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The following excerpts are taken from the original 15-page US Government TOP SECRET document, "Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Justification for US Military Intervention in Cuba [including cover memoranda], March 13, 1962," available at the [National Security Archive](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20010430/doc1.pdf) website in pdf format at the following link: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20010430/doc1.pdf> (local pdf copy) (if you don't have it, [download Adobe Acrobat Reader](#) to view pdf formatted files).

The introductory text entry point for this document is at [Pentagon Proposed Pretexts for Cuba Invasion in 1962](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20010430/) (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20010430/>) and is reproduced here:

In his new exposé of the National Security Agency entitled [Body of Secrets](#), author James Bamford highlights a set of proposals on Cuba by the Joint Chiefs of Staff codenamed OPERATION NORTHWOODS. This document, titled "Justification for U.S. Military Intervention in Cuba" was provided by the JCS to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara on March 13, 1962, as the key component of Northwoods. Written in response to a request from the Chief of the Cuba Project, Col. Edward Lansdale, the Top Secret memorandum describes U.S. plans to covertly engineer various pretexts that would justify a U.S. invasion of Cuba. These proposals -- part of a secret anti-Castro program known as Operation Mongoose -- included staging the assassinations of Cubans living in the United States, developing a fake "Communist Cuban terror campaign in the Miami area, in other Florida cities and even in Washington," including "sink[ing] a boatload of Cuban refugees (real or simulated)," faking a Cuban airforce attack on a civilian jetliner, and concocting a "Remember the Maine" incident by blowing up a U.S. ship in Cuban waters and then blaming the incident on Cuban sabotage. Bamford himself writes that Operation Northwoods "may be the most corrupt plan ever created by the U.S. government."

**See** • [Friendly Fire](#) - Book: U.S. Military Drafted Plans to Terrorize U.S. Cities to Provoke War With Cuba, by David Ruppe, [ABCNews.com](#), 5/1/01

**Also:** • [Official 9-11 Misrepresentations - Reclaiming Our Voice and Liberties](#) from [Broadening Our Perspectives of 11 September 2001](#), by David Ratcliffe, September 2002

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## Excerpts from declassified 1962 U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Memo

# Operation Northwoods

## Justification for U.S. Military Intervention in Cuba

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TOP SECRET SPECIAL HANDLING NOFORN

THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

13 March 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: Justification for U.S. Military Intervention  
in Cuba (TS)

1. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have considered the attached  
Memorandum for the Chief of Operations, Cuba Project, which

responds to a request of that office for brief but precise description of pretexts which would provide justification for US military intervention in Cuba.

2. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that the proposed memorandum be forwarded as a preliminary submission suitable for planning purposes. It is assumed that there will be similar submissions from other agencies and that these inputs will be used as a basis for developing a time-phased plan. Individual projects can then be considered on a case-by-case basis.

3. Further, it is assumed that a single agency will be given the primary responsibility for developing military and para-military aspects of the basic plan. It is recommended that this responsibility for both overt and covert military operations be assigned the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

SYSTEMATICALLY REVIEWED,  
BY JCS ON 21 May 84  
CLASSIFICATION CONTINUED

[signed]

L. L. Lemnitzer  
Chairman  
Joint Chiefs of Staff

1 Enclosure  
Memo for Chief of Operations, Cuba Project

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### RECOMMENDATIONS

8. It is recommended that:

a. Enclosure A together with its attachments should be forwarded to the Secretary of Defense for approval and transmittal to the Chief of Operations, Cuba Project.

b. This paper NOT be forwarded to commanders of unified or specified commands.

c. This paper NOT be forwarded to US officers assigned to NATO activities.

d. This paper NOT be forwarded to the Chairman, US Delegation, United Nations Military Staff Committee.

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## APPENDIX TO ENCLOSURE A

## DRAFT

## MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: Justification for U.S. Military Intervention  
in Cuba (TS)

1. Reference is made to memorandum from Chief of Operations, Cuba project, for General Craig, subject: "Operation MONGOOSE", dated 5 March 1962, which requested brief but precise description of pretexts which the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider would provide justifications for US military intervention in Cuba.

2. The projects listed in the enclosure hereto are forwarded as a preliminary submission suitable for planning purposes. It is assumed that there will be similar submissions from other agencies and that these inputs will be used as a basis for developing a time-phased plan. The individual projects can then be considered on a case-by-case basis.

3. This plan, incorporating projects selected from the attached suggestions, or from other sources, should be developed to focus all efforts on a specific ultimate objective which would provide adequate justification for US military intervention. Such a plan would enable a logical build-up of incidents to be combined with other seemingly unrelated events to camouflage the ultimate objective and create the necessary impression of Cuban rashness and irresponsibility on a large scale, directed at other countries as well as the United States. The plan would also properly integrate and time phase the courses of action to be pursued. The desired resultant from the execution of this plan would be to place the United States in the apparent position of suffering defensible grievances from a rash and irresponsible government of Cuba and to develop an international image of a Cuban threat to peace in the Western Hemisphere.

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4. Time is an important factor in resolution of the Cuban problem. Therefore, the plan should be so time-phased that projects would be operable within the next few months.

5. Inasmuch as the ultimate objective is overt military intervention, it is recommended that primary responsibility

for developing military and para-military aspects of the plan for both overt and covert military operations be assigned the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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## ANNEX TO APPENDIX TO ENCLOSURE A

### PRETEXTS TO JUSTIFY US MILITARY INTERVENTION IN CUBA

(Note: The courses of action which follow are a preliminary submission suitable only for planning purposes. They are arranged neither chronologically nor in ascending order. Together with similar inputs from other agencies, they are intended to provide a point of departure for the development of a single, integrated, time-phased plan. Such a plan would permit the evaluation of individual projects within the context of cumulative, correlated actions designed to lead inexorably to the objective of adequate justification for US military intervention in Cuba).

1. Since it would seem desirable to use legitimate provocation as the basis for US military intervention in Cuba a cover and deception plan. to include requisite preliminary actions such as has been developed in response to Task 33 c, could be executed as an initial effort to provide Cuban reactions. Harassment plus deceptive actions to convince the Cubans of imminent invasion would be emphasized. Our military posture throughout execution of the plan will allow a rapid change from exercise to intervention if Cuban responses justifies.

2. A series of well coordinated incidents will be planned to take place in and around Guantanamo to give genuine appearance of being done by hostile Cuban forces.

a. Incidents to establish a credible attack (not in chronological order):

- (1) Start rumors (many). Use clandestine radio.
- (2) Land friendly Cubans in uniform "over-the-fence" to stage attack on the base.
- (3) Capture Cuban (friendly) saboteurs inside the base.
- (4) Start riots near the entrance to the base (friendly Cubans).

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- (5) Blow up ammunition inside the base; start fires.
- (6) Burn aircraft on airbase (sabotage).
- (7) Lob mortar shells from outside of base into base. Some damage to installations.
- (8) Capture assault teams approaching from the sea of vicinity of Guantanamo City.
- (9) Capture militia group which storms the base.
- (10) Sabotage ship in harbor; large fires -- napthalene.
- (11) Sink ship near harbor entrance. Conduct funerals for mock-victims (may be lieu of (10)).

b. United States would respond by executing offensive operations to secure water and power supplies, destroying artillery and mortar emplacements which threaten the base.

c. Commence large scale United States military operations.

3. A "Remember the Maine" incident could be arranged in several forms:

a. We could blow up a US ship in Guantanamo Bay and blame Cuba.

b. We could blow up a drone (unmanned) vessel anywhere in the Cuban waters. We could arrange to cause such incident in the vicinity of Havana or Santiago as a spectacular result of Cuban attack from the air or sea, or both. The presense of Cuban planes or ships merely investigating the intent of the vessel could be fairly compelling evidence that the ship was taken under attack. The nearness to Havana or Santiago would add credibility especially to those people that might have heard the blast or have seen the fire. The US could follow with an air/sea rescue operation covered by US fighters to "evacuate" remaining members of the non-existent crew. Casualty lists in US newspapers would cause a helpful wave of national indignation.

4. We could develop a Communist Cuba terror campaign in the Miami area, in other Florida cities and even in Washington.

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The terror campaign could be pointed at Cuban refugees seeking haven in the United States. We could sink a boatload of Cubans enroute to Florida (real or simulated). We could foster attempts on lives of Cuban refugees in the United States even to the extent of wounding in instances to be widely publicized. Exploding a few plastic bombs in carefully chosen spots, the arrest of Cuban agents and the release of prepared documents substantiating Cuban involvement also would be helpful in projecting the idea of an irresponsible government.

5. A "Cuban-based, Castro-supported" filibuster could be simulated against a neighboring Caribbean nation (in the vein of the 14th of June invasion of the Dominican Republic). We know that Castro is backing subversive efforts clandestinely against Haiti, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Nicaragua at present and possible others. These efforts can be magnified and additional ones contrived for exposure. For example, advantage can be taken of the sensitivity of the Dominican Air Force to intrusions within their national air space. "Cuban" B-26 or C-46 type aircraft could make cane-burning raids at night. Soviet Bloc incendiaries could be found. This could be coupled with "Cuban" messages to the Communist underground in the Dominican Republic and "Cuban" shipments of arms which would be found, or intercepted, on the beach.

6. Use of MIG type aircraft by US pilots could provide additional provocation. Harassment of civil air, attacks on surface shipping and destruction of US military drone aircraft by MIG type planes would be useful as complementary actions. An F-86 properly painted would convince air passengers that they saw a Cuban MIG, especially if the pilot of the transport were to announce such fact. The primary drawback to this suggestion appears to be the security risk inherent in obtaining or modifying an aircraft. However, reasonable copies of the MIG could be purchased from US resources in about three months.

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7. Hijacking attempts against civil air and surface craft should appear to continue as harassing measures condoned by the government of Cuba. Concurrently, genuine defections of Cuban civil and military air and surface craft should be encouraged.

8. It is possible to create an incident which will demonstrate convincingly that a Cuban aircraft has attacked and shot down a chartered civil airliner enroute from the United States to Jamaica, Guatemala, Panama or Venezuela. The destination would be chosen only to cause the flight plan route to cross Cuba. The passengers could be a group of college students off on a

holiday or any grouping of persons with a common interest to support chartering a non-scheduled flight.

a. An aircraft at Eglin AFB would be painted and numbered as an exact duplicate for a civil registered aircraft belonging to a CIA proprietary organization in the Miami area. At a designated time the duplicate would be substituted for the actual civil aircraft and would be loaded with the selected passengers, all boarded under carefully prepared aliases. The actual registered aircraft would be converted to a drone.

b. Take off times of the drone aircraft and the actual aircraft will be scheduled to allow a rendezvous south of Florida. From the rendezvous point the passenger-carrying aircraft will descend to minimum altitude and go directly into an auxiliary field at Eglin AFB where arrangements will have been made to evacuate the passengers and return the aircraft to its original status. The drone aircraft meanwhile will continue to fly the filed flight plan. When over Cuba the drone will begin transmitting on the international distress frequency a "MAY DAY" message stating he is under attack by Cuban MIG aircraft. The transmission will be interrupted by the destruction of aircraft which will be triggered by radio signal. This will allow IACO radio

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stations in the Western Hemisphere to tell the US what has happened to the aircraft instead of the US trying to "sell" the incident.

9. It is possible to create an incident which will make it appear that Communist Cuban MIGs have destroyed a USAF aircraft over international waters in an unprovoked attack.

a. Approximately 4 of 5 F-101 aircraft will be dispatched in trail from Homestead AFB, Florida, to the vicinity of Cuba. Their mission will be to reverse course and simulate fakir aircraft for an air defense exercise in southern Florida. These aircraft would conduct variations of these flights at frequent intervals. Crews would be briefed to remain at least 12 miles off the Cuban coast; however, they would be required to carry live ammunition in the event that hostile actions were taken by the Cuban MIGs.

b. On one such flight, a pre-briefed pilot would fly tail-end Charley at considerable interval between aircraft. While near the Cuban Island this pilot would broadcast that he had been jumped by MIGs and was going down. No other calls would be made. The pilot would then fly directly west at extremely low altitude and land at a secure base, an

Eglin auxiliary. The aircraft would be met by the proper people, quickly stored and given a new tail number. The pilot who had performed the mission under an alias, would resume his proper identity and return to his normal place of business. The pilot and aircraft would then have disappeared.

c. At precisely the same time that the aircraft was presumably shot down a submarine or small surface craft would disburse F-101 parts, parachute, etc., at approximately 15 to 20 miles off the Cuban coast and depart. The pilots retuning to Homestead would have a true story as far as they knew. Search ships and aircraft could be dispatched and parts of aircraft found.

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## ENCLOSURE B

### FACTS BEARING ON THE PROBLEM

1. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have previously stated\* that US unilateral military intervention in Cuba can be undertaken in the event that the Cuban regime commits hostile acts against US forces or property which would serve as an incident upon which to base overt intervention.

2. The need for positive action in the event that current covert efforts to foster an internal Cuban rebellion are unsuccessful was indicated\*\* by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 7 March 1962, as follows:

" - - - determination that a credible internal revolt is impossible of attainment during the next 9-10 months will require a decision by the United States to develop a Cuban "provocation" as justification for positive US military action."

3. It is understood that the Department of State also is preparing suggested courses of action to develop justification for US military intervention in Cuba.

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\* (JCS 1969/303)

\*\* (JCS 1969/313)



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