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31 October 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Discussion with Governor Averell Harriman at Lunch,
October 30th

1. We reviewed the South Vietnam situation. I stated that we had reached a point of decision. I felt that we either had to make up our minds to go along with Diem or to put our shoulder behind the coup -- that we were studying the alternatives to, and the pros and cons of both, and that I had not made a final personal judgment. However, in the last analysis it was a policy decision. On the one hand the Diem regime's strength had eroded away. On the other hand there was great uncertainty concerning the type of government which would succeed in the event of a coup.

2. I brought up the question of the August 24th cable, stating it was difficult for me to understand the reason why it was sent out so precipitously, particularly in view of the fact that on August 22nd at the meeting attended by the President and a substantial number of advisers, the group were briefed on the Pagoda raids in July, etc., and that no policy judgment was reached which would indicate action taken in the August 24th cable. Harriman accepted no responsibility for the cable and asked why we did not express ourselves when it was "coordinated". I said it was not coordinated and that at 8:00 p.m. Saturday night Mr. Helms had been called and had been "informed" about the general substance of the cable which was "supported by the President, State Department and Defense Department". Our views were not requested. Harriman said he was surprised as he had been told that the cable had been coordinated with us and that we supported it. I corrected this impression.

3. We then turned to the discussion of Laos. I said that Alexis Johnson had been given a paper outlining in detail all CIA activities in Laos, which was then reviewed and approved by the Special Group 5412. In view of the criticism of CIA/Saigon activities which had come from the Embassy and the Department, I said that he, Harriman, was the architect of the situation in Laos and therefore I wished for Alexis Johnson in approving CIA/Laos activities at the 5412 Committee to do so after discussion with Harriman. Harriman

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Harriman said he knew all about our activities in Laos and approved, but there was not criticism and thought we were and had done a good job in Laos. This had been reported by both Ambassador Brown and Unger. I said that inspite of all this I wished his current review and current approval.

4. Harriman then asked what should we do in Laos. He said that Khrushchev's attitude changed between April and July and that he was worried over reports that the Soviets were assisting the North Vietnamese and hence probably Meos in Laos. He questioned whether CIA had a plan. He also raised the question of whether the U. S. should not put in a small military force. I said that it did not appear to us that the situation had reached a point where the U. S. should take precipitous action. I felt diplomatic action was indicated and I was not sure just how accurate or how extensive the Soviet military aid to North Vietnamese really was. However, it appeared to me that the Soviets might, as part of their row with the ChiComs, openly support the North Vietnamese.

5. Governor Harriman then turned to a discussion of Latin America. He said that he was going down to a meeting in Brazil and that he was seeking ideas. What did I think about Latin America? I said that the situation was very disturbing. Each country had its own separate problem and therefore no general formula could be applied. I did say, however, that we felt the intensified guerrilla and insurgency activities directed by Castro out of Cuba applied to practically all Central and South American countries. He also asked that J. C. King discuss Latin America with him.

NOTE: I transmitted this request to J. C. King. I think we should consider whether King should accompany Harriman on his mission. Also I believe it might be useful for DDP and DDI to put together some current appraisals of the current situation in each country and out of this might come some suggestions. We should avoid being drawn too deeply into policy matters.

JAM:mcm

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