

Dear George,

5/1/91

I've forgotten the context but when we were speaking the other day you questioned my statement that JFK had ordered the liquidation of our involvement in Viet Nam. I told you that what I'd planned as my second book was "Tiger to Ride: the Untold Story of the Cuba Missile Crisis" and that the research for it was in the basement and not easy for me to retrieve. You may remember that I told you the Post's morgue should hold two short pieces, the first a few days before he was assassinated, the second a few days after it; that the first reported a Pentagon re-evaluation the result of which was that we could start withdrawing our "advisers" and the second that the re-evaluation was optimistic and withdrawn. I also told you that in 1967 I had interviewed General Gavin, who'd told me that JFK called his generals in one at a time and tried to explain to them that Vietnam was a political problem and that political problems are not susceptible of military solutions.

While I did not have the time to make a real search, which would have taxed me too much in any event, I did recall some correspondence on this in a file in my office. I remembered a letter of two years ago from a friend who was involved in which he goes into this a bit. I've copied the relevant portions of his letter, nothing omitted in my taping the top of one page to the bottom of the other, to give you his account and his citation of one of the two NSAMs that is also probably in the Post's morgue. I believe that the second may be dated 11/26/63 from his reference to that date. Well, I'm not 100% certain that the second was in the form of a NSAM but I think it was. In any event, in two short stories the Post reported both and I clipped both stories.

I have from time to time disagreed with some of the interpretations of events by this friend but I have no reason to doubt his representation of fact or of his personal involvement that he reports. In addition, I have a clear recollection ~~that~~ my interview of Gavin, when and where it was and that although the interview was for a syndicated radio program, "Authors Roundtable," I'd not had time to read the book he was promoting.

I do not remember anything like this from Oliver Stone's script but I won't be a bit surprised if he has some extension of this in it before he finishes filming. He can use it to fortify what is in it, that the CIA offered JFK.

I'm glad Moo told me about Pershing Gervais' letter to the editor and that you phoned him. I'm sure I'd have enjoyed listening to him, as I did so many times in the coffee shop of the ~~bleau~~, as they all referred to the Fountainbleau. In any event, you can quote him now. I have a file on the tax case against Garrison that Pershing made possible if that interests you. Because I knew the explanation he gave under oath was false I've always wondered what the pressure applied to him was. I suspect they may have had him on taxes and dropped that, preferring to nail Garrison.

I hope the Post is not arranging to get beat on this story!

est,

*Harold*

I have been trying to fight the battle of the Kennedy Legacy for years. I must admit that I did not think he was the greatest President when he moved in to the White House. As I watched him, and I was quite close to him by 1963...with only one boss between him and me...I began to appreciate that he was laying plans for a great and most effective second term. His NSAM #55 was the key document and it was dated June 1961.

You speak of Gen Gavin confirming JFK's order to withdraw troops from Vietnam. I can give you more on that. Gavin was right. JFK sent Gen Krulak to Vietnam in Aug/Sep 1963. This gave Krulak the needed position to be able to set down Kennedy's policy for Vietnam. Then JFK sent Maxwell Taylor, then Chairman JCS and Robert McNamara, Sec/Def to Vietnam in Sep 1963. Their trip was for public display.

While they were gone JFK and his closest advisors gave their Vietnam policy to Krulak and ordered Krulak to write up, elaborately, the "McNamara-Taylor Vietnam Trip Report." Krulak and I worked around the clock, at JCS, with cots in the offices to do that Report precisely as it came from the White House.

When it was finished, printed on legal-size paper and bound in thick leather covers with JFK's name on it, illustrated, 2 to 3 inches thick, it [two copies] was flown to Hawaii in a jet fighter and given to Taylor and McNamara. They studied it as they flew back to Washington. As they landed on the White House lawn in a helicopter from Andrews Field, they carried this

Report and gave it to JFK. He read and approved "their" Report. It became the substance of NSAM #263. This was the most important of the JFK documents of the Vietnam era. It stated that 1000 troops would be out by Christmas, and despite his death they did come home. It stated that by the end of 1965 all Americans, not just all American military, would be home. That was to be his campaign issue of 1964.

NSAM #263 was published in early Oct 1963. Diem died--not as JFK had planned...JFK had sent a plane to fly the Diems to Europe--on Nov 1. The JFK cabinet...a majority of them...met in Honolulu on Nov 20, and were in flight to Tokyo on Nov 22. On Nov 20 their agenda, with Lodge, had been...not the JFK NSAM #263, but rather the LBJ agenda of Nov 26. In other words their agenda before JFK died was already a new agenda. They knew!