, 1960 and so far in 1961, weekly meetings have been held with the Assistant Secretary of State, his deputy, Special Assistant, and a representative from the Office of Special Operations in State, for the purpose of briefing them on the highlights of intelligence. Since the approval of the paper, they have also been kept informed in general terms of major operational aspects.

13. Mr. Bissell said that the language of the basic paper was general as we did not know then how large a force would be built up. During the autumn months of 1960, the military force took shape and the original concept went through subtle changes.

14. In June 1960, the FRD (Frente Revolucionario Democratico) came into being. This was one of the first orders of business. It was needed as an umbrella for the recruiting and training of a nucleus of a military force. The thinking then was that this military group would be used in small teams and serve as a catalyst for uprisings in Cuba.

15. The Attorney General then asked was it conceived that Castro could be overthrown with a catalyst force at that time. Mr. Bissell replied that the original concept was to generate various pressures on Castro including this force, and it was expected that the classic guerrilla pattern would be followed. The Attorney General then asked what step should we have taken at that time if we had known what we know now, and did we have any policy then. Mr. Dulles replied we did have a policy, which was to overthrow Castro in one way or another.

16. General Taylor asked if the plan was based on capabilities or on what we actually needed, to which Mr. Dulles replied in the negative. Mr. Bissell said we thought we could build up guerrilla resistance through teams being infiltrated to groups inside, which would lead to the formation of a large enough group to facilitate air drops of arms and other materiel.

17. Mr. Esterline said we had a navy of sorts which ran operations for the ex/infiltration of personnel and the introduction of arms and other materiel with better than 50% success. The buildup of guerrillas did not

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occur as expected and the number of successful drops was very low. This led to the further expansion of our military force to the point that it had gotten beyond the covert state about 1 November 1960.

18. General Taylor requested the date that military training began. He was informed that thirty (30) selected leaders were sent to a jungle area at Fort Sherman in the Canal Zone in July 1960. These were all recruited and carefully screened by the FRD.

19. General Taylor asked if maximum effort was made to raise manpower. Mr. Esterline answered that at first we were very selective and the troops came in at a trickle. Later they came in at a greater rate than we could handle. Mr. Esterline described the method of selection and screening. General Taylor asked if figures were available as to how many ex-officers of the Cuban army were recruited and as complete a breakdown as possible of personnel.

20. Mr. Barnes stated that beginning about mid-November 1960, there were weekly discussions in the Special Group. Mr. Dulles said recommendations from the Task Force were considered at these meetings. Special Group references show that on 16 November 1960, the changing concept of the operation was noted by Under Secretary Livingston Merchant. By November 1960, it was recognized that guerrilla warfare operations in the Escambray were not going well; we were having difficulty with air drops and some change in approach was needed.

21. Mr. Bissell said that one of the problems at this time was the Department of State's concern about tainting Guatemala and Nicaragua if the size was augmented. The Agency was asked to consider withdrawing from Guatemala and setting up an American base. After further consideration, the use of a base in the continental U. S. was ruled out.

22. In answer to General Taylor's question as to what bottle-necks existed, it was stated that there were no bases immediately available for the training of large numbers of the troops and that recruits came in at a trickle until the political base was broadened.

23. The Attorney General asked what was the purpose of a Strike Force, to which Mr. Bissell replied they would administer a strike

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which could lead to a general uprising or a formation of larger guerrilla units in the mountains with which dissidents could join forces. The Strike Force was not in repudiation of the guerrilla concept but in addition to it.

24. Col. Hawkins stated there never was a clear-cut decision in his mind policy-wise to use a Strike Force.

25. Mr. Bissell read excerpts from a memorandum of 8 December 1960 of a meeting of the Special Group where a changing concept had been presented by various members of the Task Force. General Taylor said that all members of the board want a copy of this paper.

26. Among the items requested in this memorandum, officers from the Special Forces for the training of the Strike Force were authorized, the use of an air strip at Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua was approved, supply missions were approved, and on Tuesday, 16 April, the use of American contract pilots was approved. Records are in General Lansdale's office.

27. General Taylor asked what discussions there were with President Eisenhower during this period and requested copies of any existing memoranda.

28. Mr. Dulles said that the only minutes of the meetings of the 5412 Group were prepared and kept by CIA. These could be consulted by authorized individuals of other departments.

29. Mr. Bissell quoted from the minutes of a 5412 meeting where doubt was expressed that a covert force could succeed and consequently overt action might be required. About 1 January 1961, recruiting was greatly stepped up.

30. In reply to General Taylor's question as to when did we reach concept number three, Mr. Esterline said about 1 March 1961. In January and February 1961, JCS teams were sent to the camps under special arrangement and furnished the necessary instructor force for training of a larger strike force.

31. The Board agreed that one set of papers only would be kept, these to be by General Taylor. Documents desired are:

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- A. The 5412 Paper. General Gray has a copy in his possession.
- B. Basic paper of 17 March 1960.
- C. Tables of Organization beginning with the creation of the Task Force.
- D. Both communications plans.
- E. Chronology of events from 17 March 1960:
 - (1) CIA chronology.
 - (2) State chronology.
- F. Changes in concept.
- G. Data on both American and Cuban personnel.
- H. Supply plan.
- I. Training plan.
- J. Intelligence aspects.
- K. Reconstitution of facts and intelligence available when plans were approved.

32. It was agreed that the next meeting would be held at 1000 hours on Monday, 24 April 1961, in the Director's conference room.

J. C. KING

Distribution:

- Original - Copy #1 - General Maxwell D. Taylor
- Copy #2 - Admiral Arleigh Burke
- Copy #3 - Allen W. Dulles
- Copy #4 - Attorney General Robert Kennedy
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