

13 December 1971

Mr Rodger Hayne  
75 School Street  
Cambridge 02139

Dear Mr Hayne,

Although I can ill spare the time and am listening to the UN Security Council while I write this letter (which is therefore likely to be disjointed and sketchy), I do feel a responsibility to respond to your request for my views on the summary of the Salandria speech which you sent me. (I would like to have the full text which you kindly offered me.)

I would hesitate to say categorically that Salandria's thesis is irresponsible, perhaps because of the warm personal affection that I felt for him during the years when we were in close touch in our work on the case, but I consider it, at the least, defective. It is a somewhat up-dated version of the thesis I first heard from Vince—or to be more accurate, from him and Tom Katen jointly—early in 1966. I felt then, as I feel now, that by applying inferential logic to the events (or some of them) surrounding the assassination, you can arrive at best at one of many possible and equally logical explanations, which in the absence of proof or evidence that excludes other solutions remains no more than a theoretical exercise. At less than best, the exercise may be dangerous, in leading to a logical but false reconstruction, and encouraging a fixation which too easily brushes aside material evidence and alternate hypotheses which may have a lesser personal appeal but a greater evidentiary validity.

In specific terms, I am completely unable to accept some specific interpretations which Salandria makes. For example, his suggestion that the federal government deliberately provided the public "with data which prove a conspiracy...while simultaneously contending...that there was no conspiracy". My study of the records and procedures of the Warren Commission convinced me long ago that the evidence which contravenes its conclusions was provided in complete inadvertence and ignorance, out of haste and confusion (and of course spokesmen for the Commission adamantly deny that such evidence is to be found in its records).

Similarly, his suggestion that "the killers actually preempted...criticism by supplying the information...(and) the critics..." seems not only unfounded but absurd, speaking from my own experience as a critic and from sustained and close knowledge of the experience of others. There were a few crude and ridiculous attempts by individuals who may or may not have been unleashed by official agencies to gull the critics and help them to make fools of themselves, and Salandria was sometimes highly gullible where others had the common sense to recognize these emissaries or independent mischief-makers for the frauds they obviously were. There was also one instance when his own over-hasty assimilation of documentary evidence almost led to a public spectacle in which the critics would have made mortifying fools of themselves; but I feel sure that no one entrapped Salandria on that occasion, in which I was intimately concerned.

Salandria's hypothesis with respect to Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers must be evaluated in the context of his persistent suspicion and frequent charges over the years that this and that individual critic was really a CIA (or FBI) agent. I would tend to regard that as a somewhat paranoid tendency characteristic of Salandria and perhaps one or two others among the critics who, in common with Vince, betrayed the great deficiency of judgment of espousing Garrison and refusing to give up the ghost of that audacious charlatan even when the evidence of his bankruptcy was piled sky-high. Salandria's theory of a falling-out between the CIA and the military is only a variation of his earlier similar theme of a falling-out between the FBI and other branches of the Government, which proved to be rooted in the misreading of documentary evidence mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

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For some years Salandria has been reading entirely too much, in my opinion, into the message to Air Force One on 11/22/63 that there was no conspiracy and only a lone assassin. His hypothesis does not even offer real internal logic, for if the message was part of a grand strategy of cold-warriors it was merely self-defeating. On 11/22/63 the cold-war advocates could have triggered a full-scale attack on Cuba or even a war with the Soviet Union by fostering the public suspicion that the assassin or assassins were agents of Castro and/or the Kremlin. Again, study of the record together with personal recollection of 11/22/63 and the several days which followed persuades me that a major effort was made in Washington and by the State Department among other agencies to counter the communist-conspiracy-agitation by Texas officials and to reduce the clear danger of an act of war committed in hysteria on the pretext of avenging the nation for the assassination of its President.

The weakness of Salandria's reasoning is exemplified in his remarks about the attitude of the Kennedy family. It does not refute or reinforce a conspiracy but is merely irrelevant, for the massive solid evidence of conspiracy exists in the material and forensic evidence and cannot be diminished by any Kennedy family attitude any more than it can be or needs to be fortified by such means. The evidence is one thing, and the position of the family is a separate phenomenon entirely whose motivations are very obscure indeed. An interpretation just as plausible as Salandria's was published years ago in an editorial titled "A Dead Brother is No Brother"—and personally I find the latter hypothesis quite plausible.

Although this commentary is not exhaustive, it is perhaps sufficient to indicate my views, and in any case I really must close now. With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,