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July 3, 1995

Professor Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.
Graduate School and University Center
City University of New York
33 W. 44nd Street
New York, New York 10036

Dear Mr. Schlesinger,

In the same issue (V.74, #4) in which your essay, *Back to the Womb?*, appeared, *Foreign Affairs* also published a letter by Roger Hilsman on Robert McNamara's recent book. Hilsman wrote, "McNamara does conclude that Kennedy would not have made Vietnam an American war. But Kennedy's view was much stronger than McNamara suggests. Kennedy told me, as his action officer on Vietnam, over and over again that my job was to keep American involvement at a minimum so that we could withdraw as soon as the opportunity presented itself." He also wrote, "All of the reasons that McNamara now gives for why the United States should not have made Vietnam an American war were repeated to him again and again - not only by the experts and their memos but also by Robert F. Kennedy, W. Averell Harriman, George Ball, and me." (p.164) Thus Hilsman suggests that even that early, Robert supported his brother's stout opposition to increased American involvement in Vietnam, and that the President's close advisors were not confused about his intentions.

Jack Kennedy's saber-rattling campaign rhetoric in 1963, which I find ambiguous, has been used as evidence he had no true intention to withdraw. LBJ's antiwar campaign rhetoric taught me that campaign statements may mask opposite intentions.

As you were very close to the events of that time, do you have an opinion on what Kennedy truly intended to do? I know that events certainly might have overwhelmed any intention he had in 1963, but is Hilsman right that Kennedy's clear intention to withdraw was known to his close and trusted associates? (Perhaps I should mention that I campaigned for Nixon *against* Kennedy in 1960, and that I originally supported US involvement in Vietnam. After the publication of the Pentagon Papers I developed what I hope is a healthy skepticism. Now I find the opinions of individuals like you who were so close to events more persuasive than the campaign statements of politicians.)

Thank you very much,

Sincerely yours,

Gary L. Aguilar, MD
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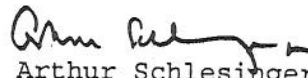
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20 July 1995

Dear Dr Aguilar:

For reasons set forth in chapter 31 of Robert Kennedy and His Times and by John Newman in his book Kennedy and Vietnam, I am reasonably sure that Hilsman, Bundy and McNamara are right in saying that Kennedy would never have sent US ground troops into Vietnam and would have found some means of withdrawal from Vietnam by 1965. I do think, however, that Johnson in proceeding to Americanize the war did what he honestly thought Kennedy would have done. But I do not believe Kennedy would ever have done it.

Sincerely yours,


Arthur Schlesinger, jr

Dr Gary L Aguilar

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