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6 March 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR : Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : Forthcoming Book: Facing The Brink: An Intimate Study of Crisis Diplomacy by Edward Weintal and Charles Bartlett

1. This memorandum is for information only to invite your attention to a forthcoming book entitled Facing the Brink: An Intimate Study of Crisis Diplomacy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967). It is written by two well-known journalists, Edward Weintal, diplomatic and chief European correspondent for Newsweek and Charles Bartlett, whose close relationship with President Kennedy is well known.

2. Facing the Brink, written with all the prescience of hindsight, discusses the handling of certain of the foreign crises which faced the Kennedy-Johnson administration (with some throwbacks to the Eisenhower administration) such as Cyprus, the Yemen ("Komer's War"), the Cuban missile crisis and Vietnam. Commentary on the government's methods in meeting crisis situations runs throughout the book.

3. President Kennedy and his associates, of course, receive high marks. In attempting to guess at the major sources for Facing the Brink, this reviewer is inclined to believe that Walt Rostow must have been a major contributor, and it would appear that Paul Nitze also is a source of some of the material.

4. Special attention is called to Chapter Eight entitled "--But not the Secretary of State." This chapter is the most concentrated personal attack on Secretary Rusk which this reviewer can recall. The authors pull together many of the adverse comments which one can presumably hear on the cocktail circuit and evidently in the halls of the Department itself (and State people are quoted in the book). It is alleged that Secretary Rusk's concept of his role "is to communicate his views only to the President and not to air or debate them with the Cabinet or the White House staff." (p. 150). For this reason, it is alleged that Rusk refused to sit as a member of the Excom during the

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Cuban missile crisis. It is also stated that Rusk opposed the Bay of Pigs, "but never in strong or convincing terms." (p. 149). The general tenor of this chapter is that Secretary Rusk has never expressed an original idea or a convincing position on any matter, and that he has had no impact in making American foreign policy. The authors conclude that "Rusk has succeeded admirably in making his tenure of office dull and commonplace." (p. 166). Also included here is the story that President Kennedy proposed to shift Rusk out of State in his second term because of "the failure of the Secretary and his department to initiate or produce foreign policy ideas, and the lethargy with which the Secretary and the department moved ... ." (p. 153).

5. Chapter Seven ("Diplomat in Chief") deals in considerable measure with President Johnson's handling of diplomatic and crisis situations. The chapter includes all the usual allegations of the President's initial dislike for foreign affairs and mistreatment of ambassadors and foreign dignitaries. While President Johnson comes out fairly well in some respects, the chapter reflects Bartlett's well-known antipathy to this Administration.

6. There are a few references to CIA in Facing the Brink. In the first chapter, Mr. McCone is quoted as telling President Johnson shortly before the 1964 election that, in view of his tremendous forthcoming majority, it would be a good time immediately after election to review all aspects of our foreign policy. As a result, a meeting of the President's advisory panel on foreign affairs and senior government officials in the field was convened. The meeting was allegedly turned into a shambles by one of the non-government participants and "McCone's well-meant initiative collapsed." (pp. 1-2).

7. In Chapter Four on the Cuban missile crisis, Mr. McCone's foresight and "honeymoon cables" draw high marks from the authors. While the authors feel that "intelligence estimators were guilty of missing the logic of the Soviet ploy as it unfolded," (p. 60) the Agency receives considerable praise for its work during the crisis and "on balance the intelligence community had many reasons to take pride in its performance." (p. 63).

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8. In Chapter Five on Vietnam, it is alleged that when President Eisenhower was considering using U. S. military power at Dienbienphu, the most vehement protest came from Senator Johnson. The recommendations made by Mr. McCone following his 1964 trip to Vietnam with Secretary McNamara are noted, but when these recommendations (calling for the immediate bombing of North Vietnam and inviting the Nationalist Chinese Army to enter the war) were in conflict with those of McNamara, President Johnson is alleged to have ordered them to work out their differences. As a result, "McCone, aware that his role as intelligence adviser did not entitle him to give policy advice to the President, said he would withdraw his recommendations. He added, however, that his report on the situation in Vietnam was an intelligence estimate and would have to stand unchanged." (p. 72). In this chapter, the authors also state that "Johnson distrusted covert operations" (p. 77) and quote him (as Vice President) as saying "I don't believe in this cloak and dagger stuff." (p. 87). In this chapter, Roger Hilsman's role as a principal source of leaks to the press on Vietnam is given chapter and verse; he does not emerge very favorably. Hilsman's call to Mr. Helms in regard to the famous 24 August 1963 cable of instructions to Ambassador Lodge is also mentioned with the comment that neither Mr. Gilpatric nor Mr. Helms was in the position to question it, because Hilsman stressed that the instructions had already been approved by the President. (Actually, it is our recollection that the call came from Governor Harriman, not Hilsman).

9. In Chapter Nine, which deals in the main with the role of Under Secretary Ball, it is stated that the State Department still regards CIA as its rival, and that after President Kennedy's order giving primacy to the ambassador at each post, "CIA Chief McCone had to travel around the world to direct his 'station chiefs' to comply with the order." (p. 176). This is, of course, a considerable exaggeration, presumably from State sources.

10. The authors allege that, in 1958, President Eisenhower ruled against the policy of a preemptive missile strike because "no intelligence was sufficiently foolproof to avoid mistaken interpretations of enemy intentions." (p. 209). President Kennedy also adopted the same positions on the basis that no President could "ever be certain that his intelligence estimates were accurate." (p. 210).

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11. Facing the Brink is well written in journalistic prose. Because the press normally accepts the work of its fellow members as "highly competent" and "authoritative," this controversial volume stands a good chance of receiving considerable publicity and probably will get good marks from many reviewers because of its "candor." However, because it is so controversial, reviewers may tend to choose up sides, depending on whose friend is praised or attacked in its pages.

Walter Pforzheimer
Curator
Historical Intelligence Collection

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