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MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

April 22, 1954

FROM: W. David Slawson
 SUBJECT: Trip to Mexico City

On Wednesday, April 8, 1954 Mr. Howard P. Willens, Mr. William T. Coleman, Jr., and Mr. W. David Slawson, all on the staff of the Commission, flew from Washington, D. C. to Mexico City. Mr. Coleman returned on Sunday, April 12 and Mr. Slawson and Mr. Willens returned on an airplane leaving Mexico City at about 3:20, Monday afternoon, April 13. This memorandum will briefly summarize this trip plus some of the meetings held in preparation for it.

TUESDAY - APRIL 7

10:20 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Willens, Coleman and Slawson met with Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs Thomas Mann, Mr. Thomas Ehrlich of the Office of the Legal Adviser for the State Department, and two aides to Mr. Mann in Mr. Mann's office at about 10:20 a.m. Assistant Secretary Mann was Ambassador to Mexico at the time of the assassination and personally directed the investigatory effort and our relations with the Mexican law enforcement authorities immediately after the news of the President's death reached Mexico City. A copy

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time, but that it not be permitted to hold up the information at this stage.

Back in the CIA offices, during Willens' absence, Slawson and Coleman discussed the cable traffic from the Soviet and Cuban Embassies both during the time of Oswald's visits there in September-October 1963 and immediately after the assassination. Scott and White said that no increases or unusual variations had been noted at either time. We then discussed briefly the possibilities that the National Security Agency might be able to "break" the codes for the times when Oswald was in Mexico City, using as a key the fact that Oswald's attempt to obtain a visa was probably communicated to Washington on Friday or Saturday, September 27 or 28. Scott pointed out that all his office did with coded materials was to send them back to the National Security Agency in Washington in the form in which it obtained them. They felt that the code-breaking might be possible, however, and should be tried.

FRIDAY - APRIL 10
9:00 a.m. to 9:45 a.m.

Coleman, Willens and Slawson appeared at the FBI offices at 9:00 a.m., as we had agreed to do the previous evening, and there met Rolfe Larson. The plan had been that we

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were immediately to depart on a tour of the spots which Oswald had visited during his trip to Mexico, but Larson told us that he had just been requested not to leave until 9:45, because by that time we expected some confirmation of the hour when we could meet with Secretary Echevarria. We therefore sat in Anderson's office and discussed with Larson the relative locations and other physical aspects of the places we were to see later in the morning. Soon Anderson came in and told us that the appointment with Echevarria was firm for 11:30. The Ambassador had been told about the meeting and again approved it, repeating his conditions that when we ask Echevarria for permission to speak directly with Mexican citizens that we make clear that we wanted all interviews to be within the American Embassy and to be completely voluntary. We then had a brief discussion on how we would handle the meeting with Echevarria. Willens and Slawson said that we had agreed the previous evening that Bill Coleman would carry the discussion for us and that Coleman would spend the first few minutes in conveying the gratitude and appreciation of the American Government to the Mexican Government for its assistance to date, its satisfaction with the quality of such assistance, etc., and other matters of etiquette and friendship, which we had been told were essential when dealing in a formal manner with

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Mexicans. Anderson and the others present at this conference agreed that this would be the best approach.

9:45 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

The three of us were driven by Rolfe Larson in an unmarked automobile around the various points that had been touched upon by Oswald. We saw the Transportes del Norte bus terminal, the Transportes Frontera bus terminal, the Flecha Roja bus terminal, the Chihuahuiences travel agency, the Hotel del Comercio, the restaurant next door to the hotel where Oswald reportedly ate many meals, other hotels in the neighborhood of the Hotel del Comercio and the various bus stations and this neighborhood generally, the Cuban Embassy and Consulate, and the Russian Embassy and Consulate.

Several observations were immediately obvious. The two embassies are close enough together so that Oswald almost certainly walked back and forth between them when the occasion called for it. The embassies, although theoretically reachable from the Hotel del Comercio or the inter-city bus stations by local bus, are in practice so located that reaching them by bus would be much too complex for someone who was not familiar with the bus lines in Mexico City and especially for someone

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who did not speak Spanish fluently enough to get precise directions. The Hotel del Comercio, although certainly a cheap hotel and one in which American tourists would ordinarily never stay, has a neat, clean appearance and, according to Larson, is in fact clean inside, and stands out from its surroundings as being definitely more attractive than the other hotels in the neighborhood.

Although one-way streets make it difficult to drive from the Flecha Roja bus terminal to the Hotel del Comercio except by devious routes, for someone walking, as Oswald was, it would be an easy distance and a natural direction to walk. The hotels near this particular bus terminal are almost all grouped around the same area as the Hotel del Comercio, and it would seem very possible that Oswald could have been directed towards this neighborhood if he inquired of the whereabouts of an inexpensive hotel. Moreover, coming from the direction of the bus terminal, the Hotel del Comercio would very likely be the first reasonably clean and attractive hotel that one would notice. Some of the other hotels in this neighborhood closer to the terminal than the del Comercio are also attractive, although perhaps not quite so as the Hotel del Comercio, but Rolfe Larson pointed out that those hotels tend to get filled earlier and therefore Oswald might have been referred further

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down the street if he inquired at one of them for a room and was turned down.

Larson confirmed what we had been told by both Anderson and Scott earlier, that none of them had any indication whatever that the Hotel del Comercio was known as a meeting place for Cuban revolutionaries or even for Cubans, revolutionary or not. Larson said that he of course had investigated this possibility and that his examination of the hotel register for the periods around Oswald's visit there had disclosed only one Cuban name. Further investigation showed that this belonged to a Cuban family man who had his family with him and that they were tourists traveling through Mexico.

The Cuban and Soviet Embassies have no remarkable characteristics except that both are surrounded by high adobe walls which make observation of their interiors extremely difficult. The Cuban Consulate, where Oswald did most of his dealings, is a small separate building on the corner of the Cuban complex of buildings, with its exterior walls coterminous with the adobe walls which surround the area. Its front door therefore opens onto the street. Exit and entry into the Consulate, therefore, forms an exception in that it can easily be observed by persons outside.

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After driving around with Larson we returned and parked the car in front of the American Embassy and waited just outside the car for Scott and Anderson to come out, as we had agreed beforehand. They came out shortly after 11:00 a.m. and we all got into the car and drove to the Mexican Ministry of the Interior to meet Senor Echevarria.

11:15 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.

We arrived at Senor Echevarria's office somewhat early but were nevertheless immediately brought in to meet him. We were soon joined by his head assistant for this kind of work, Senor Ibanez, Chief of Inspections. Clarke Anderson acted as interpreter, under our instructions that he should feel free to elaborate as to courtesies and details at any time, and Winston Scott also interpreted at a few points.

As previously agreed, Mr. Coleman did the talking for the three of us. He expressed the thanks of the American government, and of the Warren Commission in particular, for the cooperation our nation had received from his agency and from the Mexican government generally, and in general exchanged pleasantries and courtesies. Coleman also told Echevarria that Chief Justice Warren had sent his personal thanks to Echevarria.

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Coleman asked that the Mexican government give the Commission a complete and as detailed as possible report on all the investigations it had carried on in connection with the assassination and on any other actions, such as closing the border, it had carried through. Echevarria readily agreed to do this, saying that all the basic reports which would go into such an overall report had already been prepared and that he could deliver the overall report on 48 hours notice. He asked, however, that we deliver a formal request for this report to the Mexican foreign office, addressed to his attention, in order that it not be mistakenly sent to some other police or investigatory agency in Mexico. (We had learned from other sources that there are 26 different police forces operating in the Mexico Federal District alone.) He said that he would telephone the foreign office immediately after our conference to alert them that he was the person responsible for the note and would appreciate its being forwarded to him for his appropriate action. We agreed that we would deliver such a note that afternoon if possible, marked to his attention as he had requested.

Mr. Coleman went on to tell Echevarria that we were treating all communications from Mexico on this subject as confidential and that we would do the same for the report he was

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going to deliver to us. We would publish only after receiving clearance from the Mexican government, which clearance we planned to seek at some later point in our investigation. Echevarria agreed that this had been his understanding all along and that it would also be the understanding upon which he would convey the full report to us.

Echevarria then discussed briefly the overall situation and gave his strong opinion that there was no foreign conspiracy involved in the assassination, at least no conspiracy connected with Mexico.

Coleman then brought up the matter of our interviewing witnesses for documentation purposes and to find out additional information, if possible, in Mexico. To give a specific illustration of what we had in mind, Mr. Coleman used the manager of the Hotel del Comercio as an example. Echevarria replied basically in the affirmative, but he made two important qualifications. First, he felt that the interviews should not be in the American Embassy, because to hold them there would give the appearance of an official investigation being carried on by the American government on Mexican soil, and this, he felt, would be very disadvantageous politically for the present Mexican government. He pointed out

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that an election for president was scheduled to be held in July, that such elections were held only every six years in Mexico, and that the present time was therefore extremely sensitive politically. One of the most effective propaganda weapons the communists have in Mexico is the alleged American domination and interference with the Mexican government and any unduly public investigatory activities on our part would lend themselves to this kind of propaganda. Second, Echevarria requested that the interviews with Mexican nationals not be formal but that instead, for example, we ought to arrange to have lunch or coffee, etc., with the persons with whom we wished to speak.

Our reply to this, made through Mr. Coleman, was that we did not want any appointments for lunch or otherwise made at this time because we wanted to leave the entire problem open. We had not in our own minds decided whether and to what extent we wanted to proceed on this basis. Echevarria agreed that he would take no action until we requested it.

There was an interruption here while Echevarria spoke in Spanish to Ibanez. The three of us took the opportunity to consult quietly in English with one another. Coleman felt that in view of Echevarria's reluctance to permit

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formal meetings even with unimportant witnesses such as the hotel clerk, that the proposal we had for dealing with Silvia Duran ought to be handled very circumspectly. He proposed to do this by shifting the conversation back to the overall report, stressing that in the writing of this report we felt that Duran's interrogation was of the highest importance, and then hopefully shifting the conversation onto the subject of how we could deal directly with Duran. Willens and Slawson agreed with this approach.

Coleman then again spoke to Echevarria, referring back to the overall report and describing our feeling of importance as to Silvia Duran, etc., as outlined in the previous paragraph. Echevarria replied by emphatically agreeing that Duran's testimony was of the greatest importance and promising to go into as much detail and documentation as possible in connection with her evidence in his final report. He commented that it was upon the information his men had obtained from her that he had relied most heavily in concluding that no conspiracy had been hatched during Oswald's visits to Mexico. At about this point, Echevarria abruptly took steps to end the meeting. He said that he had an appointment to have lunch with Queen Juliana, who was then in the midst of an official visit

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