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MEMORANDUM

TO: J. Lee Rankin  
FROM: W. David Slawson  
SUBJECT: Conference with CIA, March 27, 1964; Discussion of Best Way to Approach Further Investigations in Mexico

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K.C.

At about 2:30 on the afternoon of Friday, March 27, 1964, Messrs Howard P. Willens, Samuel A. Stern, and W. David Slawson from the staff of the Commission and Messrs Richard Helms, [redacted] and Raymond Rocca from the CIA met in the CIA offices to discuss certain mutual problems. After the preliminary courtesies were exchanged Rocca and Stern departed into a separate room to discuss their particular subject and Willens, Slawson, Helms and [redacted] remained in the main conference room to discuss whether, at this juncture, it would further the work of the Commission if members of the Commission's staff were personally to go to Mexico City or whether the purpose of such a trip might better be handled by other methods, such as sending CIA representatives from Washington to Mexico or bringing certain CIA and/or FBI personnel and records from Mexico City back to Washington.

Mr. Slawson opened the discussion by giving a brief

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review of the present state of the Commission's knowledge of what Lee Harvey Oswald probably did in Mexico during September-October 1963, the current status of investigations into the as-yet unknown aspects of his activities, and the contents and probable reliability of certain allegations and rumors which have come to the Commission or the federal investigatory agencies in connection with Oswald's activities in Mexico. This subject was then discussed briefly by all of those present, and the CIA representatives explained more fully to Mr. Slawson and Mr. Willens the manner in which the CIA and the FBI had carried on the Mexican investigation and the division of responsibility worked out by the two agencies in that country. Mr. Willens mentioned that President Johnson had assigned the primary responsibility for running the investigation in Mexico to the FBI about ten days after the assassination. Mr. Helms was at some pains to point out that although the formal order to this effect may not have come down until ten days after President Kennedy's death, the informal directive, which Mr. Helms said was fully as effective as the formal order, had been forwarded to Mr. McCone very shortly after the assassination, probably within about two days. Mr. Helms added that throughout the entire investigation of Oswald's activities in Mexico, the CIA and the FBI had been "trading papers," so that each agency was believed fully cognizant of the other's activities.

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We then entered the discussion of how best to carry forward the investigation in Mexico at this juncture. The job remaining seemed to break down into three separate tasks: first, the Commission must be certain that it has obtained all the information already in the possession of the various investigatory agencies, both American and Mexican, in substantially the same detail as is possessed by the agencies. Second, decisions must be made as to what further areas are worth investigating and who is in the best position to carry forward such investigations. Third, the Commission must be in a position to satisfy itself that all areas warranting investigation have either been fully investigated or that the reasons against carrying on any further investigation are persuasive.

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It was the conclusion of all four participants in the conference <sup>that</sup> the best way to handle each of these tasks would be for a few members of the Commission staff personally to go to Mexico, the sooner the better. Mr. Helms and Mr. [REDACTED] pointed out that no one in the CIA or the FBI or any other government agency at this point has the over-all grasp of the Mexican situation presently possessed by some of the staff members of the Commission, and as to how the Mexican trip fits into the entire Oswald picture, outside as well as inside Mexico, the Commission staff is at an even greater advantage.

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The detailed knowledge of the Mexican investigation possessed by the CIA and by the FBI is not easily transferable to the Commission, pointed out Mr. Helms. He said that it is contained in the files and the minds of many persons in Mexico City and that, short of bringing all these personnel virtually all of their files back to Washington to confer members of the Commission staff, which would be a waste- and possibly unworkable procedure, there seems no alternative but to send a few members of the Commission staff to Mexico City. There, they can discuss the problems all the various investigatory personnel involved, and files will be available for immediate reference. Helms summed up his argument by saying that his experience with intelligence and investigatory work had convinced him that there was "no substitute for having the case officer on the spot," and that in this case, the "case officer" was the Commission's staff, not the CIA nor the FBI.

Mr. [REDACTED] added that physical familiarity with the area of Oswald's activities would also be helpful for a complete understanding of what had probably occurred. He suggested the advisability of Commission staff members even walking by the Soviet and Cuban Embassy grounds, examining the Hotel del Comercio, and otherwise seeing for themselves

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where Oswald was and observing the physical surroundings of where the various conspiratorial activities, if they occurred, were supposed to have taken place.

It was also pointed out that, if the result of the entire investigation in Mexico is that Oswald's activities there did not include any kind of preparation for the assassination, the principal task of the Commission will be to report to the American public, based upon its own review of what was done, that all reasonable lines of investigation were followed and that the result of each of them was negative. An honest report of this nature could be written only after one or more members of the Commission staff had examined in detail the course of each of the lines of investigation carried on, in and around Mexico. This examination, in turn, would be very much facilitated by having a staff member from the Commission personally in Mexico, conferring with the investigators and reviewing their reports with them. In fact, Mr. Helms felt that it would be extremely difficult to render a conclusion on the completeness of such investigations without personally going to Mexico City.

Mr. Slawson raised the question whether, if CIA itself were asked to carry on the job which would otherwise be performed by a member of the Commission staff in Mexico City,

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would CIA feel that its security or secret nature had been compromised by the necessity of openly inquiring of so many sources, many of them Mexican, about the Oswald case?

Mr. Helms replied that the CIA's Mexican staff was composed partly of undercover agents and partly of men who operated entirely in the open, and that it would of course be the latter who would make the necessary inquiries of the Mexican authorities. Consequently, this particular problem would not amount to much.

We then raised the problem of whether the relative unfamiliarity of the members of the Commission staff with the workings of the Mexican law-enforcement agencies and of Mexico in general might not be a material detriment, whereas CIA representatives could operate with a broader background and more expert knowledge. Mr. Helms and Mr. [REDACTED] both assured us that this would be no problem whatever. They said that our knowledge of the Oswald case, which would be evident in any discussion with a Mexican law-enforcement official, plus the fact that we came from the Warren Commission, would far outweigh any slight disadvantage we might have in not having previously dealt with Mexican nationals.

Finally, Mr. Helms and Mr. [REDACTED] stressed that the Warren Commission is in a unique position to obtain the very best cooperation from other agencies of the American

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Government, and that this would be a considerable advantage in Mexico. Mr. Helms said that although the CIA and the FBI work well and closely together, in Mexico as elsewhere, there remains an inevitable restraint when one governmental agency seeks to oversee and advise another, and this restraint would be present in Mexico on the Oswald affair as it always is. Mr. Helms felt that the Commission, since it has been created specifically to do its one job and no other, and also because its job is of the utmost importance, should transcend this natural restraint and accomplish its mission more effectively and more quickly than would be the case if it delegated this responsibility to an existing agency.

With that, the meeting came to a close.

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