American troops. CIA operatives actually assured the Brigade leaders American military assistance would be there if they needed it.[30] Howard Hunt, the original chief of political action for the project, had no doubt about this. When Kennedy publicly excluded the use of American troops before the invasion, "I did not take him seriously. The statement was, we thought, a superb effort in misdirection." [31]

Better "an aggressor than a bum" may have been Kennedy's first reaction. But, despite great pressure, he held the line. The CIA planners did not reckon with his inherent prudence and his ability to refuse escalation. Reflecting that summer at Hyannis Port, on those who had wanted to go in with full force, Kennedy said, "We're not going to plunge into an irresponsible action just because a fanatical fringe . . . puts so-called national pride above national reason. Do you think I'm going to carry on my conscience the responsibility for the wanton maiming and killing of children like our children we saw here this evening?" [32] In 1965, Dulles reminisced with Tom Wicker of the *New York Times* about the Bay of Pigs. Kennedy, he said, obviously had not liked the idea. In order to get him to go along, Dulles had to suggest repeatedly, without ever saying so explicitly, that, if Kennedy canceled the project, he would appear less zealous than Eisenhower against communism in the hemisphere. "This was a mistake," Dulles said. "I should have realized that, if he had no enthusiasm about the idea in the first place, he would drop it at the first opportunity rather than do the things necessary to make it succeed." [33]

The second withheld thought was a plan to assassinate Castro. That plan made no sense in isolation. The elimination of Castro in a vacuum would only have led to a more violent Cuban regime under Fidel's radical younger brother Raul or under the Argentine revolutionist Che Guevara. In the context of invasion, however, the murder of Castro might produce enough shock and disorganization to put the regime in jeopardy. As early as December 1959, Colonel J. C. King, Chief of CIA's Western Hemisphere Division, recommended that "thorough consideration be given to the elimination of Fidel Castro" in order to "accelerate the fall" of his government.* Dulles and Bissell approved King's inquiry.[34] In May 1960, Howard Hunt, offering his recommendations to Bissell, listed first: "Assassinate Castro *before* or coincident with the invasion. . . . Without Castro to inspire them the Rebel Army and *milicia* would collapse in leaderless confusion." [35] Though Dulles and Bissell said not a word about it at the Bay of Pigs meetings or thereafter to the board of inquiry, the CIA had pursued, if with spectacular ineptitude, its plan to murder Castro before or during the invasion.

* Actually the American ambassador to Cuba, Arthur Gardner, had proposed to Batista in 1957 that the CIA or FBI murder Castro. Batista said, No, no, we couldn't do that: we're Cubans" (as told by Gardner to Hugh Thomas, *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom* [London, 1971], 947).

Schlesinger: What Kennedy

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Intelligence agencies, sealed off by walls of secrecy from the rest of the community, tend to form societies of their own. Prolonged immersion in the self-contained, self-justifying, ultimately hallucinatory world of clandestinity and deception erodes the reality principle. So intelligence operatives, in the CIA as well as the FBI, had begun to see themselves as the appointed guardians of the Republic infinitely more devoted and knowledgeable than transient elected officials, morally authorized to do on their own whatever they believed the nation's security demanded. Let others interfere at their peril. J. D. Esterline, the CIA's supervisor of planning for the Bay of Pigs, bitterly told the board of inquiry, "As long as decisions by professionals can be set aside by people who know not whereof they speak, you won't succeed." [36]

The CIA had struck out on its own years before. Congress had liberated it from normal budgetary restraints in 1949. Through most of the 1950s the fact that the Secretary of State and the director of Central Intelligence were brothers gave the Agency unusual freedom. "A word from one to the other," wrote Howard Hunt, "substituted for weeks of inter- and intra-agency debate." [37] Eisenhower, reluctant to commit conventional armed force, used the CIA as the routine instrument of American intervention abroad. Covert-action operators working on relatively small budgets, helped overthrow governments deemed pro-Communist in Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954), failed to do so in Indonesia (1958), helped install supposedly prowestern governments in Egypt (1954) and Laos (1959) and planned the overthrow and murder of Castro in 1960.

Congress and the press looked on these activities, insofar as they knew about them, with complacency. Only one group had grave misgivings and informed criticism; expressed, however, in the deepest secrecy. This, improbably, was the President's Board of Consultants on Foreign Intelligence Activi-