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Audio Samples from President Kennedy's Tapes

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Sample 8: JFK dictates some notes concerning the anti-Diem coup in South Vietnam, November 4, 1963. (2:04 minutes)

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Vietnam Dictation

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: 1...2...3...4...5...Monday, November 4, 1963. The ah...Over the weekend the ah...coup in Saigon took place--culminated ah three months of ah conversation about a coup, conversation which divided the government here and in Saigon. Opposed to a coup was ah General Taylor, the Attorney General, Secretary McNamara, to a somewhat lesser degree, John McCone, partly because of an old hostility to Lodge, which causes him to lack confidence in Lodge's judgment, partly to as a result of a new hostility because Lodge shifted his station chief; in favor of the coup was State led by Averell Harriman, George Ball, Roger Hilsman, supported by Mike Forrestal at the White House. I ah feel that we must bear a good deal of responsibility for it beginning with our cable of early August in which we suggested the coup. In my judgment that wire was badly drafted, it should never have been sent on a Saturday, I ah should not have given my consent to it without a round table conference in which McNamara and Taylor could have presented their views. While we did redress that balance in later wires, that first wire encouraged Lodge along a course to which he was in any case inclined. Harkins continued to oppose the coup on the grounds that the military effort was doing well. There was a sharp split between Saigon and the rest of the country. Politically the situation is deteriorating. Militarily they had not had its effect. There was a feeling whoever that it would for this reason Secretary McNamara and General Taylor supported applying additional pressures to Diem and Nhu in order to move them...(John, Jr. enters the room)

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: Do you want to say something? Say hello

JOHN, JR.: Hello.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: Say it again.

JOHN JR: Naughty, naughty Daddy...

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: Why do the leaves fall?

JOHN, JR.: Because it's autumn

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: Why does the snow come on the ground?

JOHN, JR.: Because it's winter.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: Why do the leaves turn green?

JOHN, JR.: Because it's spring.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: Where do we go to the Cape?...Hyannisport?

JOHN, JR.: Because it's summer.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: It's summer.

JOHN, JR: (Laughter) Your horses .

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: (Dictation resumed) I was ah shocked by the death of Diem and Nhu. I'd met Diem with Justice Douglas many years ago. He was ah extraordinary character and while he became increasingly difficult in the last months nevertheless over a 10 year period he held his country together to maintain it's independence under very adverse conditions. The way he was killed made it particularly abhorrent. The question now whether the generals can stay together and build a stable government or whether Saigon will begin to turn on public opinion in Saigon the intellectuals students etcetera will turn on this government as oppressive and undemocratic in the not too distance future.