

Biography of the Kennedy Administration



by
Joseph R. Granato

Based on *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* by Richard Reeves

Copyright © 1998 by Joseph R. Granato. All Rights Reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission from the author.

When President John Fitzgerald Kennedy entered the White House in January 1961, he was the new symbol of youth and change in America. Overseas, Kennedy inherited, as all new presidents do, the dilemmas of international and national concerns that carried over from the previous administration. Kennedy found himself entangled in Laos, Vietnam, Cuba, and Berlin. At home there was the pledge for equal rights beginning to take place from millions of African Americans. In a brief time, from 1961 to 1963, the Kennedy Administration faced some of the most challenging issues of the 20th Century and left a lasting legacy for America and the world.

The election of 1960 had one of the closest margins of victory, just over one hundred thousand votes. One of Kennedy's first assignments as President-elect was to appoint his various cabinet members. He brought in the President of Ford Motor Company and a graduate from Harvard named Robert S. McNamara to be his Secretary of Defense. He appointed his brother Robert Kennedy to the role of Attorney General of the United States. There was an abundance of Ivy League intellects that surrounded the presidency of John F. Kennedy. Still, even with all that brain power, Cold War warriors like Allen Dulles of the CIA, and the most connected man in government as his Vice-President – Lyndon Johnson, John Kennedy was always the center of American political power.

President Kennedy followed the collegial approach (shared decision-making process among parties) in setting up his administration. One reason why he may have chosen this approach as opposed to the hierarchical approach (singular/group of power at the top with subsequent levels of power beneath them – President Reagan's administration is one example) is because Kennedy was a great listener. During the daily meetings and briefings that occurred in the White House he would often just sit back and listen to his staff members, or anyone else who happened to be attending the meetings, and silently choose which ideas he liked best. Usually, the only person whom he confided in with his personal thoughts and feelings toward a specific issue was his brother Bobby. It was not because Kennedy distrusted his staff, but like a true politician, he reserved for himself the opportunity to change his mind, without having to be held to words or print on a specific decision. One problem that seemed to arise from Kennedy's private thinking was that his staff often felt he agreed with them, perhaps even when he did not, and so they went about to further pursue their plans.

Another characteristic of Kennedy's decision making was choosing the middle route. During international crises like Berlin in 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, a limited number of decisions were created by his specialty staffs, like Ex-Comm, and proposed to him. The first was usually the most extreme militarily, while the last would be the least effective, thus leaving the middle ground as the safest choice politically.

The Final Frontier and the Peace Corps

On February 20, 1961, the nation watched Colonel John Glenn's rocket, Friendship 7, blast off from Cape Canaveral at 9:36 A.M. into the most mysterious and undiscovered regions of our world. Colonel Glenn "orbited the Earth three times in four hours and fifty-six minutes." When he landed in the Atlantic Ocean near Bermuda, America had entered the space age. America's young president was so enthralled by this event that Space exploration soon became a priority for his administration.

On March 1, 1961, less than three months into his presidency, Kennedy signed an executive order creating the Peace Corps, one of his lasting contributions to America. "Young Americans would fan out over the world to live in mud huts and shanties, doing good...teaching the less fortunate about personal hygiene and democracy, crop rotation and the English language."¹ The Peace Corps remains one of the most popular accomplishments of the Kennedy Administration. Between 1961 and 2013, over 215,000 Americans joined the Peace Corps and served in 139 countries.²

The Bay of Pigs

The first major political predicament presented to the new President occurred when the CIA approached him with their secret plans to invade Cuba, using Cuban exiles and mercenaries. The CIA had been training them for over two years, with an investment of about \$40 million dollars. According to the CIA these exiles, as well as an uprising of the citizens of Cuba, would overthrow the new ruler of the country, Fidel Castro. Castro was seen as a threat to the US, in both their export and import trading relations with other South American countries, and because the Castro regime was undoubtedly becoming communist. Having a communist country just ninety miles off American shores, was not only a militarily strategic advantage for the communists, but was also an ideological threat to free world capitalism. Kennedy, wanting to start off with a good relationship between himself and the CIA, permitted them to continue with their plans. Around the middle of March, the CIA briefed Kennedy with a report that an invasion would take place sometime in April. Kennedy, indecisive about the issue to invade Cuba so soon into his Presidency, told the CIA he would not order any American troops into Cuba to back-up the mercenaries. The CIA did not believe him. They assumed that once the exiles landed on Cuban shores, Kennedy would definitely have to send reserves to assure a military victory or face a political disaster.

Kennedy was faced with a predicament. He was willing to allow the invasion to occur as long as he did not have to commit US troops to make it successful. Besides, he knew that the CIA operation was too far along now to be cancelled. CIA Director Allen Dulles told Kennedy not to forget one thing, "we have a dispersal problem. If we take the men out of Guatemala, we will have to transfer them to the United States, and we can't have them wandering around the country telling everyone what they've been doing." Kennedy agreed, and then added an exception to their plans. He must have authorization to cancel the whole thing up to twenty-four hours of the invasion if he chooses. Dulles accepted.

Many of Kennedy's staff members, including McNamara, told the president that they did not think the invasion would work. By April, various American newspapers and magazines were printing material speculating the Cuban invasion. The invasion was now an open secret. Still, Kennedy did not call it off. The CIA had manipulated him with false information about the military strength of the trained exiles and their strategy for victory. Kennedy, not knowing he was being deceived, gave the final go ahead at 2:00 P.M. on Sunday April 16, 1961. At a press conference less than a week before, he publicly stated that no US troops would be involved in any intervention in Cuba. "In his mind, each decision was a trade-off between military and political considerations. He chose a minimum of political risk, which meant a maximum military risk."

The failed invasion would go down in history as the Bay of Pigs. It was Kennedy's first political defeat as President, and he bore the weight of it, both publicly and privately. All too late, he came to the

realization that the CIA had lied to him and that only a full-scale military invasion would make the attack successful. He could not change what happened in Cuba, but he was determined to change the way his government was run. The first thing he decided on was telling Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell, the two top CIA officials, that when things calmed down they were to resign from their positions. Kennedy also wanted more control over the flow of information that would come into the Oval Office. He began to receive daily reports on CIA operations as well as Cold War information. He demanded comprehensive knowledge of everything that was going on around him; he felt more in control that way, a feeling necessary when making decisions that the President of the United States must make.

The Rise of Television in Politics

When it came to gaining support from the public, Kennedy used the most powerful tool available - television. He was personally fond of television for many reasons. The first and most important reason was that he could talk to millions of Americans at one time. Kennedy also liked the spontaneous ability of television broadcasting. Instead of having to go through newspaper reporters, whose information would not be published until the following day, he could go live on television any time he wished. There was a lot of freedom with television and it became the President's most powerful weapon in cultivating support from the public for specific legislation. Through the polls that would follow the next day, Kennedy would learn where Americans stood on specific issues and if they had favored his proposals. He could use that as a way to gain support in Congress, where it counted most.

Kennedy was a true politician. He had worked for several years in Congress and understood their procedures very well. Often times he would lobby support from other Congressman using his famous Kennedy charm as well as his presidential power of persuasion. He would invite Congressmen like Mike Mansfield, the Senate Majority Leader, to the Oval Office in search of support for his bills. Kennedy always wanted to be well prepared for any encounter. When it came to Congressional affairs he thoroughly examined and re-examined his proposals before making a final decision. He wanted to be sure that once a bill hit the Senate floor to be voted on, it was the most agreeable conclusion he and his staff had come to.

On May 25, 1961, Kennedy gave a televised speech that once again proved the strength of Kennedy's devotion toward lobbying support through Congress on a public level. In this speech, Kennedy requested an additional \$2 billion for military purposes. He wanted to raise the level of the military weapons and personnel in the fight against communism. He asked for all Americans to prepare themselves for the sacrifices to come and to help pay for programs that would ensure National Security. The senators and representatives cheered. He told America that he would be leaving in the next few weeks for Vienna, where he would meet with Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev.

Finally, Kennedy spoke of another more distant dimension, space, "I believe this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth. No single project in this period will be more impressive to mankind." The country went wild. Kennedy knew that "winning in space was politically imperative." He told Congress it would cost between \$7 billion and \$9 billion altogether. Surprisingly they cheered that too. The May 25th speech

was Kennedy's most successful speech thus far as President, in terms of gaining support in Congress. For the first time, Congress appeared ready to back him all the way.

Vienna Summit and Building the Berlin Wall

Kennedy's second great disappointment came in his meetings with Premier Krushchev in Vienna, Austria, in June 1961. It seemed as though the two leaders could not reach an agreement on anything. The policy of the United States and its Western allies was to stop communism wherever it started, a policy Kennedy believed in. However, the President's main goal for the Vienna meeting was to come to an agreement with Krushchev about Berlin and nuclear war. Kennedy wanted to reassure the Premier that the US would do all it could to uphold its duty in protecting West Berlin from communism. Berlin was the remaining landmark of World War II. Since the Soviets controlled East Berlin, which was communist, and the US controlled West Berlin, which was capitalist, Kennedy felt the two leaders should strive for some kind of agreement that would allow the two cities to co-exist peacefully, thus reducing the threat of nuclear war. However, Krushchev "believed the United States would not use nuclear weapons to preserve the status quo in Western Europe - and that was the only way the West could stop an invasion by the Soviets and their allies." Kennedy was trying desperately not to be humiliated by the overwhelmingly critical Krushchev. Kennedy desired peace with Krushchev, offering to work with the Soviets on sending a man to the moon, but Krushchev denied that proposal. In the end, the ambitious new president lost a battle of political-will to the leader of the communist party. Yet, at the same time, Kennedy impressed Krushchev enough so that the two men would have a close relationship in the future.

Over the next few months, Kennedy was confronted with the first real threat of nuclear war since he became President. When it came to Berlin, Kennedy was very patient and cautious regarding military action. He knew, as did most of the world, that if war broke out in Berlin between the US and Russia, it would very likely lead to nuclear war, where an estimated seventy million Americans would die; that amounted to about half the country. Kennedy had daily meetings with his cabinet members in the Justice and Defense departments, including up-to-the hour CIA reports. He asked objective questions after each Secretary spoke. Kennedy wanted his men to think out every possible solution, to meet together and cover all options, and to offer him nothing but the most thought-out conclusions. In the third week of July, after numerous days of exhaustive meetings, the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented Kennedy with their final proposal, called Plan A. In it, they suggested that the President request from Congress \$4.3 billion dollars to escalate military spending. Most of all, the plan called for "the toughest military scenarios, which gave them [JCS] authorization to use tactical nuclear weapons. The President decided to choose Plan C, the most moderate alternative." He would ask Congress for \$3.2 billion for new military appropriations; "he would ask for a congressional resolution giving him stand-by authority to call up reserves" and most importantly, he would ask for all these things in a public speech on national television, in the hopes of mobilizing the American people. He wanted the public to support and back him if indeed the US had to go to war in Berlin. Finally, the decision to go on national television was also to show the Soviets and Krushchev, that the United States was ready for war.

When the day came for Kennedy to give his speech to all of America, preparing them for possible nuclear war at the hands of the Soviet Union, it seemed as though the whole nation was ready and willing to fight to keep US troops in Berlin. Thousands of letters flooded the White House the following morning.

“The mail to the White House ran better than 100 to 1 in support. The Senate went even further than Kennedy, voting 80 to 1 for \$750 million for new manned bomber programs.” The New York Times, the Washington Post, even former President Harry Truman, praised Kennedy’s efforts to preserve American interests in Berlin. Kennedy’s speech was the key to US victory in Berlin during the Cold War.



In the next few weeks, the USSR built the Berlin Wall, originally a barbed wire fence dividing the territory between East and West Berlin. Although Kennedy and Krushchev had not come to any personal agreements, Krushchev withdrew his demands of a treaty that would give Russia access to all of Berlin, which was the cause of this crisis in the first place. Most of all, Kennedy’s precise decision making spared the world from all-out nuclear destruction...for the time being at least.

With Berlin secured, and international affairs quieting down, as well as popular support from eighty percent of the nation, Kennedy could finally focus on some of his personal goals for the country and the administration.

National Issues

On August 14, 1961, Kennedy gave a little back to those who had served and would serve their country. “The president signed HR 845, a bill reducing from sixty-five to fifty, the age at which Congressional Medal of Honor winners could begin collecting their veteran’s pension.” Two months later, Kennedy spoke at the United Nations concerning his dream to live in a world safe from nuclear war. It became one of the most memorable speeches of his administration. He stood at a podium and in his charismatic, persuasive, and definite voice of power, movingly touched the minds and hearts of those who listened. “Ladies and gentleman of this assembly, the decision is ours. Never have the nations of the world had so much to lose, or so much to gain. Together we shall save our planet, or together we shall perish in its flames.” The speech was Kennedy’s first public request for a ban on nuclear testing. His decision had come after the Soviets resumed testing hydrogen bombs in the atmosphere over Siberia. Kennedy was facing enormous pressure from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as the American people, to resume testing after three years without such tests (an agreement was signed during the Eisenhower administration in the late 1950’s to stop testing; even so, the US continued secretly underground, which the general public was unaware of). Kennedy had made his decision however, despite the opposition of his military advisors and nuclear scientists; he wanted the testing to stop now.

Kennedy ended the final months of his first year in office demanding new and more accurate information regarding the situation in Vietnam. After sending Maxwell Taylor and Walt Rostow (United States Deputy National Security Advisor) to Vietnam, analyzing their data and the conclusions they, the Joint Chiefs of Staff including McNamara, had reached, he finally made his decision. “He had effectively decided that, operationally, Vietnam was a military issue. But he was not willing to send in US troops...Not now. Not yet...More advisors, more pressure on Diem [President of South Vietnam] to act less like a Mandarin emperor and more like an American-style democrat.” He based his decision on the expectation that the US would be successful in their efforts to contain the slow movement of the communist North Vietnam.

In one way or another President Kennedy was a man very different from those of his era, especially those in government. He chose to strive for peace, rather than war. He understood that good diplomatic relations with the enemy were better than no relations at all. He wanted to change the mood of the Cold War and make Russia our closest ally, rather than our worst foe. He had already begun to do this, secretly of course, by writing letters to Premier Krushchev. President Kennedy was the symbol of change when he entered the White House in January 1961, and come January 1962, he wanted to see that change begin to take place both nationally and internationally.

A national gallop poll taken exactly one year to the day of Kennedy's inauguration, showed his approval ratings at seventy-seven percent. Kennedy's major problems were not with the public though - they were with Congress. The House of Representatives was still controlled by Southern Democrats. They held the real power and almost always opposed Northern liberals like Kennedy. He was struggling desperately to have his legislation passed. "The only Kennedy bills they supported were the military appropriations bill and a \$6 billion moderate- and low-income housing bill that represented new federal money going into districts across the country." Kennedy's focus for 1962 was to strengthen the economy. He asked for the help of Democratic Senators and representatives during a series of meetings at the end of January. He asked Walter Heller, the Chairman of Economic Advisors, to teach him all he needed to know about economic issues.

A New Safety Net

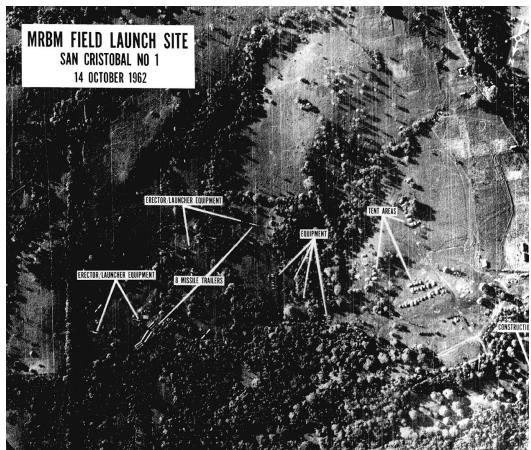
In July 1962, Kennedy was unsuccessful in his attempts to lobby support from Congress for his health plan for Americans sixty-five and older, called Medicare. "It was to be financed by a half percent increase in Social Security taxes, providing 90 days of hospital care and 180 days of nursing home care for 17 million Americans." After three weeks of Senate debate it was voted down 52-48. Kennedy may have been charismatic, but it was not helping him very much in Congress. He could not seem to gain enough support from those in Congress to make a successful impact on getting his legislation passed. Although he often met with them inside the Oval Office, or even at his parents' home in Palm Beach Florida, when it came down to their votes on the floor, they let him down, one after another.

Still, even with his difficulties in Congress, it turned out to be a successful summer for the Kennedy administration, economically. The President asked Walter Heller to draw up a memo of tax cut choices that would benefit Kennedy politically and the country economically. On August 9, Heller handed him the memo, which included six different choices for reducing taxes and lowering the national deficit. Kennedy chose number six, which was similar to a bill he planned to propose to Congress in 1963 anyway. Once again Kennedy went straight to the homes of the American people with a live broadcast from the Oval Office. He wanted to encourage support from the nation, which he trusted would influence Congress enough to pass the bill when the time came. He announced to his audience, "Federal purchases have added \$7 billion to the economy, but Federal taxes have siphoned out \$12 billion." In terms of influence, as Kennedy put it, the speech was somewhere between a B and a C. These tax cuts were finally approved by Congress in early 1964, three months after Kennedy's assassination.

The Steel Crisis

In August 1962, President Kennedy received a memo from Walter Heller “warning him that a steel strike, a sharp rise in the price of steel or steel workers’ wages, or both, was the greatest single threat to economic stability during his presidency.” So on March 31, 1962, a grateful Secretary of Labor, Arthur Goldberg, enthusiastically assured the President that the United States Steel Company and the United Steelworkers Union had come to an agreement, after months of threatening strikes. They would raise the workers’ wages, but not raise the price of steel. Kennedy was excited, because inflation would not rise and the economy would remain stable. However, the information released by US Steel was false, and in fact they did raise the price of steel by about 3.5 percent. After learning that he had been lied to, Kennedy quickly countered this defiance with a public statement at a press conference. He angrily criticized the steel company as being greedy at the expense of all Americans. Then he took personal charge of a campaign against US Steel. “Cabinet members were assigned statements to make regarding the effects of the price increase on everyone from automobile manufacturers to small farmers...friendly Senators and Congressman were asked to hold anti-trust hearings.” Kennedy used his influence over the media, and his persuasion over the public, to pressure the steel company into reversing the rise in prices, and it worked.

On the Brink of the End



The CIA sent a series of frightening pictures to the White House on October 15, 1962. U-2 reconnaissance planes photographed dozens of Russian trucks in Cuba. The trucks appeared to be carrying “SA-2’s, surface to air missiles.” Apparently, the Soviets were answering the demands of Cuban Dictator Fidel Castro for more arms protection in case of an invasion by the US. When this was brought to the President’s attention, Kennedy immediately issued a National Security Action Memorandum to all of his top advisors – Rusk (Secretary of State), McNamara (Secretary of Defense), Robert Kennedy (Attorney General), McCone (CIA Director), and General Maxwell Taylor (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff).

It included six different actions and studies that were to be examined by the men. Kennedy was first convinced that this knowledge of a possible Soviet nuclear build-up in Cuba must be kept private from the public and from Congress. Over the next 13 days, only after additional data was collected from U-2 spy planes and the CIA, Kennedy began to form his own conclusions, “that the Soviet leader’s actions in Cuba were more political than military.” The real problem was that Krushchev and Castro were both aware of the possibility that the US was in fact planning for another invasion of Cuba. “In the Caribbean, and along the Southern Atlantic coast, the US was openly escalating military planning and actions obviously targeting Cuba, including amphibious invasion exercises around Puerto Rico through the summer and fall.” This was just one of many factors that led to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Kennedy created a secret panel called Ex-Comm, which had two daily meetings, beginning on October 16th that covered all the latest information on the situation in Cuba. One of General Maxwell Taylor’s first proposals to President Kennedy was for an all out air strike against Cuba, followed by a

naval blockade. Kennedy listened, but quickly changed the topic and decided to go with Secretary of the Treasury Clarence Douglass Dillon's idea in response to whether or not this information should be made public. "Telling people in NATO, would appear to me to have the danger of forcing the Soviets to take a position that if anything was done, they would have to retaliate...whereas a quick statement at the same time saying this is all there is to it, might give them a chance to back off and not do anything." Kennedy's first working paper of the crisis laid out four separate tracks in dealing with the dilemma. The President began to write down his choices, so he would have a visual representation of his options. At one point he sent a letter to all the members of EX-Comm as well as Vice President Johnson, asking them, "Bomb or Blockade? Check the appropriate box." He had his men vote, time and time again, over bombing or blockading. However, by October 20th, the question had finally been answered; quarantine Cuba. "The goal was not to corner Krushchev; the whole point was to give him room to maneuver, to back down." Two days later Kennedy gave a televised address to the American people, in what became one of the most famous speeches of his tenure

Over the next week, the President patiently debated with the military and his staff over which steps were to take place next. He wrote two to three letters a day to Premier Krushchev, trying to find a middle ground on which they could negotiate and put an end to this most destructive conflict. The quarantine was working somewhat effectively, but it would probably not be useful in removing the offensive weapons from Cuba, which was the real threat. Kennedy was running out of options, out of hope and out of time. He knew that if he did what his military experts wanted him to do and bomb Cuba, the United States of America, Russia, Cuba and the rest of the world would be destroyed. Finally, on October 28th, the world breathed a sigh of relief. Krushchev ordered, over Moscow radio, "the dismantling of the 'offensive weapons' in Cuba and their crating and return to the Soviet Union."

President Kennedy showed true leadership and patience over those frightening weeks. He did not overreact and he was not hasty enough to listen to his military generals who were willing to start World War III. He understood that patience is its own reward. Not only did President Kennedy make the most crucial and effective decisions with the help of his Ex-Comm staff, but for a second time in less than two years, he spared the world from nuclear disaster. A record only he holds thus far.

1963

President Kennedy began his third year in office with an agenda, "Questions to be settled...in the coming months." There were twenty-seven of them; four were on the Common Market and international trade, three were on nuclear weapons, three on President De Gaulle [including France's desire to receive American support in developing a nuclear bomb and sharing such knowledge with the Government of West Germany (Federal Republic of Germany)], and two on Germany. The rest were on NATO, Laos, Belgium, Yugoslavia, Spain, Portugal, Africa, and the moon." Kennedy knew first hand that if he was going to be re-elected he had to assure the American people that progress was being made. Many rumors circulated in Washington and throughout the rest of the country, especially in the Deep South, that Kennedy was soft. He wanted to change that perception by strengthening the economy once and for all, sign the treaty on banning nuclear testing and pass his legislation in Congress. Kennedy understood what was perhaps the single greatest line of advice he could follow, "there was a political rhythm to being a Cold War president; talk tough to win the job, talk peace to keep it."

Kennedy's biggest decision of 1963 came in June. The African American community was demanding the President's help in their fight for civil rights. They believed Kennedy was holding back legislation to Congress for a new civil rights bill. In reality, there was no such legislation to hold back. Martin Luther King Jr. publicly criticized Kennedy's lack of effort and support in helping the African American cause. Concerned, the President talked privately with his closest advisor, his brother Robert. Robert Kennedy arranged a meeting between the President and Mr. King for the end of June. The two legendary figures met at the White House and walked alone together through the Rose Garden. The President informed King of the great risks that were involved in asking Congress to pass a civil rights bill. Many of the Congressman, mostly Southern Democrats and Republicans, were dead set against equality and Kennedy feared that he would lose, not only in having his programs passed, but the election of 1964 as well. "We may all go down the drain as a result of this - so we are putting a lot on the line." Still, Kennedy sided with King and the African American community in the end, deciding that civil rights was one of the steps that must be taken to get the country moving again. He promised King that a bill would be proposed to Congress by the end of the year.

Vietnam

The President spent most of the summer traveling abroad. He met with Pope Paul VI at the Vatican, stopped in West Berlin, and made a personal visit to the country of his ancestors, Ireland. When he returned to the White House in August, his central concern was the situation in Vietnam. The CIA had notified him early in the summer that a coup-de-tat was undoubtedly going to occur, and that South Vietnam's President, Ngo Dinh Diem, his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu and sister-in-law Madame Nhu, were all going to be removed from office. Kennedy was very concerned that the situation there was getting worse, not better. He had already sent Henry Cabot Lodge, a Republican, to be his new Ambassador to Vietnam, less than two months before. Still, even with Lodge there and sending almost daily reports to Kennedy, that was not enough. By September, Kennedy came to the conclusion that he could not make any intelligent and final decisions with the information he had received to date from the CIA and military intelligence, for it was too inaccurate. He decided to send McNamara and Taylor to Vietnam for a week. He told them to cover every objective and to gather the appropriate information that was needed. There was a great deal of pressure coming from the President's military advisors in Vietnam, and from conspirators in South Vietnam's government, to give a green light to the assassination of Diem. They wanted to replace Diem with someone else, someone that the people of South Vietnam would support in a war against the communist North. Kennedy was uncertain and undecided in this regard. It was against US policy to participate in assassinations outside of wartime, but he also knew that was not the real issue. As long as the US would not be held responsible for the coup, and as long as the coup would successfully serve its purpose, he would not order the plans canceled. The reality was however, that it was already out of his control, much like the Bay of Pigs.

When McNamara and Taylor returned from Vietnam they had come to separate views; a most unwelcome conclusion. Taylor felt the war could be won there by 1965. McNamara concluded that the war could only be won with a commitment of US troops, and that it would not be in less than two years. At that point Kennedy decided not to act and to let events run their course.

On November 2, 1963, President Diem was assassinated at the hands of the military intelligence of the United States government and the government of South Vietnam, who had been working closely together on this plan. A cover story was created and the world was led to believe that Diem and his brother had committed suicide. The President received the same report from the CIA in Vietnam. About a week later, Kennedy made one last decision regarding the policy of aiding the government of South Vietnam. He planned to pull all US troops out of Vietnam by the end of 1965, if re-elected. In the meantime though, he would ask Congress to call 1,000 advisors back to the United States beginning in January 1964.

The End of Camelot



On November 22, 1963, while traveling in an open limousine through downtown Dallas, President Kennedy was assassinated. The world was in shock. It was unthinkable that in the 1960's, the President of the United States, undoubtedly the most powerful man in the world, could fall from glory at the hands of an assassin. The US government told America and the world that it was the work of a lone assassin, a communist named Lee Harvey Oswald. The hopes of the American people were shattered. The era of the 1960's and the history of the world thereafter, would never be the same. Almost twenty years after his death, and well after the publication

of the Warren Commission Report, it was declared by the House Committee on Assassinations, that in fact there was a conspiracy to kill President John F. Kennedy.

President Kennedy was a patient decision maker who reviewed all options that were available to him before reaching a final decision. The collegial approach, which he implemented with his staff, allowed for a free flow of ideas by his 'advisors of equals'. He often called on them to do their best for their President, for themselves, and for their country. When cultivating support from Congress, he found television to be his most useful tool and medium. For it was through his televised speeches that he captured the attention of the American people and asked them to conjure their own opinions and views toward the issues at hand. He also called on them to influence their Senators and Representatives in Congress and to share their priorities and ideas in order to make the country better. President Kennedy asked the country to strive for wholeness, to achieve unity, for the prosperity of their lives and the lives of future generations. In his path, he left behind not only the Peace Corps and the Space Program, but a lasting inspiration for America. Perhaps one day, a young American could become the charismatic, intellectual, and decisive President of the United States, just as John F. Kennedy had been.

Sources:

- 1 "President Kennedy: Profile of Power" by Richard Reeves, 1994
- 2 "Fast Facts What Is Peace Corps? Learn About Peace Corps", 2009

Image Credits: (chronological as they appear in this essay)

Public domain, from Wikimedia Commons: *Picture of President Kennedy*

Public Domain, from Wikimedia Commons: *East German construction workers building the Berlin Wall, 20 November 1961*

Public Domain, from Wikimedia Commons: *October 14, 1962: Soviet nuclear missiles discovered in Cuba*

Public Domain, from Wikimedia Commons: *JFK Limousine*