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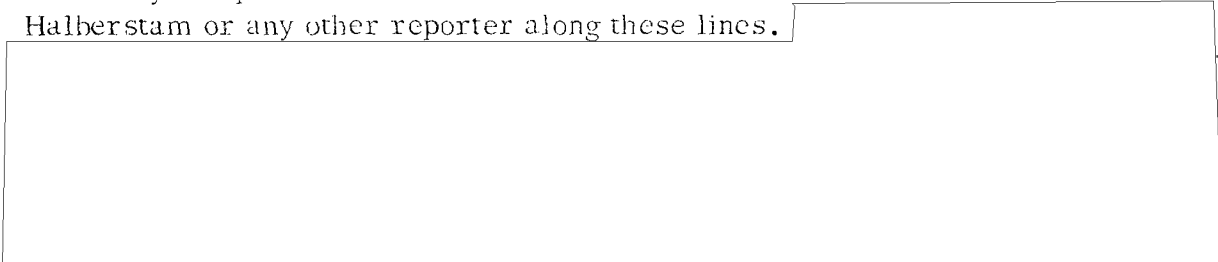
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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Meeting with Marguerite Higgins in the Office of the Director on 5 November 1963

1. Marguerite Higgins had been attempting for some time, since my return to Washington on 5 October, to arrange an interview. After several delays and cancellations, Higgins and I met with the Director in his office on 5 November for a conversation lasting approximately forty-five minutes.

2. Higgins' first question to me was whether I had talked to David Halberstam, New York Times correspondent in Saigon, prior to my departure from Vietnam and whether I had said to Halberstam that Ambassador Lodge was attempting to achieve my recall. Higgins added that she had been provided this information by a senior White House aide. I denied the allegation flatly and pointed out that I had had no conversation whatsoever with Halberstam or any other reporter along these lines.



(b)(1)
(b)(3)

3. Thereafter, the conversation ranged generally over aspects of the successful 1 November coup d'etat, and the problem of where we go from here. Higgins took the initiative throughout and it became quickly apparent that she finds herself entirely out of sympathy with the coup d'etat and with the killing of Ngo Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu. She feels that the achievement of a democratic government in South Vietnam is impossible at this time and expressed the hope that the U.S. Government would not attempt to proceed in an unrealistic manner in an effort to achieve an unattainable political objective in South Vietnam. It seems clear also that Higgins is skeptical about the capabilities of the new Vietnamese leadership to proceed in a united way with determined and effective prosecution of the war. She was interested in an appraisal of various leading personalities in the new government and Mr. McCone provided her with his

impressions of some of the more prominent figures. Higgins expressed the view that the chances of the new government might be about 50-50 in terms of carrying out the programs and reforms we hope for. However, from the tenor of her conversation I would estimate that she rates these chances lower. She said she plans to leave for Saigon on 6 November and to spend some time in the provinces she had previously visited as well as in Saigon itself.

4. Higgins said that she felt the 1 November coup d'etat had been caused by the American Government, primarily through the curtailment of economic aid. It was her view that, because of U.S. measures and public postures, we had left the Generals no alternative but to overthrow the Diem administration. She did not approve of this course of action taken against an allied government.

5. Higgins expressed a very adverse opinion about Tri Quang. She said that she had talked with him personally and that he had threatened to carry out further immolations and "to blackmail the U.S. Government", (Higgins reaction) unless our Government worked toward Diem's overthrow. She thought that Tri Quang's political intransigence had been clearly demonstrated by recent events. On the whole she considered him a ruthless and unscrupulous personality who was willing to sacrifice the lives of his credulous followers in the name of religion but actually for the accomplishment of his own strongly held political purposes.

6. Higgins said that she had talked to Roger Hilsman at least twice since the 1 November coup d'etat and had expressed her criticism of the coup as well as her adverse view with respect to American involvement. She had asked Hilsman to provide Madame Nhu with some information on the fate of the family's children. She said that she now felt she had become persona non grata with Hilsman.

7. Mr. McCone conducted his part of the discussion along the general line of our Government's attempting to do the best we can to help make the new Vietnamese administration work out satisfactorily. He admitted that potential serious difficulties could loom ahead and said he felt confident that our government would not impose unrealistic demands on the new Vietnamese Administration. Nevertheless, we would press for some reforms similar to

those we had sought from Ngo Dinh Diem. Mr. McCone made it clear that responsible American officials would not expect an easy or swift solution in South Vietnam from the country's new government. He recommended that Higgins, during her forthcoming trip to South Vietnam, pay particular attention to the emerging form and substance of the new government and to important civil and military programs such as the strategic hamlet program.

John H. Richardson

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