

7 October 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Meeting in DCI's Office - 0800-0930 - 7 October 1963

Attended by: DCI, DDCI, DDP, A/DDP, DDI, Mr. Cooper,
C/FE, Mr. Richardson, Knoche

COS Debrief

After an exchange of amenities, during which Mr. Richardson described his travel to the US from Saigon over the weekend, Mr. Richardson said that he had last seen Ambassador Lodge about Noon on Saturday, 5 October.

The Director asked what the Ambassador had had to say. Mr. Richardson responded that Lodge was pleasant, expressed personal regards for Richardson, and commented that anyone on the South Vietnam scene "burns out" and he figured he (Lodge) would also burn out someday. Lodge said that there had been no differences in opinion between the two but that the main problem was that Nhu has become a symbol of evil and that the Nhu-Richardson relationship was undesirable. Lodge told Richardson he would be happy to work with him anywhere except by implication in Saigon.

Richardson said that he suspects that Lodge may view the CIA and its role as preferably only that of a collection agency. Richardson explained that he had been able to give Lodge the first briefing on the station's activities only last Wednesday, 2 October. Lodge had admitted that he should have found time for this earlier but explained that he had been enmeshed in the crisis ever since his arrival.

There then ensued a discussion of the impact on Saigon of the 24 August cable, State #243. DCI asked if Lodge took this cable as an order to overthrow the government. Richardson replied in the affirmative and said that after receipt of this cable,

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discussions in the Embassy involving the Ambassador, Trueheart, Harkins and Richardson centered primarily on the manner of trying to accomplish Nhu's removal. The big question was whether direct contact on this subject should be made with Diem and perhaps Nhu. Harkins felt the effort should be made directly with Diem. Trueheart and Richardson felt this was not practical.

Richardson explained that while this problem was being considered during the weekend, the VOA made the famous broadcast which, in effect, invited the generals to rebel.

On Monday, Ambassador Lodge presented his credentials. This was followed by a meeting in Lodge's home. Richardson asked Lodge if he considered #243 to be a command decision from Washington. Lodge said yes. (Richardson noted that Lodge has a tendency to be aggressive in interpretation of instructions and that care must be exercised in the preparation of them.)

There was further discussion of the points made in State #243. The point was made that some officials in Washington, including the President, had felt there might be some options in these instructions but Richardson said it was apparent to him that Lodge thought there were no options.

Richardson explained that Lodge engaged in no process of analysis or consultation with the Country Team members on #243. To Lodge the only important thing was whether to approach Diem or Nhu directly. By Monday, 26 August, in Saigon it was a simple matter of which generals should be approached.

The DCI asked Richardson if he had objected or otherwise provided advice during that weekend in Saigon. Richardson said no, that he could see nothing useful in objecting. He had joined in Lodge's decision and had tried to carry it out.

On Monday, 26 August, Harkins said he was willing, if he had to, to approach the generals. At this point, Lodge told Harkins and Richardson that the contacts with the generals should not be on an official personal basis. Lodge said that once Harkins would involve himself directly with the generals, the US would have reached

a point of no return. Lodge, Harkins and Richardson then discussed the question of how many generals should be informed. It was agreed to inform only as many as necessary to avoid a "pocket veto" by any of the generals of the nine points listed in #243. Richardson said that the essence of the nine points was to get rid of Nhu, keep Diem if the generals wanted him, broaden the government, release the Buddhists, avoid bloodshed, etc. The only thing the nine points didn't say was to openly request the military to overthrow the government but this was taken in Saigon as the thrust and meaning of #243.

It was agreed that the word would be delivered to the generals under Richardson's supervision. The generals at this point were assumed by Lodge to be eager to hear the pitch. The precise pitch to the generals was put in writing by the station and cleared with DCM Trueheart.

The decision was made to approach just two generals -- Khanh and Khiem. It was agreed others couldn't be trusted at the time. The decision to approach the two generals was approved by Lodge with Harkins present, on Monday, 26 August. The message was delivered by Conein and Spera on Monday afternoon.

Khanh said he wasn't ready; Khiem said thanks, I have to talk with Minh. On Tuesday or Wednesday, Khiem said the military would be ready to move within a week and he outlined the state of his forces.

By Thursday, however, Khiem had become hard to find and by the end of that day, it appeared to Richardson that the operation was at an end.

Harkins met with Khiem on Saturday, 31 August, and after this meeting all hands in Saigon agreed the operation was over.

Richardson explained that throughout that week, DCM Trueheart was deep in all details and all aspects of the operation. Trueheart functioned as a sort of chief of operations, giving constant scrutiny to all details. Lodge sat in on a few of the post mortem sessions after the meetings with the generals, but otherwise did not participate in the meetings.

Richardson explained that it was on Wednesday, 28 August, just prior to a scheduled meeting between Conein and Minh at 0815 that he (Richardson) was telephoned by General Weede. Richardson and Conein, at Weede's request, went to Weede's office at 0745 to read the message from General Taylor to Harkins which told Harkins that the essence of #243 was under reconsideration in Washington.

Richardson and Conein had only 15 minutes to "read, absorb and decide" what to do in light of the Taylor message before leaving to meet with Minh at 0815.

Richardson decided, in light of this message, to have Conein and Spera fill up the meeting with Minh with details but no commitments. At the meeting Minh did not ask for further assurances but asked for suspension of US aid.

(At this point, Mr. Cooper asked Richardson what would have happened if there had been no Taylor message and a more specific pitch had been made to Minh. Richardson responded that it was his opinion that this would have had no effect on the ultimate situation since the key generals lacked troops and capability.)

Conein and Spera returned from the meeting with Minh to discuss the results. Ambassador Lodge attended the debriefing session and was told of Richardson's decision and the results of the meeting. Lodge was very angry. He said that Richardson was under orders to push and he wanted to know why he had not been consulted before Richardson made his decision. Richardson explained that there had been insufficient time to do this. Arrangements for the meeting with Minh had been very elaborate. It was Lodge's view that Richardson's decision had ruined the coup plan. Richardson told Lodge he disagreed.

(On Saturday, 5 October, Ambassador Lodge apologized to Richardson for having lost his temper the day of the meeting with Minh.)

DCI asked if General Taylor's cable to Harkins had been coordinated here in Washington. The answer was no.

The DCI cited Ambassador Lodge's message #478 of 11 September describing the Diem regime as a sinking ship and asked if Richardson had seen this message. The answer was no.

The Director asked Richardson what the climate in Vietnam had been after 1 September. Richardson replied that the situation was marked by student demonstrations and repressive actions by the Government, universities and schools were closed, and all of this brought emotional shock and indignation to many Americans there. By mid-September the Government's repression had affected USOM and its educational program, USIS, etc. Richardson said that Lodge, like many others, reacted with a great sense of shock. Richardson said that Lodge refers to Diem as a medieval despot and that Lodge sees himself as dealing with pure tyranny.

The Director then mentioned Lodge's cables of 19 and 20 September in which he reversed ground and concluded that the only practical course of action was to work with the present regime while attempts are made to reform the Government. Richardson said he did not recall having seen these messages. Colby explained that about this time conflicting messages had arrived from Saigon - one was a Country Team message, the other was from Lodge. Richardson said that throughout none of these issues were subjected to the normal Country Team consultative process. The Country Team assessment of the extent of disaffection was done by deputies of the departments involved although Richardson himself felt them important enough that he participated in them. Richardson characterized the procedures in the Embassy as a "lone wolf operation".

The DCI noting that Richardson had not seen many of Lodge's messages, asked if Lodge had seen all of Richardson's messages. Richardson responded saying that all his assessments were available to Lodge via Truehart but that not all of Richardson's messages were automatically given to Lodge.

Mr. Cline asked Richardson whether Lodge ever discussed the philosophy of the Ambassador's relations with the Chief of Station along the lines of the Starnes article. Richardson said no - that basically Lodge had little direct contact with the Station. Richardson reiterated, however, Lodge's statement that he realized he should have had an early and clear picture of Station activities but that he had not found time to do so. Cline then asked where Starnes could have obtained his information. Richardson said that Hanson of BOB had told Richardson recently that Lodge, in conversation with Hanson,

had taken a line similar to that of the Starnes' article. Richardson said, however, that Lodge had never talked with him along this line.

The DCI recalled his telephone conversation with a Scripps-Howard official in which he suggested that they find out from Starnes who his sources were. Starnes had replied to Scripps-Howard that the article was fully attributable and supportable.

There then ensued a discussion of the possibility that Lodge was the source of the Starnes article.

DCI explained that it was his information that the Frankel story that the President was recalling Richardson had come straight out of Saigon despite the Washington dateline.

Richardson explained that after his 5 October meeting with Lodge just before leaving, he was talking to Dave Smith about the session with Lodge. He later discovered that Halberstam had already filed a story on this the night before, and it was while briefing Dave Smith that Richardson and Smith saw Rusk's cable to Lodge referring to press leaks of bickering and asking that an end be put to such matters. (Richardson had been informed on 4 October of the Agency's request to return TDY, and he advised Lodge of this on the same day -- 4 October -- that Halberstam filed his story.)

Richardson said that Lodge has not accused the Agency of obstructing him. Flott, one of Lodge's assistants, told Richardson that Lodge was at "a peak of euphoria" at the beginning of the hoped-for coup. According to Flott, Lodge saw a whole new deal coming out of it. After the coup possibility faded, Flott said that Lodge thought the Station had performed magnificently in the first few days, but that thereafter Lodge considered them incompetent.

The Director said he could understand Lodge's position - that Lodge had read #243 as an order, had tried to put his forces to work, and then when he appeared to be halfway home, the Taylor message reversed the process without Lodge having had a chance to be consulted. The DCI told Richardson he thought it was poor judgment not to have checked with Lodge in some way before making his decision on the day of the meeting with Minh.

Mr. Helms pointed out that no one could logically hope for a successful coup without having first sized up the prospects.

Mr. Cooper said that it had been sometime around 18 or 19 August that Mike Forrestal had called him and asked for a daily assessment of South Vietnam coup reports. These were prepared by OCI and concluded in essence that there was not too much probability of a coup. The DCI said it was important that he be shown copies of these assessments.

The DCI asked Richardson to explain Dunn's role in Saigon. Richardson said that Dunn is an executive aide to Lodge. He maintains liaison with the U.S. military, screens reading material for Lodge but that his duties are not precisely defined. Richardson said Flott had told him early in the game that Dunn had a series of attitudes toward the Agency deriving from his previous Pentagon post in General Wheeler's office. According to Flott, Dunn's line was that the Agency was active in too many fields that should be the responsibilities of the military. Flott told Richardson that Dunn has needled the Agency in conversations with Lodge but that Truehart has stood up in the Agency's defense. Richardson said, however, that Truehart has never mentioned this to him.

Colby stated that on 6 September at a dinner party in the presence of Joseph Alsop, Pepper Martin of the U.S. News and World Report and Keyes Beech of the Chicago Daily News, Dunn had told Conein that Richardson would be replaced. This, according to Richardson, would indicate that Lodge had apparently made up his mind to replace Richardson sometime within two weeks after Lodge's arrival and before a briefing on the Station's activities.

Richardson said that Lodge says he does not want "yes men" around him, but it is Richardson's personal impression he does not like anyone to disagree with him. Richardson said that Lodge apparently views him as a public symbol of a relationship with Nhu that had to end.

The Director inquired as to the origin of CIA's relationship with Nhu. Mr. Colby said that the relationship goes back prior to the installation of the Diem regime. Nhu had been running an opposition newspaper. We were in contact with him and on the eve of Diem's accession to power we had tried to recruit Nhu as an agent. Nhu had

considered the proposal but backed away when Diem was made Prime Minister. This recruitment pitch probably explains Nhu's continued suspicion of CIA. The Agency has maintained a relationship with Nhu in the Ambassador's full knowledge. We have often tried to get someone else to carry on the contact, but no one else has wanted to.

To clarify his own position in this matter the DCI described Lodge's personal and confidential letter to Secretary Rusk in which he suggested that Lansdale become Chief of Station and the DCI read aloud from his personal and confidential letter sent to Lodge on 19 September. Richardson said that Lodge had not discussed the DCI letter with him. The Director explained there had been no direct request from Lodge to change or reorganize the Station, that this had come only from McNamara and the newspapers. The DCI said that he had then decided to recall Richardson for TDY and consultation but that he, the DCI, has made no final decision as to what will be done next.

The Director then announced the following instructions:

1. There is to be no surfacing by us of the fact that Richardson is here. He will remain in a safe apartment in the area.
2. Richardson is to review the agreed weekend instructions to Lodge and the DCI notes on the 5 October meeting in the White House.
3. A brief statement is to be prepared by close of business today setting forth the principal attacks on the Agency by the press (particularly those accusing us of making policy, working at cross purposes, supplying erroneous information, supporting the police, etc.) and countering these with the facts of our reporting and activities, etc. The counters will show that our reporting fits logically with the new instructions to Lodge. This paper is to be prepared for the President's use prior to his Wednesday morning press conference.
4. The DCI has reviewed Colby's proposal to reduce the size and scope of the Saigon Station. The DCI wants this proposal carefully reviewed. He said it is his impression we had grown into undertaking certain activities that we carry out only because we started them.

5. DCI said that under no circumstances should the Agency get into the subject of assassinations or other highly sensitive matters with Lodge. The DCI pointed out he knows Lodge well and Lodge has no concept of security and has long used the press as an instrument of power.

H. KNOX

