

Institute for Policy Studies

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12/26/71

Dear Marc and Ralph,

Marc was in and out while we talked this past Tuesday. One of the "put" times, when Ralph raised the question of the Diem-Nhu assassinations, he bracketed it with the report that Nhu allegedly was in contact with North Viet Nam, the suggestion being that this could have figured in either the coup, the assassinations or both. I then expressed disbelief on both counts.

Since then, if in haste, I have read the relevant pages of The Pentagon Papers. My disbelief is fortified, again on both counts. I freely admit there is much I do not know and that there can be evidence not in these pages. Based on these pages, I find no reason to believe that, in fact, there was any such serious contact (and it is a typical intelligence ploy to plant such a rumor). Even as a last resort, and there is no reason of which I know to consider he had reached that point, I can conceive that Nhu could consider he could get help from the North. He had to know that such a move meant his end.

However, another minor school has sprung up in the wake of The Pentagon Papers wave, once it succeeded. Vincent Salandria has a formulation in which the CIA emerges as good guys and the military as bad. Garrison has seized upon it as the new given word. It is the one thing on which he expounded at some length at our recent meeting, the first in almost three years. I regard it as an immature oversimplification, as invalid.

These are selective papers. I do not know what is in the Gravel version, but I think I know the CIA well enough to anticipate that its internal communications remained internal and were not available for such a study. It is not possible that the published papers represent even a major part of the military/diplomatic communications. Not can they be accepted as honest or complete. Examine just one, the first in this series (#33) and ask yourself if you can regard it as more than Hilsman's record for Hilsman's future self-justification. Or if you can believe that with the participants listed, so many said and asked absolutely nothing. Or if JFK's chief concern could be that made explicit.

Unless there is in other papers what is missing here, it would seem that official U.S. policy was not to obstruct a desired coup and not to participate in it and not to condone or even want the assassinations. In the case of Nhu, do you have any doubt that if it was officially desired that he be assassinated he would have lived to the time of the coup? Killing him presented no problem to our Army or CIA and I doubt if it did to the SVN forces of either kind.

What remains is that we were willing to have a coup. We were for it. That is not at all exceptional. During your years (M) with JFK, you should have known of more extreme cases on the other side, where we did them, not just wanted them. Am I wrong in recalling for that period Guyana, Ecuador and Peru? Meany and his boys were the instrumentality for the coups against Jagan. Irving Brown et al and Europe and Africa? Congo? Aside from the drama, this is modest in comparison.

Hedrick Smith's analysis seems unimaginative, inadequate and unquestioning to the point of semi-official propaganda. There is, for example, not even reference to the obvious gaps and omissions, and no questioning, as of the extent of CIA participation; whether this was really Lodge's thinking and writing; who really sent what is identified merely as "White House"; whether McG. Bundy really had so little to say, or Ball, or Harriman; or why no single internal JCS or CIA internal paper is included or even no more than referred to.

I am not suggesting the Salandria thesis, that the CIA really leaked all of this through Ellsberg, not do I hold or see reasons to have doubts about E's motives. The spooks would have kept their shrouds in their own haunted castles. No cabinet officer any longer runs his department. McNamara is no exception. That study ~~was~~ just could not

have had access to everything. If you are disposed not to believe this, I think that when I have completed TIGER TO RIDE your doubts will be resolved.

I may, of course, be repeating things well known to you. I was not able to follow the disclosures contemporaneously because of the work on which I was then engaged, a work I think is an important corollary to The Pentagon Papers. And I do not know what the end product of your personal analyses. What I am responding to is the nature of Ralph's questions and statements, and in the brief period we had, I may not have correctly understood either.

Nor am I questioning McN's motive in ordering the study. For me it is sufficient to know and believe as I do that he was the captive of so many others all of whom has so great a vested interest in controlling what he knew and thought. If you examine some of the absolute rubbish in these papers, such as the extent of SVN government "control" or the "success" of what is not called Vietnamization, do you need more? Yet look who said these things, with bare faces hanging out. I do not attribute venality. Isn't ignorance enough? If it was so widespread on the spot, how much worse in Washington?

One of the things disturbingly glossed over is the Honolulu conference. There is an enormous gap between Document #59, inadequate and self-serving excerpts from a taped conversation between Lodge and Diem 11/1/61 and the 11/26 "Order by Johnson Reaffirming Kennedy's policy on Vietnam." I also question the latter description. And it was nullified in less than a month, something conveniently not disclosed in the PP's, which here skip to August 1964. It is no honest to say (p. 189) that Johnson reaffirmed what JFK had said, nor is it honest to say that because JFK's "top aides held a Vietnam strategy conference at Honolulu" they bespoke his mind. It may interest you to check the reporting on this conference in the NEWS. It is so close to nothing it amounts to that, as my old pre-PP files show. (I gave several boxes of VN material to a young scholar once the PP appeared, for that I'll not now need in TIGER. It might surprise you to know how much of this was, in one form or another, public.) In any event, these pages do not disclose JFK's personal attitudes nor the policy upon which he had decided.

One of the more interesting things on which I recall no comment is that Bundy, allegedly the politico, wanted Harkins, the military man, in charge during Lodge's planned absence. I haven't had time to think this through, but it goes against everything. Each embassy has a No. 2 man, and the last thing one would have suspected is that a military man would be sitting on policy determinations. This is not the only thing that casts Bundy in a strange role, self-casts, that is.

These are just a few random thoughts after reading these parts of the PP's. Reading them once and in haste. I see no real reflection of JFK in them, nor of policies I can tell myself are his. I do see, unless the omissions would change it, every indication that he was interesting himself in this for the first time and had not yet taken charge. To the time of his assassination, it seems that he was doing no more than pursuing the policy he had inherited. He made major changes in these policies as he had to, as with Cuba, nuclear arms, etc., and he couldn't address them all at once. To my own satisfaction, which may not be yours, once he got hold of it, he made major changes. And didn't live to see them through. Bearing on this are two things I mentioned to Ralph, his refusal to recognize the Dominican dictatorship (it took Johnson 3 weeks to reverse this) and his statement but three days before he was killed on Cuba, that were there to be a change in government in Cuba, Cubans, not Americans, would have to bring it to pass.

Famous last words?

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg