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7-17-63
MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. McGeorge Bundy

The attached is in response to your request this weekend for comment on press versions of the death of Diem and Nhu.

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Ray S. Cline

RAY S. CLINE
Deputy Director (Intelligence)

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12 Nov 63

(DATE)

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OCI No. 3213/63

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
12 November 1963

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Press Version of How Diem and Nhu Died

1. The latest "inside" press account of how Diem and Nhu met their end is that they were killed in the presence of the coup leaders at the Joint General Staff (JGS) after an angry exchange of words. This allegedly occurred sometime after 1000 hours, Saturday morning (2 November), shortly after their capture at a Cholon church. According to this version, Diem and Nhu had left Gia Long palace by car about 2000 hours on Friday and spent the night at the home of the Republican Youth Movement leader in Cholon.
2. We still have no hard information on the time or circumstances of Diem and Nhu's departure from the palace, or indeed whether they even left there alive. There have been numerous variations on the theme of a flight to Cholon and subsequent capture. Except for minor details, this latest press version resembles the most recent "official" account issued by the coup leaders, i.e., Diem and Nhu died from "accidental suicide" in a struggle in an armored car after their arrest at church Saturday morning.
3. There are several troublesome aspects to this particular story: If Diem and Nhu had left the palace Friday evening, how can we explain the two telephone calls of surrender made by Diem to the JGS at 0620 and 0650, Saturday? These calls were reported by [REDACTED] Also, General Harkins reported that at 0600 on 2 November a surrender plea by General Dinh, in charge of the assault forces on the palace, was stonily rebuffed by Diem.

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4. It would also seem strange that having successfully fled to Cholon, the two brothers would eschew further escape and instead calmly attend church in full public view.

5. Finally, the photographs of the bodies, seen by CIA personnel and judged apparently genuine, showed Diem and Nhu with their hands tied behind their backs. Yet this latest version says the fateful argument ensued after Diem had angrily thrown down a microphone proffered for his resignation statement.

6. The version of events on the afternoon of the coup, including the telephone conversation between Diem and Ambassador Lodge, comports with known facts, but this information already was in the public domain.

7. On the basis of available information, our best judgment is that Diem and Nhu may well have been killed by a junior officer or enlisted personnel acting unilaterally, possibly provoked by the captives' haughtiness. It is possible, however, that General Dinh or some other senior officer may have ordered their execution. In any case, it seems likely that Diem and Nhu never reached the JGS alive.

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