

~~SECRET - EYES ONLY~~

*MR* #146  
1471  
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*Jordan*  
8.

26 September 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD -- Single copy, no distribution

SUBJECT: Luncheon meeting with Mr. Reston of the New York Times -  
DCI residence - 26 September 1963

1. Discussed briefly our appraisal of Halberstam's objectivity, as outlined in the attached. Reston realizes there is reason for some prejudice on the part of Halberstam; stated that Halberstam and Sheehan were obviously the best-established permanent correspondents and therefore naturally the leaders in Saigon press corps. Furthermore, he did not think his reporting was as slanted as some claim.

2. Discussed in some detail the attacks on CIA as evidenced by the Ted Lewis article of September 19th and the Max Freedman article of September 23rd, and others. Reston felt the attacks were obviously planted; was of the opinion they came from State, probably a great deal of it from Harriman who is both emotional and talkative, but did not feel there was much we could do about it; nor did he feel any particular damage was done. He made the point that the American public generally are against any kind of secrecy; that they look upon CIA as an organization of intrigue and that the Washington press corps feel the Kennedy administration operates on the basis of prejudices and special interests rather than principles, and this lays them open to suspicion of intrigue, hence CIA is an obvious victim. All in all Reston felt the situation not as bad as it has been in the past and I shouldn't worry too much about it.

3. He said that stories of the Freedman type had not been planted with the New York Times to his knowledge; however spokesmen for the State Department had definitely confirmed the Halberstam article that CIA supported Nhu's secret police that raided the pagodas and this was done by the Department prior to the publishing of the article. Reston was very surprised at the true facts relating to this situation.

There was a brief discussion of why the feeling has suddenly flared up. Reston recognized that certain elements in the government had moved precipitously in late August and wondered whether CIA had supported this move or been informed in advance. He recognized that our reserved position and warning to go slow might cause pain to some of those who wished to rush ahead.

There was no discussion of operational details, position of individuals, coordination or lack of coordination, etc.

*Ellen showed to Mr. Helms 9/26*

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Richardson's impression is that large part, perhaps most of U. S. civil mission personnel are strongly and emotionally against Diem administration. Civilian personnel, including Richardson, who believe we can still win this war despite adverse factors, are in distinct minority. On the other hand, would be inclined to think that most U. S. military leadership in Saigon and in countryside definitely feel we can progress with war. There are, of course, exceptions among the military.

Since 8 May and especially since 21 August, there has been large increase in intensity of American emotional reaction to local scene and in tendency to reach final and sweeping conclusion now.

U. S. press representatives resident here were bitterly anti-administration. Halberstam dominates resident U. S. press community. He made up his mind quite some time ago that war could not be won with Diem, Diem had to go, and that any American who did not agree with Halberstam was either a fool or unwitting traitor to his country. Halberstam and Sheehan live together, have identity of views and emotions, and fully exchange their information and leads with each other. Impression is also that Halberstam and Sheehan attempt to indoctrinate and dominate incoming U. S. reporters. Situation is difficult enough to justify adverse reporting and am not ascribing such reporting solely to influence of one or two men. They merely constitute at least one small part of problem.

In some ways we seem to have reached point in official American community that, if you think we can win with present government, you are simply not running in right direction with the majority. There is continual leakage from official sources to press, especially to Halberstam and to Sheehan. Realize pressures may be so strong in U. S. and abroad that time for decision making might be limited. However, if this is not compellingly the case, continue to suggest that we attempt obtain time for further development of situation here and for more deliberate process of analysis and formulation of action recommendations.



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4. With reference to a press representative, Reston thought it was better to have someone who is fully familiar with the Agency and who either had, or could inspire, the confidence of the Washington press corps rather than bring in a stranger from the press corps who would require years of indoctrination to really learn the agency. He spoke most favorably of Burding and volunteered his name; I did not raise it. He also spoke highly of Nils Lennartsen. He thought, however, we should search in our own house.

Attachment

JAM/mfb

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