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U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE OVERTHROW  
OF DIEM, 1963

A STAFF STUDY  
BASED ON THE PENTAGON PAPERS

PREPARED FOR THE USE OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
UNITED STATES SENATE

STUDY No. 3



JULY 20, 1972

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(III)







## PREFACE BY SENATOR J. W. FULBRIGHT, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

In 1968 the Department of Defense completed an eighteen month study of "U.S.-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967," popularly known as the "Pentagon Papers." The existence of this classified 47 volume study became known to the public through newspaper reports in June 1971. In September the Defense Department declassified large portions of the first 43 volumes. The other four volumes remained classified on the grounds that disclosure of the materials they cover—the history of negotiations—would be detrimental to the national interest.

In September 1971 the Committee on Foreign Relations began a detailed study of the Pentagon history and related materials. The study was initiated under the authority of S. Res. 140, agreed to July 24, 1971, for the purpose of inquiring into the origins and evolution of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, with particular reference to lessons for U.S. foreign policy making that might be drawn from the Pentagon history. Three staff researchers, Robert E. Biles, Robert M. Blum, and Ann L. Hollick, have been engaged in a careful review of the 7,000 pages of documents and analysis included in "U.S.-Vietnam Relations." They have had at their disposal both the classified and unclassified versions of the Pentagon Papers. In addition, they have drawn upon corroborative printed materials and interviews with individuals involved in the events under study.

"U.S. Involvement in the Overthrow of Diem, 1963" by Ann L. Hollick, is the third of the staff studies to be released. It examines the role of the American Government in the planning and execution of the coup that ended the nine-year rule of Ngo Dinh Diem. In the period from August to November 1, the United States Government approved and encouraged the plot to overthrow the South Vietnamese Government. The United States, in a series of public actions, rebuffed the Diem regime and, through the suspension of aid, encouraged the coup leaders to move against the government. The United States maintained secret contact with the plotting generals throughout the planning and execution of the coup and sought to advise them on alternate coup plans. Immediately after the coup, the United States advised the victorious generals on the formation of a new government and accorded it prompt recognition.

The story of the active U.S. role in the overthrow of Diem raises a number of issues that have a continuing relevance to ongoing policy. At an operational level, this episode reveals a great deal about the difficulty of maintaining a foreign policy responsible to central direction from Washington. In the not uncommon situation of inter-agency disagreements, a country Ambassador has enormous latitude to guide U.S. policy free from the constraints of Washington. That freedom may easily yield to an active intervention in the domestic affairs of the nation to which he is accredited. Depending on the situ-



ation, that intervention can in turn greatly expand U.S. commitments to that nation.

The increased commitment to the new government of Vietnam that resulted from U.S. complicity in the coup planning is the significant lesson of the story of U.S. action against Diem.

What is omitted from the story of the Diem coup tells a great deal about the American policy process. Absent is any questioning by U.S. officials of the U.S. Government's right to reform the Vietnamese government or to replace it. The right to manipulate the destiny of others is simply assumed. Equally significant is the absence of any thought as to the possible consequences of U.S. support for the coup for an increased commitment in Southeast Asia.

Withdrawal from Vietnam is rarely discussed by U.S. officials. Perhaps the most important omission, and that which made the others possible, is the exclusion of Congress and the public from the policy-process. The facts of U.S. policy toward the Diem regime were limited to such a tight circle of U.S. officials that significant debate over the desirability of support for Diem, much less of an Indochina presence, was precluded.

The material which appears in this study does not necessarily reflect the views of the Committee or any members thereof.

J. W. FULBRIGHT.



## U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE OVERTHROW OF DIEM, 1963

For the military coup d'etat against Ngo Dinh Diem, the U.S. must accept its full share of responsibility. Beginning in August of 1963 we variously authorized, sanctioned and encouraged the coup efforts of the Vietnamese generals and offered full support for a successor government. In October we cut off aid to Diem in a direct rebuff, giving a green light to the generals. We maintained clandestine contact with them throughout the planning and execution of the coup and sought to review their operational plans and proposed new government. Thus, as the nine-year rule of Diem came to a bloody end, our complicity in his overthrow heightened our responsibilities and our commitment in an essentially leaderless Vietnam.<sup>1</sup>

The story of the U.S. role in the Diem coup and of the events preceding it begins, according to the Pentagon Papers, on May 8, 1963. On this date South Vietnamese Government troops fired upon a Buddhist protest gathering in Hue, killing fourteen and initiating what has since become known as "the Buddhist crisis."<sup>2</sup> The significance of the Hue incident and the resulting protest movement lay in what it revealed to the American public and U.S. government officials. Apparent to all was the extent of Vietnamese disaffection from the U.S.-supported government of Ngo Dinh Diem.<sup>3</sup>

President Diem's handling of the growing Buddhist protest proved equally revealing to U.S. officials. It undermined their belief that Diem could handle the political struggle against the Vietcong and shattered any illusion that the United States could, with the proper tactics, influence the difficult Ngo brothers. During the course of the summer, U.S. officials alternately tried threats and inducements in a vain attempt to compel Diem to placate the growing Buddhist protests. For a brief moment, the policy of inducement appeared to meet with success when Diem promised the departing U.S. Ambassador, Frederick E. Nolting, that he would make a public statement conciliatory to the Buddhists. Diem's fulfillment of this promise, however, typified the Vietnamese leader's pro forma responses to American pressure. In an interview on August 15, President Diem merely stated that conciliation had been his policy all along and that it was "irreversible."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Pentagon Papers, The Defense Department History of United States Decision Making on Vietnam, The Senator Gravel Edition*, Vol. II (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), p. 207. Hereafter cited as *Pentagon Papers*.

<sup>2</sup> General Maxwell Taylor argues that "the facts are in dispute, although there is no doubt that there was a clash involving Buddhists in which some lives were lost." *Swords and Plowshares* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1972), p. 289.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. officials and reporters alike have since acknowledged their ignorance of the Vietnamese political situation before the Buddhist crisis. As John Mecklin, Chief of the U.S.I.S. confessed, "... there was little effective effort to keep tabs on the political attitudes of the Vietnamese people, despite the known fact that our adversary gave first priority to this." *Mission in Torment* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 102. And David Halberstam of the *New York Times* points out, "At the time, few of us knew much about Buddhism in general, or its Vietnamese particulars. . . . Like other Americans in Vietnam, we were concerned with the war. After eight months there, I knew no Buddhist priests, knew little about Vietnamese Buddhism and had never been in a pagoda." *The Making of a Quagmire* (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 196.

<sup>4</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, pp. 210, 230.



Less than a week later, shortly after midnight on August 21, military forces loyal to Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, raided pagodas throughout the country, injuring and arresting monks and sacking the buildings. "For better or worse, the August 21 pagoda raids decided the issue" for the United States, according to the Pentagon account. "In their brutality and their blunt repudiation of Diem's solemn word to Nolting, they were a direct, impudent slap in the face for the U.S."<sup>5</sup> It is not known whether Diem knew of or approved his brother's plans for the pagoda raids. Diem did not however, repudiate them.

Nhu's apparent intent in conducting these raids was to crush the Buddhist opposition and to present the new Ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, with a *fait accompli* when he arrived. Not only were the raids carefully timed, they were carefully executed to implicate the army rather than Nhu's own forces. In the confused aftermath of the raids, the United States Government denounced the attacks and held the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) responsible. When evidence of Nhu's responsibility eventually became overwhelming, the United States issued a strong statement denouncing the raids and attributing them to Nhu.

In addition to alienating the Americans, Nhu's actions resulted in massive student protests throughout the country and, most importantly, eventuated in the beginning of military plotting to overthrow the Government. On August 23 General Tran Van Don, Chief of South Vietnam's Joint General Staff, contacted a CIA officer to deny ARVN responsibility for the raids and asked if the United States would support the Army if it acted against Nhu and Diem. On the same day, General Le Van Kim, General Don's deputy, made a similar approach to Rufus Phillips of USIA. According to the Pentagon account, "These two direct and obviously reinforcing requests for U.S. support for military aid aimed at Nhu's ouster marked the formal beginning of the U.S. involvement in the protracted plotting against the Diem regime."<sup>6</sup> The pagoda raids, in effect, threw the Vietnamese Army together with the United States Embassy in opposition to the Diem regime.

### COUP PLANNING: AUGUST 23-31

U.S. participation in plotting for the coup occurred in two separate periods—from August 23 to 31 and from October 2 to the November 1 coup. On August 24, the day after the Generals' feeler, Ambassador Lodge sent a cable to Washington in which he advised against U.S. support for a coup against Nhu. He took this stance, not because he was concerned that the U.S. would become involved in a Vietnamese domestic matter, but because he believed that the balance of forces in the Saigon area was unclear and that a coup then would be a "shot in the dark."<sup>7</sup>

At the same time in Washington, a cable of instructions to Lodge was being drafted in response to the Generals' query as to whether or not the U.S. would support a coup. Drafted by Roger Hilsman, Averell

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

Nowhere does the analyst address himself to the question of whether the United States had a legitimate right to intervene in the internal political affairs of Vietnam and to expect the Vietnamese leader to do as the U.S. wished.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



Harriman, George Ball, and Michael Forrestal, the cable was approved by the President, the Secretary of State, Roswell Gilpatrick, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and General Maxwell Taylor for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>8</sup> The subsequently controversial August 24 cable signalled a new political approach to the Diem regime. Recognizing the leading role of Nhu in the pagoda raids, the cable stated:

U.S. Government cannot tolerate situation in which power lies in Nhu's hands. Diem must be given chance to rid himself of Nhu and his coterie and replace them with best military and political personalities available.

If, in spite of all your efforts, Diem remains obdurate and refuses, then we must face the possibility that Diem himself cannot be preserved.<sup>9</sup>

In carrying out this new policy, Ambassador Lodge was instructed to proceed along several lines. First he was to tell Diem that "USG cannot accept actions against Buddhists taken by Nhu" and that "prompt dramatic actions redress situations must be taken." Secondly, Lodge was to

tell key military leaders that US would find it impossible to continue support GVN militarily and economically unless above steps are taken immediately which we recognize requires removal of Nhus from the scene. We will give Diem reasonable opportunity to remove Nhus, but if he remains obdurate, then we are prepared to accept the obvious implication that we can no longer support Diem. You may also tell appropriate military commanders we will give them direct support in any interim period of breakdown central government mechanism.<sup>10</sup>

The third step mentioned in the cable was to publicly exonerate the military from involvement in the pagoda raids. Fourth, the cable went on to say, "Concurrently, with above, Ambassador and country team should urgently examine all possible alternative leadership and make detailed plans as to how we might bring about Diem's replacement if this should become necessary."

Because there are some gaps in the cable traffic after August 24, the Pentagon analyst relied heavily at this point on the accounts of Hilsman and others. One important cable that was available to the analyst was Lodge's prompt response to the August 24 instructions. In that message Lodge staked out a new position by strongly supporting a coup policy.

Believe that chances of Diem's meeting our demands are virtually nil. At same time, by making them we give Nhu chance to forestall or block action by military. Risk, we believe, is not worth taking, with Nhu in control combat forces Saigon.

Therefore, propose we go straight to Generals with our demands, without informing Diem. Would tell them we prepared have Diem without Nhus but it is in effect up to them whether to keep him. . . .

Request modification instructions.<sup>11</sup>

According to the Hilsman account, Washington officials, on receiving Lodge's response, agreed to "defer a direct approach to Diem" until more was known about the situation.<sup>12</sup> While the Pentagon analyst adds nothing to the Hilsman version,<sup>13</sup> the *New York Times* claims

<sup>8</sup> For accounts of the drafting and approval of this cable, see Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 485 ff. and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 991.

<sup>9</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, p. 734.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 734.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 735.

<sup>12</sup> *To Move a Nation*, p. 489.

<sup>13</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, p. 236.



that a reply to Lodge was drafted by Hilsman and Ball on August 25 stating "Agree to modification proposed."<sup>14</sup>

Whether or not such a message was sent, Mr. Lodge met on August 26 in Saigon with John Richardson, General Paul Harkins, William Truehart, and John Mecklin to plan a strategy for dealing with the Vietnamese Generals. According to a cabled account by Richardson, CIA's Saigon station chief, Lodge decided that the "American official hand should not show." Therefore, Lt. Colonel Lucien Conein and Mr. Spera of the CIA would maintain contact with the Vietnamese Generals rather than have General Harkins, the chief of the American Military Assistance Command (MACV), do it. The points that the two agents were to convey to the Generals included the following:

We in agreement Nhus must go. . . . Question of retaining Diem or not up to them. . . . We will provide direct support during any interim period of breakdown central gov mechanism. . . . We cannot be of any help during initial action of assuming power of state. Entirely their own action, win or lose. Dont expect to be bailed out.<sup>15</sup>

While officials in Saigon were moving ahead, policy makers in Washington were having second thoughts about supporting a coup policy. At a National Security Council (NSC) meeting on the morning of August 26, misgivings were aired by Secretary McNamara and CIA Director McCone, neither of whom had personally approved the August 24 cable, and General Taylor, whose approval had been secured after the cable was dispatched.<sup>16</sup> In the course of numerous NSC meetings during that week, a disagreement emerged between those who wished to continue a policy of support for Diem and those who favored proceeding with plans for a coup. Ambassador Nolting sided with McNamara and Taylor in the view that the outcome of a coup would be very doubtful and that it was better to continue our support for Diem. Nolting did, however, disagree with the U.S. military's hope that Diem could be persuaded to remove Nhu from the Government. On the other side of the argument, Hilsman, Harriman, and Ball of the State Department agreed with Nolting that it was unlikely Diem would remove his brother; unlike Nolting, however, they concluded that the war could not be won if Nhu remained in power and that the U.S. should therefore throw its weight behind the coup plotters.

In this situation of disagreement among his Washington advisors, President Kennedy cabled Saigon asking for more details on the coup and its prospects for success. Kennedy also asked what effect delaying the coup would have. Separate responses sent by Lodge and Harkins indicated that the division among the President's advisors existed in Saigon as well. The President's enquiry arrived after CIA agents Conein and Spera had conveyed the agreed U.S. position to Generals Khiem and Khanh, members of the coup committee. The generals in turn supplied details regarding other members of the coup group. On the basis of this information, Ambassador Lodge sent a reply to President Kennedy expressing confidence in the identified coup leaders and in the coup's prospects of success. In Lodge's assessment, "the chances of success would be diminished by delay."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Neil Sheehan and others, *The Pentagon Papers*, New York Times edition (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 169.

<sup>15</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, p. 735.

<sup>16</sup> General Taylor denies having approved the cable at all. *Swords and Plowshares*, pp. 292-94.

<sup>17</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, p. 238.



General Harkins' response to President Kennedy's enquiry was far more negative. Harkins did not see any clear cut force advantage for the coup plotters and saw no reason "for a crash approval on our part at this time." Moreover, Harkins doubted that the coup would be launched at all unless the United States gave the word. In a third message to Washington, CIA station chief Richardson cabled that the situation in Saigon had "reached a point of no return" and that the coup would undoubtedly proceed unless the generals were neutralized before the coup got underway.

These differing replies obviously did not contribute to a resolution of the increasingly acrimonious dissension within the National Security Council. Upon receiving these messages, President Kennedy on August 28 again cabled Lodge and Harkins requesting their "independent judgement" about the prospect for a coup and their advice as to the course of action the U.S. should follow. In a separate cable to Lodge, the Department of State asked him to indicate "the latest point at which the operation could be suspended, and with what consequences." Since U.S. prestige would be involved in such a venture, the cable went on, the coup had to succeed once it was underway. The cable also asked what actions the United States could take to promote the coup.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile the CIA agents in Saigon were becoming progressively more involved with the plotting generals. On August 29, Generals Khiem and Minh met with Spera and Conein. The Pentagon history indicates that Lodge not only approved the contacts but also "authorized CAS [CIA] to assist in tactical planning."<sup>19</sup> The *New York Times* version of the Pentagon Papers, referring to an October 5 CIA message, adds the information that "in August the American agents provided the coup organizers with sensitive information including a detailed plan and an armaments inventory for Camp Longthanh, a secret installation of the loyalist Special Forces."<sup>20</sup> These actions were taken to reassure the uncertain and cautious Generals of United States support. The Generals, however, remained reluctant to divulge their plans to the Americans, still fearing that the United States might betray them to Nhu. Seeking further evidence of U.S. support, they requested a suspension of U.S. economic aid to the Diem regime.

In his reply to President Kennedy's August 28 enquiry, Ambassador Lodge stressed the Generals' lack of confidence in United States support and asked permission for General Harkins to personally reiterate to the Generals the messages already conveyed to them by the CIA contact men. If this did not prove sufficient reassurance, Lodge reluctantly recommended a suspension of U.S. aid as the Generals had requested. Lodge was quite explicit on the importance of the American role in carrying out a coup.

The chance of bringing off a Generals' coup depends on them to some extent; but it depends at least as much on us.

We should proceed to make all-out effort to get Generals to move promptly.

We must press on for many reasons. Some of these are: (a) Explosiveness of the present situation which may well lead to riots and violence if issue of discontent with regime is not met. Out of this could come a pro-Communist or at

<sup>18</sup> These cables are not included among the documentation and are described only in the analysis. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239

<sup>20</sup> Neil Sheehan and others, *The Pentagon Papers*, p. 171.



best a neutralist set of politicians. (b) The fact that war cannot be won with the present regime. (c) Our own reputation for steadfastness and our unwillingness to stultify ourselves. (d) If proposed action is suspended, I believe a body blow will be dealt to respect for us by VNese Generals. Also, all those who expect U.S. to straighten out this situation will feel let down. Our help to the regime in past years inescapably gives a responsibility which we cannot avoid.<sup>21</sup>

On the contrary, General Harkins believed that without endangering the plotters there was still a chance to approach Diem with an ultimatum that Nhu must be removed. Such a move, he argued, would strengthen, not undermine, the position of the Generals who, like the Americans, were opposed to Nhu rather than to Diem. If however, Diem did not respond affirmatively to this ultimatum, Harkins thought the United States could then back a move by the Generals.<sup>22</sup>

These differing responses to President Kennedy's second enquiry once again did little to resolve the dispute within the National Security Council. In an attempt to avoid a decision, to buy time, and to keep both policy options open, the State Department sent two contradictory cables to Saigon on August 29. The cable to Lodge stressed the desirability of further consideration of the Harkins approach. Secretary Rusk raised the possibility of waiting until the plotting Generals were prepared to act and then asking Diem to remove Nhu. If Diem's response was negative, the Generals could then proceed with the coup.<sup>23</sup> The other cable addressed to both Lodge and Harkins encouraged the course of action proposed by Lodge. In it Rusk responded affirmatively to Lodge's proposals for reassuring the Generals. The cable read:

In response to your recommendation, General Harkins is hereby authorized to repeat to such Generals as you indicate the messages previously transmitted by CAS officers. He should stress that the USG supports the movement to eliminate the Nhus from the government, but that before arriving at specific understandings with the Generals, General Harkins must know who are involved, resources available to them and overall plan for coup. The USG will support a coup which has a good chance of succeeding but plans no direct involvement of U.S. armed forces. Harkins should state that he is prepared to establish liaison with the coup planners and to review plans, but will not engage directly in joint coup planning.

\* \* \* \* \*

You are hereby authorized to announce suspension of aid through Diem government at a time and under conditions of your choice. In deciding upon the use of this authority, you should consider importance of timing and managing announcement so as to minimize appearance of collusion with Generals and also to minimize danger of unpredictable and disruptive reaction by existing government. We also assume that you will not in fact use this authority unless you think it essential. . . .<sup>24</sup>

This State Department cable in effect turned over U.S. policy toward the Diem government to Ambassador Lodge. According to the Pentagon analyst, the Vietnamese Generals had clearly specified that "they would regard an aid suspension as a coup signal."<sup>25</sup> By delegating to Lodge the authority to suspend aid to the Diem regime, the State Department was thereby bestowing on the Ambassador the power to initiate the coup. And, as was by then abundantly clear, Lodge was firmly convinced that a coup was the only feasible course of action. He

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239, 738-39.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 737-38.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 736-37.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.



doubted the likelihood of separating Diem from his brother, and he wanted to move ahead with the coup as quickly as possible.

Even Lodge, however, could not at that stage hurry the reluctant generals. According to General Duong Van Minh, the senior general in Vietnam and the nominal leader of the coup committee, the plotters not only continued to doubt the extent of U.S. commitment to a coup, but they were also uncertain of securing a favorable balance of forces in the Saigon area. Compounding their problems were difficulties within the group itself. Pointing to this combination of unfavorable circumstances, General Minh suddenly called off the coup and on August 31, according to the Pentagon account, notified General Harkins accordingly. According to Roger Hilsman, however, the United States Government never really received word that the coup was off. "What happened was that over the next week or 10 days it became increasingly clear that the Generals were not going to act. Then the issue became what will the United States do."<sup>26</sup> Although, according to some accounts,<sup>27</sup> planning for a coup continued among the Vietnamese Generals, this is not documented in the Pentagon Papers. Instead, the Pentagon analyst details a situation in which the Americans believed that coup plotting had ceased. For all practical purposes, therefore, U.S. involvement in coup plotting came to an abrupt end and was not to be resumed until a month later.

### INTERREGNUM: SEARCH FOR A POLICY, SEPTEMBER 1-OCTOBER 1

The suspension of planning for a coup took U.S. officials completely by surprise. Having become deeply involved in coup plotting during the last week of August, a dismayed U.S. Government was left suddenly without a policy toward the Diem regime. The period from September 1 to October 1 was devoted to efforts to find a new policy. During the month, alternative means of dealing with Diem were considered in both Washington and Saigon.

The record during this period is very sketchy. Despite references in the text to cables and meetings, there are no documents in the Pentagon Papers between the notes of the August 31 State Department meeting and a cable of instruction to Lodge on September 17. In the first half of the month, alternatives under consideration in both capitals ranged from promoting a coup to a reconciliation with Diem. By the September 17 meeting of the National Security Council, Washington officials seem to have dropped the idea of a coup, at least as a short term prospect. Ambassador Lodge, however, continued to favor a coup.

The plan of action most consistently discussed by U.S. officials was the suspension of non-military aid to Diem. While some viewed this as a means of influencing Diem to carry out reforms, others, such as Lodge, saw it strictly as a means of encouraging a coup. As noted earlier, Ambassador Lodge had been authorized on August 29 to suspend aid at his discretion if he believed it would facilitate a coup.

<sup>26</sup> National Broadcasting Company, "An NBC News White Paper, Vietnam Hindsight, Part II: The Death of Diem," Transcript of Broadcast (December 22, 1971), p. VIII-p/12.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Shaplen, "The Cult of Diem," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 14, 1972, p. 16 ff.



Then, as later, he was reluctant to use aid suspension as a lever on Diem. He preferred instead to follow a policy of aloofness, in the hope that Diem would be forced to come to him.

On September 3 a State/AID cable informed Lodge that all approval for non-military aid would be temporarily held up. No suspension was announced, however, since a policy decision was still pending.<sup>28</sup> Lodge used this opportunity to worry rather than to overtly pressure Diem. Maintaining his policy of making Diem come to him, Lodge directed that in response to all enquiries about the status of U.S. aid, the Vietnamese Government be informed that Diem would have to talk directly to Lodge about it.

In a series of cables on September 11 and 12, Ambassador Lodge urged that detailed consideration be given to ways to suspend non-military aid as a sanction to topple the Government. The Lodge cable and a proposal by Hilsman for combining public and private pressure to influence Diem, were the subject of a September 11 meeting in the White House.<sup>29</sup> At this meeting the decision was taken to hold economic aid renewal in abeyance pending a complete reexamination of how it might be used to pressure Diem. On September 14, Lodge was told that approval of the remaining \$18.5 million commercial import program was deferred until the United States could arrive at basic policy decisions.

These basic decisions were made, at least for the time being, at the September 17 meeting of the National Security Council. Hilsman's "pressure and persuasion track" was apparently adopted. In the guidance cable resulting from the meeting, it is evident that Washington officials were no longer considering a coup in the near future, although they did not rule it out at a later time. The cable to Lodge read:

We see no good opportunity for action to remove present government in immediate future; therefore, as your most recent messages suggest, we must for the present apply such pressures as are available to secure whatever modest improvements on the scene may be possible. We think it likely that such improvements can make a difference, at least in the short run. Such a course, moreover, is consistent with more drastic effort as and when means become available, and we will be in touch on other channels on this problem.<sup>30</sup>

Although obviously aware of Lodge's preference for using aid suspension only in relation to a coup, the September 17 cable nonetheless gave Ambassador Lodge full control over the U.S. aid program for the purpose of enhancing his power vis a vis the Diem government.

We share view . . . that best available reinforcement to your bargaining position in this interim period is clear evidence that all U.S. assistance is granted only on your say-so . . . we specifically authorize you to apply any controls you think helpful for this purpose. You are authorized to delay any delivery of supplies or transfer of funds by any agency until you are satisfied that delivery is in U.S. interest, bearing in mind that it is not our current policy to cut off aid, entirely.<sup>31</sup>

Despite Lodge's aversion to approaching Diem, the White House cable included a list of specific domestic actions that the U.S. Government wanted Diem to take toward the Buddhists, students, press, police, and so on. In an obvious effort to handle Lodge delicately, the

<sup>28</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, p. 245.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 744.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*



cable stipulated that in the matter of approaching and urging these reforms on Diem, Washington would, of course, await Lodge's comments and criticism before further decision.

Lodge's response to the plan for pressuring Diem to reform was predictably negative. He wanted to limit any use of his authority to suspend aid to coincide with promoting a coup.

As regards your paragraph on withholding of aid, I still hope that I may be informed of methods . . . which will enable us to apply sanctions in a way which will really affect Diem and Nhu without precipitating an economic collapse and without impeding the war effort. We are studying this here and have not yet found a solution. If a way to do this were to be found, it would be one of the greatest discoveries since the enactment of the Marshall Plan in 1947 because, so far as I know, the U.S. had never yet been able to control any of the very unsatisfactory governments through which we have had to work in our many very successful attempts to make these countries strong enough to stand alone.

I also believe that whatever sanctions we may discover should be directly tied to a promising coup d'etat and should *not* be applied without such a coup being in prospect. In this connection, I believe that we should pursue contact with Big Minh and urge him along if he looks like acting. I particularly think that the idea of supporting a Vietnamese Army independent of the government should be energetically studied.<sup>32</sup>

This exchange of cables indicates the difficulties involved in carrying out a policy through an Ambassador who does not respond affirmatively to directives from Washington. In Lodge's behalf, it must be noted that it was particularly easy in this instance to ignore Washington's directives, since they were inconclusive. By holding out the long-range possibility of more drastic action, Washington was still hoping to keep open the option of supporting a coup.

The extent of Government confusion during this September of hurried meetings and conflicting cables was further apparent in the dispatch of fact-finding missions to Vietnam. Designed to bring back more information on the political and military situation, such trips were the most visible sign of disorientation within the Government. The first of these trips during the policy interregnum lasted from September 6 to 10.

It was headed by Major General Victor H. Krulak, the Defense Department's top expert in counter guerrilla warfare. He was accompanied by Joseph Mendenhall, a senior Foreign Service Officer with experience in Vietnam. During their hectic four day visit, the two men undertook very different kinds of tours. While Krulak visited ten different locations in the four corps area, Mendenhall spoke with old friends in Saigon and several provincial cities and capitals. The two officials returned to Washington with very different estimates of the situation. Whereas Krulak discounted the effect of the political crisis on the Army and its prosecution of the war, Mendenhall predicted a possible breakdown of civil government and even a religious war resulting from disaffection with the regime.<sup>33</sup> Each of these views found its supporters in Washington and as usual, no decisions were forthcoming from the September 10 National Security Council meeting that heard these varying accounts.

The second and more important fact-finding mission during the September interregnum was headed by Secretary of Defense, Robert

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 747.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243-45.



McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. According to Roger Hilsman, the President's real purpose in sending McNamara and Taylor to Vietnam was

'to keep the JCS on board.' By that he meant not going along with us and not leaking to the press and doing all sorts of things. And the only way we can keep the JCS on board is to keep McNamara on board. And apparently the only way we can keep McNamara on board is to let him go and see for himself.<sup>34</sup>

In his memorandum to McNamara, the President understandably described the purpose of the mission in different terms.

I am asking you to go because of my desire to have the best possible on-the-spot appraisal of the military and paramilitary effort to defeat the Viet Cong. . . . The events in South Vietnam since May have now raised serious questions both about the present prospects for success against the Viet Cong and still more about the future effectiveness of this effort unless there can be important political improvement in the country. It is in this context that I now need your appraisal of the situation. If the prognosis in your judgment is not hopeful, I would like your views on what action must be taken by the South Vietnamese Government and what steps our Government should take to lead the Vietnamese to that action. . . .

It is obvious that the overall political situation and the military and paramilitary effort are closely interconnected in all sorts of ways, and in executing your responsibility for appraisal of the military and paramilitary problem I expect that you will consult fully with Ambassador Lodge on related political and social questions. I will also expect you to examine with Ambassador Lodge ways and means of fashioning all forms of our assistance to South Vietnam so that it will support our foreign policy objectives more precisely.<sup>35</sup>

The party left Washington on September 23 and returned on October 2. While in Saigon, McNamara and Taylor met separately with the country team, President Diem, and Vice President Tho. In evaluating the socio-political situation in Vietnam, McNamara and Taylor were, according to Taylor's account, anxious to "assess coup attitudes." They therefore arranged a meeting with General Minh "under the guise of a game of tennis." Despite their hints, Minh declined to broach the subject and the two Americans came away with the view that no coup attempt was in the offing.<sup>36</sup> In their report to the President, they stated that "The prospects of an early spontaneous replacement of the Diem regime are not high." Although the United States should not actively promote a coup, the Report urged "an intensive clandestine effort, under the Ambassador's direction, to establish necessary contacts to allow U.S. to continuously appraise coup prospects." Not ruling out future U.S. involvement in a coup, they went on to note that "whether or not it proves to be wise to promote a coup at a later time, we must be ready for the possibility of a spontaneous coup."<sup>37</sup>

On the military situation in Vietnam, the October 2 McNamara-Taylor Report was generally optimistic.<sup>38</sup> The report did, however, acknowledge that "There are serious political tensions in Saigon (and perhaps elsewhere in Vietnam) where the Diem-Nhu government is becoming increasingly unpopular."<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the report stated,

5. Further repressive actions by Diem and Nhu could change the present favorable military trends. On the other hand, a return to more moderate methods

<sup>34</sup> National Broadcasting Company, "The Death of Diem," IX-pp/5-6.

<sup>35</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, p. 748.

<sup>36</sup> Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, pp. 297-98.

<sup>37</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, pp. 763-65.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 754-57.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 751.



of control and administration, unlikely though it may be, would substantially mitigate the political crisis.

6. It is not clear that pressures exerted by the U.S. will move Diem and Nhu toward moderation. Indeed, pressures may increase their obduracy. But unless such pressures are exerted, they are almost certain to continue past patterns of behavior.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the pessimistic tone concerning the likelihood of influencing Diem, the Report went on to recommend a number of measures that they hoped would induce Diem to undertake certain policy reforms. These measures included selective suspension of aid, the announcement of troop withdrawals, and the continuation of a correct but cool attitude by Ambassador Lodge toward Diem.

On October 5, President Kennedy approved the recommendations of the McNamara-Taylor Report and transmitted the corresponding instructions to Lodge. The President added the directive, however, that no formal announcement was to be made of the implementation of plans to withdraw 1,000 U.S. troops.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, at the end of a month of indecision, the President had adopted a course of applying selective but unannounced pressure to influence a difficult ally. Meanwhile, U.S. officials in Saigon were to somehow continuously monitor prospects for a coup while not actively encouraging one. There is no evidence in the documentary record of the Pentagon Papers that U.S. policymakers were using aid suspension to promote a coup. Nor is there any indication that U.S. officials recalled that a month earlier coup leaders requested aid suspension as a sign of U.S. support for a change in Government. Elsewhere, however, George Ball, then Under Secretary of State, has made explicit the realization, at least on the part of some officials, that an aid suspension was a signal to the forces that were not necessarily opposed to the regime but to Diem, but felt that Diem was not providing the necessary leadership. It was an encouragement, obviously for them to go abroad and try to organize another government. This was inevitable, it seems to me, when the American government made a decision to cut off aid.<sup>42</sup>

## COUP PLANNING RESUMES: OCTOBER 2-OCTOBER 31

While Secretary McNamara and General Taylor were reporting their findings to the President on October 2, the coup plotters in Saigon reopened contact with Lt. Colonel Conein, their CIA contact in the abortive August plot. Conein was told that there was an active plot among the generals for a coup and that General Minh wanted to meet with him on October 5 to discuss details of their plans.

With Lodge's approval, the meeting took place as scheduled. According to Lodge's cabled account, General Minh stated that "he must know American Government's position with respect to a change in the Government of Vietnam within the very near future."<sup>43</sup> Although Minh said he did not expect U.S. support, he did need assurance that the United States would not block the coup attempt. Finally he outlined three alternative coup plans, one of which involved an assassination plot against Diem's two brothers. Regarding U.S. support and the alternative coup plans, Conein replied "that he could not answer spe-

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 752.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 769-70.

<sup>42</sup> National Broadcasting Company, "The Death of Diem," IX-p/10.

<sup>43</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, p. 767.



cific questions as to USG non-interference nor could he give any advice with respect to tactical planning." According to Lodge, "Minh appeared to understand Conein's position of being unable to comment at the present moment but asked that Conein again meet with Gen. Minh to discuss the specific plan of operations." Conein's response was again non-committal.<sup>44</sup>

Colonel Conein's own account of this and other contacts is as follows:

I was told that I was not to encourage nor was I to discourage a coup, by my Ambassador. Those were exact words that I was told. At no time, was I to tell them you are to have a coup or you are not to have a coup.

My instructions were that I was to inform General Minh that the United States Government would not thwart their coup. And I conveyed this. You could liken it to a football team. Ambassador Lodge was the quarterback, the coaching was being conducted by Washington, D.C. and I was the eyes and ears and the mouth-piece of Henry Cabot Lodge to the junta. It was quite obvious that if at one point that this American hand had shown that the whole thing would blow up and therefore it would be an extreme embarrassment. Therefore, Ambassador Lodge made it very clear to me that if something went wrong that he would have to be able to have deniability that I even existed.<sup>45</sup>

The Minh-Conein meeting took place on the same day that President Kennedy approved the recommendations of the McNamara-Taylor Report and transmitted the instructions to Lodge. The instructions were, therefore, based on the Taylor-McNamara report that no coup plans were underway and that active encouragement of a coup was undesirable. They said:

President today approved recommendation that no initiative should now be taken to give any covert encouragement to a coup. There should, however, be urgent effort with closest security under broad guidance of Ambassador to identify and build contacts with possible alternative leadership as and when it appears. Essential that this effort be totally secure and fully deniable and separated entirely from normal political analysis and reporting and other activities of country team. We repeat that this effort is not repeat not to be aimed at active promotion of coup but only at surveillance and readiness. In order to provide plausibility to denial suggest you and no one else in Embassy issue these instructions orally to Acting Station Chief.<sup>46</sup>

Ambassador Lodge's report of the Minh-Conein meeting arrived the day after these instructions were sent. It was accompanied in a separate cable by Lodge's recommendations for dealing with Minh. At the next meeting between Minh and Conein, Lodge suggested to Washington that Conein should:

1. Assure him that US will not attempt to thwart his plans.
2. Offer to review his plans, other than assassination plans.
3. Assure Minh that U.S. aid will be continued to Vietnam under Government which gives promise of gaining support of people and winning the war against the Communists.<sup>47</sup>

The news of renewed coup plotting and of the Minh contact with Conein changed the situation on which the President's October 5 instructions to Lodge were based. The Ambassador had been directed to "identify and build contacts with possible alternative leadership as and when it appears." Now that alternative leadership had been identified and contacted, further guidance from Washington was needed to

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 767-68.

<sup>45</sup> National Broadcasting Company, "The Death of Diem," X-pp/1-2.

<sup>46</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, pp. 766-767.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 768.



chart U.S. policy toward the present and alternative Saigon regimes. This guidance came in the form of an ambiguous October 6 cable transmitted to Lodge through CIA channels. The ambiguity of the cable was ultimately to result in differing interpretations of U.S. policy within the Saigon mission. The cable said:

While we do not wish to stimulate coup, we also do not wish to leave impression that U.S. would thwart change of government or deny economic and military assistance to a new regime if it appeared capable of increasing effectiveness of military effort, ensuring popular support to win war and improving working relations with U.S. We would like to be informed on what is being contemplated but we should avoid being drawn into reviewing or advising on operational plans or any other act which might tend to identify U.S. too closely with change in government.<sup>48</sup>

The cable went on to urge that Minh be pressed for more detailed information and reiterated the importance of maintaining the possibility of denying U.S. involvement in the planning. These instructions were conveyed to Minh by a CIA officer some time before mid-October.<sup>49</sup>

While U.S. relations with the plotting generals were developing through the first half of October, relations with the Diem regime were deteriorating rapidly. The U.S. policy of selective sanctions seemed to have a negative effect on Diem and his brother. Continuing his policy of personal aloofness, Lodge allowed the suspension of the commodity import program to go without comment. Diem responded to the suspension, however, with a vigorous attack on the U.S. Government launched through the Vietnamese press. By mid-October the rising level of the anti-American campaign indicated that Diem and Nhu were going to fight rather than submit to U.S. policy directives.

Acting for Ambassador Lodge, General Joseph Stilwell of the Military Assistance Command for Vietnam applied a further sanction on October 17. Stilwell privately informed the Diem Government that the U.S. would cut off CIA funds to Colonel Tung's Special Forces, which had been used by Nhu in the August pagoda raids, unless the three companies were placed under Joint General Staff control and transferred to the field. Although the South Vietnamese undertook a few of the minor military measures recommended by the McNamara-Taylor Report, the combat situation grew steadily worse.

Then toward the end of October, U.S. relations with Saigon suddenly seemed to take a turn for the better. Diem sent an indirect inquiry to Lodge regarding further U.S. decisions on commercial imports. Lodge apparently sensed that Diem was also being far more careful about his repressive actions. And on October 24, Diem invited Lodge to spend Sunday, October 27, with him at Dalat. Lodge was pleased that Diem had made the first move, and he used the occasion to determine the effect of U.S. sanctions on Diem's willingness to make concessions. Lodge's report of the meeting, however, described it as disappointing and revealing no movement on the part of Diem. Whether or not the October 27 meeting could have marked the beginning of a greater effort by Diem to meet the U.S. demand for reforms will never be known. The coup that was to end Diem's life was only five days away.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 796.

<sup>49</sup> At this point in the story, there is a gap in the Pentagon Papers' record of the cable traffic and exact dates are not known.



Originally scheduled for October 26, the coup was delayed on October 22 as a result of what the South Vietnamese Generals mistakenly took to be U.S. opposition. On October 22, General Harkins informed General Don that one of his officers had been told about plans for a coup. Harkins insisted that U.S. officers should not be approached about such matters as it merely distracted them from their job of fighting the Vietcong. Don interpreted his conversation with Harkins as official U.S. discouragement of the coup, and he contacted Colonel Conein in a state of agitation. Don told Conein that the generals had called off the scheduled coup, and he requested clarification of U.S. policy toward a coup. Acting for Lodge, Conein reiterated Washington's guidance and asked for proof of the existence of the coup group and its plan. Don then promised to give him the political organization plan if they could meet the next day. At this meeting on the 24th, Don did not bring the promised plans due, he said, to the coup committee's anxiety about possible breaches of security. He did promise, however, to turn over to Conein for Lodge's review detailed plans of the operation and the proposed successor government. This he promised to do two days before the coup which he said would occur before November 2. Then to reassure himself further regarding American support, General Don approached Lodge directly at Dalat on October 28. In response to his query as to whether Conein spoke for the Ambassador, Lodge assured Don that he did.

This episode between Harkins and Don and the subsequent differing interpretations of it by Lodge and Harkins reveal a number of interesting aspects of U.S. involvement in the coup plotting. It indicates first that Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins had very different interpretations of Washington's guidance and that they supported very different policies toward a coup. In carrying out his own interpretation of Washington's instructions, Lodge kept Harkins totally uninformed.<sup>50</sup> In the second place, the incident reveals that Washington's guidance was sufficiently ambiguous that it could be interpreted in different ways. And, as Ambassador Lodge chose to interpret the guidance as calling for close, continuing and even encouraging contact with the plotters, this effectively became the official U.S. policy. No matter how anxious Washington officials were to become in the days immediately preceding the coup, responsibility for the conduct of U.S. policy was never taken out of the Ambassador's hands. A third and perhaps the most revealing aspect of this incident was the importance of U.S. support to the coup plan. Given what the plotting generals perceived to be U.S. opposition, they were prepared to call off their plan with only a moment's notice. This fact must be kept in mind when reading Lodge's subsequent assertions to Washington that the United States lacked the power to forestall a coup.

Given the evidence that U.S. support was a prerequisite for a coup and the fact that Washington officials never instructed Lodge to op-

<sup>50</sup> Harkins describes Lodge's behavior as follows: "He liked to settle things and do things on his own account without too much consultation with his own staff or with those others in the country. This came to me and most apparently when Secretary McNamara and General Taylor visited in late September, early October of 1963 and they asked me if I'd seen two or three or four cables that came through the State Department involving some of the military operations. I said I hadn't. Well they hadn't been shown to me by the Ambassador." National Broadcasting Company, "The Death of Diem," IX-p/7.



pose the coup, ultimate responsibility for the coup that was to remove Diem comes to rest with the U.S. Government.

Due to the Lodge-Harkins difference of opinion and to Harkins' negative assessment of the prospects for a coup, the White House attitude toward a coup became progressively more negative. The cables from Washington record increasing concern over the outcome of a coup. As McGeorge Bundy cabled Lodge on October 25:

We are particularly concerned about hazard that an unsuccessful coup, however carefully we avoid direct engagement, will be laid at our door by public opinion almost everywhere. Therefore, while sharing your view that we should not be in position of thwarting coup, we would like to have option of judging and warning on any plan with poor prospects of success.<sup>51</sup>

At a meeting of the National Security Council on October 29, concern was expressed over the differing Harkins and Lodge views toward a coup. Of special concern to Washington officials was the apparent breakdown of communication and coordination between MACV and the Ambassador. It was decided at the meeting that General Harkins should take command of the U.S. mission in Vietnam if a coup began during the Ambassador's trip to Washington, scheduled to begin on October 31. Lodge was, therefore, instructed to show General Harkins all the cables relating to coup planning.

The revelation of these cables to Harkins caught him by surprise.

I thought the thing was dead as far as an overthrow of Diem was concerned and I went on with my business of fighting the war and training the military. And unbeknownst to me, although I was the senior military man there, the CIA was working with the Ambassador and contacting the Generals.<sup>52</sup>

Upon being informed for the first time of Lodge's evaluations and recommendations and of the continuing contacts between Conein and Don, Harkins dispatched three angry cables to Washington on October 30. In these cables, Harkins took exception to Lodge's interpretation of U.S. policy which he understood to be no active encouragement of a coup. In addition to disagreeing with Lodge's negative assessment of the military situation, Harkins also disagreed with his positive assessment of the prospects for a coup. Not only was he personally opposed to one, but he doubted that the generals had sufficient forces to pull one off.

Harkins' bleak appraisal of coup prospects brought Washington's anxieties to a head. White House concern was forcefully expressed in an October 30 cable to Lodge from McGeorge Bundy. The cable repeatedly insisted that the coup should be initiated only if it enjoyed a large probability of succeeding. Lodge was to keep Washington fully informed about all plans for a coup, enabling Washington to then decide whether or not the Generals should proceed.

Believe our attitude to coup group can still have decisive effect on its decisions. We believe that what we say to coup group can produce delay of coup and betrayal of coup plans to Diem is not repeat not our only way of stopping coup. We therefore need urgently your combined assessment with Harkins and CAS. We concerned that our line-up of forces in Saigon (being cabled in next message) indicates approximately equal balance of forces, with substantial possibility serious and prolonged fighting or even defeat. Either of these could be serious or

<sup>51</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, p. 782.

<sup>52</sup> National Broadcasting Company, "The Death of Diem," X-p/3.



even disastrous for U.S. interests, so that we must have assurance balance of forces clearly favorable.

With your assessment in hand, we might feel that we should convey message to Don, whether or not he gives 4 or 48 hours notice that would (A) continue explicit hands-off policy, (B) positively encourage coup, or (C) discourage.

In any case, believe Conein should find earliest opportunity express to Don that we do not find presently revealed plans give clear prospect of quick results. This conversation should call attention important Saigon units still apparently loyal to Diem and raise serious issue as to what means coup group has to deal with them.<sup>53</sup>

Although expressing the view that the U.S. had the power to delay a coup, it is significant that the Washington cable did not go so far as to order the Ambassador to halt the plotting. Instead, it left responsibility for determining the prospects for a successful coup entirely in Lodge's hands.

While White House officials were obviously under the impression that a coup could somehow be managed from Washington, Ambassador Lodge was not. Responding to Bundy on the same day, Lodge implied an involvement in the coup that was far deeper than Washington was willing to recognize. Lodge argued vigorously that the United States did not "have the power to discourage or delay a coup. Don has made it clear many times that this is a Vietnamese affair."<sup>54</sup> Lodge's motives in this cable are far from clear. It is doubtful that Lodge had forgotten that only a week earlier the generals called off a coup due to imagined U.S. opposition. It is conceivable that Lodge wished to keep the management of the coup in his own hands in the face of a reluctant Harkins and an uncertain Washington. There is certainly no evidence that he ever conveyed Bundy's directive to Conein. Alternatively the Ambassador may already have been given notice that the coup was imminent and may in fact have believed that it was too late to call it off. If Lodge had received such information, however, he did not pass it on to Washington. Whatever Lodge's motives, his message to Washington dated October 30, two days before the coup, was unequivocally in favor of moving ahead with a coup. He continued to insist that the only way of forestalling a coup would be to reveal the plan to Diem.

It is theoretically possible for us to turn over the information which has been given to us in confidence to Diem and this would undoubtedly stop the coup and would make traitors out of us. For practical purposes therefore I would say that we have very little influence on what is essentially a Vietnamese affair. In addition, this would place the heads of the Generals, their civilian supporters, and lower military officers on the spot, thereby sacrificing a significant portion of the civilian and military leadership needed to carry the war against the VC to its successful conclusion. After our efforts not to discourage a coup and this change of heart, we would foreclose any possibility of change of the GVN for the better. Diem/Nhu have displayed no intentions to date of a desire to change the traditional methods of control through police action or to take any repeat any actions which would undermine the power position or solidarity of the Ngo family.<sup>55</sup>

Among the ironies of this statement was Lodge's appeal for U.S. non-intervention in an "all-Vietnamese" affair. This appeal was belied by his very next paragraph.

My general view is that the U.S. is trying to bring this medieval country into 20th Century and that we have made considerable progress in military and eco-

<sup>53</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, p. 782-83.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 789.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 789-90.



conomic ways but to gain victory we must also bring them into the 20th Century politically and that can only be done by either a thoroughgoing change in the behavior of the present government or by another government. The Viet Cong problem is partly military but it is also partly psychological and political.<sup>56</sup>

In his self-assigned task of "nation-building," Ambassador Lodge had apparently decided to run the show with a minimum of interference from others. Not only did he resist Washington's views, he also insisted on keeping General Harkins and the U.S. military out of the picture.

While we [Lodge and Harkins] will attempt a combined assessment in a following message, time has not yet permitted substantive examination of this matter with General Harkins. . . .

We believe that the limitation of contact to Don and Conein is an appropriate security measure consonant with our urging that the smallest number of persons be aware of these details.

We do not believe it wise to ask that "Big Minh" pass his plans to Gen. Stilwell. The Vietnamese believe that there are members of the U.S. military who leak to the Government of Vietnam. I do not doubt that this is an unjust suspicion but it is a fact this suspicion exists and there is no use in pretending that it does not.<sup>57</sup>

On the subject of placing Harkins in control if a coup began while Lodge was out of the country, Lodge said:

It does not seem sensible to have the military in charge of a matter which is so profoundly political as a change of government. In fact, I would say that to do this would probably be the end of any hope for a change of government here. This is said impersonally as a general proposition, since Gen. Harkins is a splendid General and an old friend of mine to whom I would gladly entrust anything I have.<sup>58</sup>

By keeping both Washington and Harkins out of the picture, Lodge's views on the situation and his conception of what should be done became the overriding policy of the U.S. Government toward the Saigon regime and a coup. It was a policy which was strongly hostile to the Diem regime and which unequivocally supported the Generals plotting a coup. It was also a policy based on the CIA's rather than the military's assessment of the balance of coup forces.

We should continue our present position of keeping hands off but continue to monitor and press for more detailed information. CAS has been analyzing potential coup forces for some time and it is their estimate that the Generals have probably figured their chances pretty closely and probably also expect that once they begin to move, not only planned units, but other units will join them. We believe that Vietnam's best Generals are involved in directing this effort. If they can't pull it off, it is doubtful other military leadership could do so successfully.<sup>59</sup>

Ambassador Lodge also sketched out alternative policies to be followed when a coup began and depending on whether it failed or succeeded. Lodge advocated a less than even-handed policy of financial assistance for the plotters and denial of U.S. aircraft or assistance to the Government.

As to requests from the Generals, they may well have need of funds at the last moment with which to buy off potential opposition. To the extent that these funds can be passed discreetly, I believe we should furnish them, provided we are convinced that the proposed coup is sufficiently well organized to have a good chance of success. If they are successful, they will undoubtedly ask for prompt recognition and some assurance that military and economic aid will continue at normal level. We should be prepared to make these statements if the issue is clear-

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 790.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 791.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 790.



cut predicating our position on the President's stated desire to continue the war against the VC to final victory. Should the coup fail, we will have to pick up the pieces as best we can at that time. We have a commitment to the Generals from the August episode to attempt to help in the evacuation of their dependents. We should try to live up to this if conditions will permit.<sup>60</sup>

In what was to be a prophetic statement, Lodge also outlined what the U.S. embassy response to Diem should be in the circumstance of a coup. While the U.S. had an obligation to evacuate the dependents of the conspirators, a similar request from Government officials would have to be "studied closely." Only grudgingly did Lodge suggest that asylum be granted endangered officials.

We anticipate that at the outset of the coup, unless it moves with lightning swiftness, the GVN will request me or Gen. Harkins to use our influence to call it off. I believe our responsibilities should be that our influence certainly could not be superior to that of the President who is Commander-in-Chief and that if he is unable to call it off, we would certainly be unable to do so and would merely be risking American lives attempting to interfere in this Vietnamese problem. The Government might request aircraft. Helicopters, for the evacuation of key personalities that would have to be studied closely, but we would certainly not commit our planes and pilots between the battle lines of the opposing forces. We should, rather, state that we would be willing to act in this fashion during a truce in which both sides agree to the removal of key personalities. . . . If senior Vietnamese personalities and their families requested asylum in the Embassy or other American installations, we would probably have to grant it in light of our previous action with respect to Tri Quang.<sup>61</sup>

Having elaborated U.S. policy in the event of a successful or an unsuccessful coup, Lodge also described his view of the U.S. role if the outcome were indecisive.

Should the coup prove indecisive and a protracted struggle is in progress, we should probably offer our good offices to help resolve the issue in the interest of the war against the VC. This might hold some benefit in terms of concessions by GVN. We will naturally incur some opprobrium from both sides in our role as mediator. However, this opprobrium would probably be less distasteful than a deadlock which would open the door to the VC. We consider such a deadlock the least likely possibility of the three.<sup>62</sup>

Lodge concluded his memo to Bundy with a statement that was apparently intended to reassure Washington.

I do not know what more proof can be offered than the fact these men are obviously prepared to risk their lives and that they want nothing for themselves. If I am any judge of human nature, Don's face expressed sincerity and determination on the morning that I spoke to him. Heartily agree that a miscalculation could jeopardize position in Southeast Asia. We also run tremendous risks by doing nothing.

If we were convinced that the coup was going to fail, we would, of course, do everything we could to stop it.

General Harkins has read this and does not concur.<sup>63</sup>

The White House responded to Lodge on the same day in a cable that is the last documented message of the Pentagon Papers chapter on the Diem coup. In the cable, the White House once again refused to accept Lodge's contention that the United States was powerless to stop the coup unless it betrayed the plotters to Diem. Once again the White House insisted that the prospect of success must be high before the coup should be allowed to proceed. And, once again, the White House refrained from ordering the Ambassador to call off the

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 791-92.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 791.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 792.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*



coup. Instead, Washington left the matter in Mr. Lodge's hands by leaving to him the final judgment on the prospects for the coup's success.

We do not accept as a basis for U.S. policy that we have no power to delay or discourage a coup. . . . We have not considered any betrayal of generals to Diem, and our 79109 explicitly reject that course. We recognize the danger of appearing hostile to generals, but we believe that our own position should be on as firm ground as possible, hence we cannot limit ourselves to proposition implied in your message that only conviction of certain failure justifies intervention. We believe that your standard for intervention should be that stated above.

Therefore, if you should conclude that there is not clearly a high prospect of success, you should communicate this doubt to generals in a way calculated to persuade them to desist at least until chances are better.<sup>64</sup>

On the difficult problem of who would be in charge of the U.S. mission if a coup started during Lodge's trip to the United States, the Bundy cable was firm in designating Harkins.

When you leave Saigon and before there is a coup, Truehart will be Chief of the Country Team. Our only modification of existing procedures is that in this circumstance we wish all instruction to Conein to be conducted in immediate consultation with Harkins and Smith so that all three know what is sold in (*sic*) Conein. Any disagreement among the three on such instruction should be reported to Washington and held for our resolution, when time permits.

If you have left and a coup occurs, we believe that emergency situation requires, pending your return, that direction of country team be vested in most senior officer with experience of military decisions, and the officer in our view is Harkins. We do *not* intend that this switch in final responsibility should be publicized in any way, and Harkins will of course be guided in basic posture by our instructions.<sup>65</sup>

The Bundy cable also included a brief response to Lodge's suggested policies in the event of success, an indecisive outcome, or outright failure of the coup. Bundy's prime concern in the event of failure or a standoff was that the United States not appear to be favoring either side of the contest. Bundy's preference, of course, was for success. "Once a coup under responsible leadership has begun . . . it is in the interest of the U.S. Government that it should succeed."<sup>66</sup>

Two days after Bundy sent his instructions, the coup occurred. Events in the days immediately preceding and during the coup are far from clear, as the generals were not the only group engaged in coup plotting. Two other plots stand out among a number of intrigues. The first involved a group headed by Colonel Do Mau, the head of military security, and Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, the inspector general in charge of the strategic hamlet program. This group was periodically in contact with the Americans through CIA agent Conein but did not have U.S. support. The aim of the Mau-Thao group was to eliminate Nhu, keep Diem in the country and establish a junta of colonels. If necessary, they were prepared to kill the plotting generals.<sup>67</sup>

The second coup group was headed by Colonel Le Quang Tung, Chief of the Special Forces, and by Nhu himself. Having learned of the generals' and colonels' plots, Nhu had devised a plot of his own. Tung was to mount a phony coup, called "Bravo One," whereby Diem and Nhu would appear to be overthrown and would flee to a coastal resort near Saigon. This would bring the true conspirators out into the open, where they could then be defeated by what Nhu

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 792.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 793.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Shaplen, "The Cult of Diem," p. 54.



assumed would be loyal troops led by General Ton That Dinh. At that point, Diem and Nhu would return by popular acclaim in an operation called "Bravo Two." Nhu then planned, according to Colonel Conein, to "go into the program that he had originally planned, which was to negotiate with the North and insist that the Americans get out."<sup>68</sup>

Although in touch with or aware of these other coups and counter-coups, United States support went to the group of plotting generals led by Don, Khiem and Minh. U.S. contacts with this group were particularly frequent as November 1, the day of the coup, approached.

On October 28 two separate U.S. contacts with the plotting generals are recorded, one of which involved Lodge himself. During the morning of Lodge's visit with Diem at Dalat, General Don approached the Ambassador directly and enquired if CIA agent Conein spoke for the Ambassador. Lodge assured Don that he did. That evening General Don met with Conein and discussed details of the organization of the coup committee. In response to Conein's statement that the Ambassador should be able to review the coup plans before his October 31 departure, Don indicated that the plans might be made available to Lodge as late as four hours before the coup rather than two days before the coup as earlier promised. Don urged that Lodge not alter his plans to depart for Washington on October 31, fearing that this might alert the palace to the impending coup. Although General Don specified that nothing would take place in the next forty-eight hours, according to the Pentagon analyst, "the implication was that the coup would pre-empt Lodge's departure."<sup>69</sup>

With this advance warning, Admiral Harry Felt, Commander of the Pacific Fleet (CINPAC), was instructed on October 29 to have a naval and air task force stand off the Vietnamese coast. This alert was a reenactment of an alert called at the time of the August plotting and was intended to provide for evacuation of American civilians and dependents if necessary.

On the same day, October 29, the first preparatory move of the coup took place. General Dinh ordered Colonel Tung to move his Special Forces out of Saigon for maneuvers. In issuing this order, Dinh appears to have been cooperating with both Nhu and the general, biding his time until he could see which side would prevail. General Dinh was in charge of III Corps while General Cao headed IV Corps, the two critical corps areas in the vicinity of Saigon. With his plan for Bravo One and Bravo Two in mind and assuming the loyalty of Generals Dinh and Cao, Nhu felt safe in sending Colonel Tung's forces from the city. Unbeknownst, however, to Nhu and Diem, the plotting generals had taken great pains to neutralize Cao and to keep the unreliable Dinh out of the picture until he was needed.

On October 31 in a final approach to Diem, General Don paid a visit to the two brothers at the palace. This visit, which is not mentioned in the Pentagon Papers, was made according to Robert Shaplen "at the instigation of the Americans."<sup>70</sup> Don warned both Nhu and Diem that the situation in the country was bad and asked them what they

<sup>68</sup> National Broadcasting Company, "The Death of Diem," X-p/4.

<sup>69</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, p. 260.

<sup>70</sup> Shaplen, "The Cult of Diem," p. 54.



were going to do about their promised reforms. Nhu and Diem replied that the situation had returned to normal and that there was no need to do anything. With this Don left. The fate of the Diem regime was sealed and the coup began.

## OVERTHROW OF DIEM AND AFTERMATH, NOVEMBER 1-8

November 1, the day of the coup, began with an official call on Diem by Ambassador Lodge and Admiral Felt. Whether Lodge had been given the promised coup plans is uncertain but, whatever the reason, Lodge had deferred his Washington departure and was still in Saigon. Admiral Felt had been visiting General Harkins, and at the conclusion of that visit, Lodge accompanied Felt on a courtesy call to President Diem. At the end of the interview, Diem took Lodge aside and engaged him in a twenty minute conversation. Diem indicated that he was ready to discuss what Washington wanted him to do. According to Hilsman "the report of this conversation, which was sent by routine priority cable, did not arrive in Washington until it was all over—for it was sidetracked for the very high priority 'flash' messages that preempted the wires."<sup>71</sup>

Seemingly the U.S. policy of pressure and persuasion had finally borne fruit on the very day of the coup. Lodge's response to Diem's initiative is not described in the Pentagon account. Even if Lodge had wanted to save the Diem government, it was too late. Coup units were already beginning to deploy in and around Saigon.<sup>72</sup>

At noon nearly all the generals and top officers convened at Joint General Staff (JGS) headquarters at Tan Son Nhut. The only senior officers not informed of and present at the meeting were Generals Dinh and Cao as well as the Senior Naval officer who had been shot enroute. There the coup committee informed the assembled officers that the coup had begun, asked their support and recorded individual pledges of support for later use over the radio. The Mau-Thao group of colonels had no choice but to go along. Several officers suspected of being loyal to Diem, such as Colonel Tung, the commanders of the Air Force, Marines, Civil Guard and police force, were taken into custody. Their units were placed under the leadership of more trusted junior officers.

Colonel Conein was invited to come to JGS headquarters where he was authorized to maintain contact with the U.S. Embassy during the coup. According to Conein, "I had a radio, a special radio that cut me into a special net . . . directly to the Embassy, plus I had with the junta or the plotters agreement that I had a special telephone line directly to the U.S. Embassy."<sup>73</sup>

With regard to General Taylor's contention that the United States was not aware of the moment of the coup, Conein has said:

My personal opinion is this is quite inconceivable because during the whole reporting period through my own channels, I was reporting by cable every one of the developments leading up to and including the timing of the coup. Every

<sup>71</sup> Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 518.

<sup>72</sup> For vivid and varying accounts of the coup by U.S. observers in Saigon, see Mecklin, *Mission in Torment*, p. 251 ff. and Halberstam, *Making of a Quagmire*, p. 287 ff.

<sup>73</sup> National Broadcasting Company, "Death of Diem," X-p/7.



one of the meetings, every one of the negotiations, the discussions that were held with General Big Minh, with General Don, and General Kim and any other military leader who were participating in the coup was completely reported to Washington, D.C. and I received many times guidance exactly of what I was to discuss with these individuals and the limits of which I could discuss these problems with them.<sup>74</sup>

Throughout the coup, Conein provided reliable reports to the Embassy.

At 1:45 p.m., General Don called General Joseph Stilwell, Harkins' deputy, to inform him that the coup was underway. Apparently this was the promised official warning. At the same time coup forces were seizing the post office, police headquarters, radio stations, and airport and naval headquarters. Other units prepared to assault the palace, the barracks of the palace guard and the Special Forces headquarters near Tan Son Nhut. Colonel Tung, who was placed under arrest, was forced to call his Special Forces and tell them to surrender, which they did after a brief skirmish. With the remainder of the Special Forces out of the city, palace defenses were reduced to the palace guard.

On several occasions from the mid- to late afternoon, Diem and Nhu were in touch with the coup generals by telephone. Having tried to reach General Dinh by phone, the brothers soon realized that they had been outwitted and that the coup was genuine. Diem spoke with Don and said he was ready to announce a new policy. Don's reply, according to Shaplen, was "Why didn't you tell me that yesterday? Now it's too late."<sup>75</sup> Then, starting with General Minh, each of the coup generals spoke to Nhu and Diem, demanded that they surrender and promised them safe conduct out of the country with their families.

Diem's response was to propose that the coup leaders come to the palace for consultations—a tactic used in 1960 to delay the coup long enough for loyal troops to reach the city. The generals refused and at 4:30 p.m. they went on the air, announced the coup, demanded the resignation of Diem and Nhu and began broadcasting the previously recorded pledges of support of senior officers.

At 4:30 p.m. Diem had his last conversation over the phone with Lodge.

*Diem:* Some Units have made a rebellion and I want to know what is the attitude of the U.S.?

*Lodge:* I do not feel well enough informed to be able to tell you. I have heard the shooting, but am not acquainted with all the facts. Also it is 4:30 a.m. in Washington and the U.S. Government cannot possibly have a view.<sup>76</sup>

*Diem:* But you must have some general ideas. After all, I am a Chief of State. I have tried to do my duty. I want to do now what duty and good sense require. I believe in duty above all.

*Lodge:* You have certainly done your duty. As I told you only this morning, I admire your courage and your great contributions to your country. No one can take away from you the credit for all you have done. Now I am worried about your physical safety. I have a report that those in charge of the current activity offer you and your brother safe conduct out of the country if you resign. Have you heard this?

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, X-p/8.

<sup>75</sup> Shaplen, "The Cult of Diem," p. 54.

<sup>76</sup> It is interesting to contrast Lodge's statement to Diem with the account of a Washington official. According to Roger Hilsman, he was awakened at 2:00 a.m. Washington time (two and one half hours before Diem's conversation with Lodge) by the State Department duty officer and given word of the coup. He spent the rest of the night at the State Department "operations center." Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 519.



*Diem:* No. (And then after a pause) You have my telephone number.

*Lodge:* Yes. If I can do anything for your physical safety, please call me.

*Diem:* I am trying to reestablish order.<sup>77</sup>

According to the Pentagon analyst, "There is no evidence as to whether Washington issued further instructions with respect to the personal safety of Diem and Nhu at this time. The above conversation was the last that any American had with Diem. Lodge, as was his custom, retired that night at about 9:30 p.m."<sup>78</sup> Before retiring, Ambassador Lodge, according to John Mecklin, called the Embassy to see if there were any reason to stay up beyond his customary bedtime. His deputy William Truehart assured him there was not.

Lodge apparently reasoned that the coup, which he had expected, seemed to be going well, that there was nothing he could do to help it go better, and that morning would probably confront him with dozens of difficult problems, such as how to recognize the new regime as quickly as possible and still be dignified. A fresh well-rested Ambassador in the morning would be more in the U.S. interest than an exhausted, fretful man who had been up all night worrying.<sup>79</sup>

On the subject of U.S. efforts to provide for Diem's personal safety, Colonel Conein has stated that

I asked the Embassy for an aircraft and I was told I had to wait 24 hours before I could get the aircraft that was necessary to transport Diem to a nation who would accept his exile, I spoke for the United States government and I was authorized and I informed the junta that I had an aircraft, but it would take me 24 hours to have that aircraft.<sup>80</sup>

At 4:45 p.m., the Generals reached Diem and Nhu on the phone again. They put Colonel Tung on the line to say that he and the Special Forces had surrendered. Tung was then taken outside and shot. At 5:15 p.m. General Minh made a personal call to Diem urging him to surrender before the palace was put under ground and air attack. Diem hung up.<sup>81</sup>

Diem and Nhu then began frantically phoning troop commanders throughout the country seeking their support. In the instances where they were able to get through, the brothers were advised to surrender by officers who now supported the coup. Unable to get the support of the regular military, they vainly sought the support of their Republic Youth groups and paramilitary units.

Still unwilling to surrender, Diem and Nhu escaped from the palace at around 8:00 p.m. and fled to the home of a friend in Cholon, a Saigon suburb. An artillery barrage of the palace began at 9:00 p.m. joined by a tank shelling at 3:30 a.m., November 2. At 6:30 a.m. the palace surrendered when Diem, who had been long gone, issued a ceasefire order to his palace guard. Colonel Thao was the first of the plotters into the palace. He was told by a captured officer of Diem's escape and whereabouts.

According to all accounts, Diem and Nhu's flight from the palace sealed their fate. In the course of meetings throughout the day, the decision to kill Diem had been discussed. Military officers who might have voted to spare Diem were assassinated. Then, when it was learned that

<sup>77</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, p. 268.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>79</sup> Mecklin, *Mission in Torment*, p. 263.

<sup>80</sup> National Broadcasting Company, "The Death of Diem," X-p/11.

One wonders what became of the U.S. military aircraft that had been dispatched to stand by for Lodge's departure, scheduled for the previous day.

<sup>81</sup> Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 520.



Diem and his brother had escaped from the palace, the decision began to go against Diem.<sup>82</sup>

Between 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m., Diem made three phone calls to the General Staff headquarters from his Cholon hide-away. In the first call, Diem refused to speak with General Minh, requested full honors and a graceful exit from power and safe conduct to another country. In the second call, Diem spoke with General Minh and again insisted on full honors. Minh, becoming increasingly angry, hung up. Finally, in the third call, Diem asked only for safe conduct to the airport and departure from Vietnam.<sup>83</sup>

Recent accounts of the assassination of Diem implicate all the coup generals. While an armored personnel carrier and jeeps were dispatched to pick up Diem and Nhu, a consensus was reached on their assassination. General Minh dispatched Captain Nguyen Van Nhung, his personal aide and a professional assassin. The brothers were to be killed before returning to headquarters. General Mai Huu Xuan, the senior commander present, permitted the murder. Captain Duong Hieu Nghia assisted Nhung who shot the two brothers as they sat with their hands tied behind their backs in the armored car.<sup>84</sup> Thus the nine-year rule of Ngo Dinh Diem came to a bloody end.

According to many accounts, the news of Diem's and Nhu's deaths was deeply disturbing to President Kennedy.<sup>85</sup> His dismay was particularly acute because of "the heavy U.S. involvement in encouraging the coup leaders." The Pentagon analyst goes on to note:

Apparently, we had put full confidence in the coup committee's offers of safe conduct to the brothers, and, reluctant to intercede on behalf of Diem and Nhu for fear of appearing to offer support to them or of reneging on our pledges of non-interference to the generals, we had not appreciated the degree of hatred of the Ngo family among the generals, nor their fear that if the brothers survived the coup they would somehow stage a comeback.<sup>86</sup>

However shocked U.S. officials may have been at the assassination, they apparently recovered quickly. The State Department reaction to the coup, described but not documented in the Pentagon Papers, was in terms of the problem of recognizing the new government. Secretary Rusk advised against hasty recognition that might make it appear that the U.S. had been involved in the coup. It was important, he felt, to publicly describe the coup as an expression of national will and to include Vice President Tho in an interim regime that would return quickly to constitutional government. Rusk discouraged any large delegation of generals from calling on Lodge to avoid their appearing to "check in."<sup>87</sup>

On November 3, Generals Don and Kim called on an elated Lodge at the Embassy. General Minh, they explained, was discussing a new government with Vice President Tho and could not join them. The conversation was lengthy, cordial and "began with mutual expressions of satisfaction at the success of the coup, and continued with Lodge's assurance of forthcoming U.S. recognition for their new govern-

<sup>82</sup> National Broadcasting Company, "Death of Diem," XI-p/13.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, XI-p/14ff.

<sup>84</sup> Shaplen, "The Cult of Diem," pp. 56-58; Conein has corroborated this account of the assassination, National Broadcasting Company, "The Death of Diem," XI-p/17ff.

<sup>85</sup> Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 997; Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 521.

<sup>86</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, p. 270.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*



ment.”<sup>88</sup> The generals explained the structure and composition of the government they had decided on. They also covered a range of immediate problems such as the disposition of the Nhu children and the rest of the Ngo family, curfew, press censorship, and reprisals against former officials. Lodge promised to see that certain aid programs were restored immediately and that others were resumed when the new government was in place. “The generals confirmed the psychological importance of the commodity import suspension to the success of their plans.”<sup>89</sup>

On November 4, the next day, Ambassador Lodge and Lt. Colonel Conein met with Generals Minh and Don on instructions from Washington. Despite Lodge’s elation, the State Department was concerned with the negative effect of the assassinations on public opinion and with the appearance of U.S. complicity. The generals had, of course, denied that the assassination had been ordered and were responsive, according to Lodge, to his request that they issue a clarifying statement about the deaths of the brothers and that they treat other members of the family humanely. Lodge rebuked the State Department for its “excessive preoccupation with the negative public relations problems of the coup” and for the Department’s “failure to note the brilliance with which the coup was planned and executed.”<sup>90</sup>

The new government with Minh as President was announced on November 5. On November 6, the State Department approved Lodge’s proposed reply of recognition. On November 7, the State Department, “under the pressure of other governments and the press, announced its intention to recognize.”<sup>91</sup>

Lodge delivered the note of recognition to the new Foreign Minister, Pham Dang Lam on November 8. Lam emphasized his inadequacies for his new position and asked for the Ambassador’s advice “which Lodge was apparently not reluctant to give on a variety of topics.” It was evident, according to the Pentagon analyst, “that the new government would be heavily dependent on U.S. advice and support, not only for the war effort, but also in the practical problems of running the country.”<sup>92</sup>

This is the central message of events surrounding the Diem coup. The United States, through its participation in the overthrow of the Diem regime and the establishment of a successor government, became more directly involved in managing the political, economic and military problems of Vietnam. With the increase in U.S. involvement came an increase in the commitment of U.S. prestige to victory in South Vietnam. This in turn made a U.S. withdrawal from Southeast Asia more unlikely.

Official accounts of the coup denying a significant U.S. involvement are not uncommon. Arthur Schlesinger has noted:

It is important to state clearly that the coup of November 1, 1963, was entirely planned and carried out by the Vietnamese. Neither the American Embassy nor the CIA were involved in instigation or execution. . . . What lay behind the coup was not the meddling of Americans, quiet or ugly, but the long history of Viet-

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*



namese military resentment against Diem. . . . As Lodge later put it, the coup was like a rock rolling downhill. It could have been stopped only by an aggressive American intervention against the army on behalf of Diem and the Nhus.<sup>93</sup>

Lodge himself offered the following description of U.S. participation in the coup in an interview with the *New York Times* on June 30, 1964.

Well, the United States was not involved in the overthrow of the Diem regime. The United States was trying to change—bring about a change in the behavior of the Diem regime. It was trying to bring about a change in the personnel of the Diem regime. . . . We were trying to bring about this by thoroughly legitimate political means. . . .

Now, the overthrow was—of the Diem regime—was a purely Vietnamese affair. We never participated in the planning. We never gave any advice. We had nothing whatever to do with it. I—there were opportunities to participate in the planning and to give advice, and we never did. We were punctilious in drawing that line, and that was done by the Vietnamese.<sup>94</sup>

The account of the Diem coup in the Pentagon Papers contrasts markedly with these disclaimers of United States involvement in the overthrow of Diem: 1) The United States Government, through its Ambassador and CIA personnel in Saigon, maintained regular contact with the coup plotters from August 23 to 31 and from October 2 through the coup. 2) In these contacts, the United States told the plotting generals that we were prepared to withdraw support from Diem if he did not rid himself of Nhu and that we would provide direct support to the generals during any “interim” government. 3) The United States repeatedly asked to review coup plans in order to comment on them and to advise as to the probability of their success. 4) The United States engaged in a series of public actions that, while intended to press the Diem regime toward reforms, were also intended to encourage the plotters to act; the U.S. deplored the raids on the pagodas, exonerated the Vietnamese military from complicity in those raids, asked for new policies and personnel in South Vietnam, and suspended aid programs that were vital to the Diem government. 5) Throughout the coup, Colonel Conein, the CIA contact man, was at rebel headquarters with full authorization to report on the progress of the coup to the Ambassador. 6) Apart from the deaths of Diem and Nhu, whom the U.S. did little to protect, the reaction of U.S. officials to the coup was one of extreme satisfaction. Recognition of and cooperation with the new government began immediately after the coup.

American satisfaction with the new government, however, was short-lived. General Minh did not prove to be the natural leader the U.S. had hoped for and was overthrown in a coup on January 30, 1964. Within a little over a year following Diem's overthrow, there were four major changes of government in South Vietnam, and political stability was soon added to the list of U.S. goals in Vietnam. By encouraging the overthrow of the Diem government, the United States bears a large measure of responsibility for the ensuing political chaos. The weight of this responsibility, in turn, drew the United States ever more deeply into the struggle in Vietnam.

<sup>93</sup> Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 997.

<sup>94</sup> *New York Times*, June 30, 1964, p. 14.



## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

DEPARTMENT OF STATE—MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION—FOR THE RECORD

Date: July 4, 1963

Time: 11:00 to 11:50 a.m.

Place: The White House

Subject: Situation in South Viet-Nam

Participants: The President, Mr. Ball, Mr. Harriman, Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Mr. Hilsman, Mr. Forrestal.

The President was briefed on developments in Indonesia, Laos and Viet-Nam. The portion on Viet-Nam follows:

A joint agreement was signed on June 16 in which the Government met the Buddhists' five demands. The Buddhists and the Government then worked together on the funeral arrangements from the *bonze* who burned himself to death so that incidents could be avoided. The funeral came off without trouble.

Since then there have been rumors circulating in Saigon that the Government does not intend to live up to the agreement. These rumors were given credence by an article appearing in the English language "Times" of Viet-Nam, which is dominated by the Nhus. The article contained a veiled attack on the US and on the Buddhists. There was a suggestion that the Monk who burned himself to death was drugged and a provocative challenge to the Buddhists that, if no further demonstrations occurred on July 2, this would amount to an admission by the Buddhists that they were satisfied with the Government's action. (The President injected questions on the possibility of drugging, to which Mr. Hilsman replied that religious fervor was an adequate explanation.)

At this point there was a discussion of the possibility of getting rid of the Nhus in which the combined judgment was that it would not be possible.

Continuing the briefing, Mr. Hilsman said that the Buddhists contained an activist element which undoubtedly favored increasing demands as well as charging the Government with dragging its feet. There was thus an element of truth in Diem's view that the Buddhists might push their demands so far as to make his fall inevitable.

During these events the US had put extremely heavy pressure on Diem to take political actions. Most recently we had urged Diem to make a speech which would include announcements that he intended to meet with Buddhist leaders, permit Buddhist chaplains in the army and so on. If Diem did not make such a speech and there were further demonstrations, the US would be compelled publicly to disassociate itself from the GVN's Buddhist policy. Mr. Hilsman reported that Diem had received this approach with what seemed to be excessive politeness but had said he would consider making such a speech.

Our estimate was that no matter what Diem did there will be coup attempts over the next four months. Whether or not any of these attempts will be successful is impossible to say.

Mr. Hilsman said that everyone agreed that the chances of chaos in the wake of a coup are considerably less than they were a year ago. An encouraging sign relative to this point is that the war between the Vietnamese forces and the Viet Cong has been pursued throughout the Buddhist crisis without noticeable let-up.

At this point Mr. Forrestal reported on General Krulak's views that, even if there were chaos in Saigon, the military units in the field would continue to confront the Communists.

Mr. Hilsman went on to say that Ambassador Nolting believes that the most likely result of a coup attempt that succeeded in killing Diem was civil war. Mr. Hilsman disagreed with this view slightly in that he thought civil war was not the most likely result but that it was certainly a possible result.

(27)



The timing of Ambassador Nolting's return and Ambassador Lodge's assumption of duty was then discussed. The President's initial view was that Ambassador Nolting should return immediately and that Ambassador Lodge should assume his duties as soon thereafter as possible. The President volunteered that Ambassador Nolting had done an outstanding job, that it was almost miraculous the way he had succeeded in turning the war around from the disastrously low point in relations between Diem and ourselves that existed when Ambassador Nolting took over. Mr. Hilsman pointed out the personal sacrifices that Ambassador Nolting had been forced to make during this period, and the President said that he hoped a way could be found to commend Ambassador Nolting publicly so as to make clear the fine job he had done and that he hoped an appropriate position could be found for him in Washington so that he could give his children a suitable home in the years immediately ahead.

The President's decision was to delegate the authority to decide on the timing of Ambassador Nolting's return to the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs; that Ambassador Lodge should report to Washington no later than July 15 so that he could take the Counterinsurgency Course simultaneously with the normal briefings for an ambassador; and that Ambassador Lodge should arrive in Saigon as soon as possible following completion of the CI Course on August 14. Arrangements were made for Ambassador Nolting to see the President at 4:00 p.m. on Monday, July 8.

*Prepared by R. Hilsman.*

## APPENDIX 2

JULY 5, 1963.

### MEMORANDUM OF CONSERVATION

George Ball, Nolting, Chalmers Wood, George Springstein

Nolting opened with review of the Buddhists situation which he characterizes as serious. He regretted that Diem had not taken it in hand earlier but emphasized that Diem had given his word that the agreement would be carried out. It was Nolting's experience that when Diem gave his word, he followed through although sometimes it was handled in his own way. The ambassador said that although interference by the Nhus was serious, he believed that the GVN would be able to come through this one slowly. As to tactics, the more Diem was prodded, the slower he went. While Nhu was troublesome, he was chiefly responsible for gains which had been made in the provincial pacification program. The Under Secretary asked what would happen if there were a change in government. The ambassador replied that he would give his view which was not completely shared by Mr. Wood. In his view, if a revolution occurred in Vietnam which grew out of the Buddhist situation, the country would be split between feuding factions and the Americans would have to withdraw, and the country might be lost to the Communists. This led to the question of how much pressure we could exert on Diem. Mr. Nolting replied that if we repudiated him on this issue, his government would fall. The ambassador believed that Diem would live up to the agreement unless he believed that he was dealing with the political attempt to cause his overthrow. As to the role of the Catholics in the government, Ambassador Nolting did not believe that Diem gave them preference. Unfortunately, many persons in the government felt that it would help their careers if they became Catholic. It was true that the government had been unwise in the ostentatious manner in which it supported and encouraged the publicizing of Catholic ceremonies, however. In general, Vietnam had been a country in which there was a great degree of religious tolerance. Now the situation seemed out of hand. It was deplorable because we had been winning. . . . Turning the point of Ambassador Lodge, Mr. Nolting commented that the more Lodge was built up as a strong man who was going to tell Diem where to get off, the harder it would be for Lodge to do his job in Vietnam. The Under Secretary suggested that Ambassador Nolting could reassure President Diem on this point.

## APPENDIX 3

JULY 10, 1963.

### SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE 53-2-63

#### THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

##### SCOPE NOTE

NIE 53-63, "Prospects in South Vietnam," dated 17 April 1963 was particularly concerned with the progress of the counterinsurgency effort, and with the mili-



tary and political factors most likely to affect that effort. The primary purpose of the present SNIE is to examine the implications of recent developments in South Vietnam for the stability of the country, the viability of the Diem regime, and its relationship with the U.S.

#### CONCLUSIONS

A. The Buddhist crisis in South Vietnam has highlighted and intensified a widespread and longstanding dissatisfaction with the Diem regime and its style of government. If—as is likely—Diem fails to carry out truly and promptly the commitments he has made to the Buddhists, disorders will probably flare again and the chances of a coup or assassination attempts against him will become better than even. (*Paras. 4, 14*)

B. The Diem regime's underlying uneasiness about the extent of the U.S. involvement in South Vietnam has been sharpened by the Buddhist affair and the firm line taken by the U.S. This attitude will almost certainly persist and further pressure to reduce the U.S. presence in the country is likely. (*Paras. 10-12*)

C. Thus far, the Buddhist issue has not been effectively exploited by the Communists, nor does it appear to have had any appreciable effect on the counter-insurgency effort. We do not think Diem is likely to be overthrown by a Communist coup. Nor do we think the Communists would necessarily profit if he were overthrown by some combination of his non-Communist opponents. A non-Communist successor regime might be initially less effective against the Viet Cong, but, given continued support from the U.S., could provide reasonably effective leadership for the government and the war effort. (*Paras. 7, 15-17*)

#### DISCUSSION

##### *I. Introduction*

1. The two chief problems which have faced the Government of South Vietnam (GVN) since its birth in 1954 have been: (a) to forge the institutions and loyalties necessary to Vietnam's survival as an independent nation, and (b) to counter the menace of Hanoi's subversive and aggressive designs—pursued since 1960 by a campaign of widespread guerrilla warfare. In attempting to cope with these problems, the GVN has been hampered by its lack of confidence in and its inability to engage the understanding and support of a considerable portion of the Vietnamese people—including large segments of the educated classes and the peasantry. In recent weeks these inadequacies and tensions in the South Vietnamese body politic have been further revealed and intensified.

##### *II. The Buddhist affair*

2. President Diem, his family, and a large proportion of the top leaders of the regime are Roman Catholics, in a population that is 70 to 80 percent Buddhist. The regime has clearly accorded preferential treatment to Catholics in its employment practices and has favored the Catholic Church. But there have been no legal restrictions on religious freedom and, until recently, most Buddhists appeared passive in their response to the privileged institutional position occupied by the Catholic Church. There have, however, been various administrative discriminations against the Buddhists, though these may have resulted as much from thoughtlessness or misplaced zeal on the part of minor officials as from conscious GVN policy. These have obviously created an undercurrent of resentment, as is evidenced by the extent and intensity of the recent outbreaks.

3. In April 1963, the GVN ordered its provincial officials to enforce a long-standing but generally ignored edict regulating the public display of religious flags. As it happened, this order was issued just prior to Buddha's birthday (8 May), a major Buddhist festival, and just after Papal flags had been prominently flown during a series of officially encouraged celebrations commemorating the 25th anniversary of the ordination of Ngo dinh Thuc, Diem's brother, the Archbishop of Hue. A protest demonstration developed in Hue on 8 May, which was dispersed by fire from a Civil Guard unit. In the ensuing melee several persons were killed, including some children. The GVN has blamed the deaths on Viet Cong terrorists despite evidence to the contrary, and its subsequent stiff-necked handling of this incident and its aftermath has sparked a national crisis. The Buddhists, hitherto disorganized and nonprotesting, have shown considerable cohesion and force—enough to elicit a set of "compromise" agreements from President Diem on 16 June. Moreover, the fact that the Buddhist leaders have been able to challenge the government openly without evoking serious government retaliation has presumably given them considerable confidence.



4. For the moment, the Buddhist movement remains under the effective control of moderate bonzes who have refused to accept support from or countenance cooperation with any of Diem's political opponents, Communist or non-Communist, and appear to be trying to insure that the Buddhists live up to their part of the bargain. This leadership gave the GVN a period of grace (which expired about the end of June) in which to show that it was moving in good faith to carry out its undertakings, failing which protests would resume. So far there have been no further demonstrations, but the Buddhist leadership is clearly restive.

5. Despite Buddhist restraint in the political exploitation of the affair, it has obvious political overtones. It has apparently aroused widespread popular indignation and could well become a focal point of general disaffection with the Diem government. It provides an issue on which most of Diem's non-Communist opponents (even including some Catholics) can find common ground of agreement. There is considerable evidence that the issue itself and, even more, the Diem family's handling of it to date has occasioned restiveness at virtually all levels of the GVN's military and civil establishments, both of whose lower and middle echelons are largely staffed by Buddhists. In some cases, civil servants seem to have ignored or tempered GVN instructions, superiors have on occasion evaded their assigned task of propounding the official GVN line to their subordinates, and information on impending government actions has obviously leaked to Buddhist leaders. In any case, recent developments are causing many GVN officials to reexamine their relations with and the limits of their loyalty to the Diem regime; there is accumulating evidence of serious disaffection and coup plotting in high military and civilian circles.

6. The Buddhist affair appears to have given considerable heart to the various non-Communist political opposition splinter groups in and out of South Vietnam. There also appears to be a growing feeling among former supporters of the regime that Diem's position may have been permanently and dangerously impaired. Thus far, however, we have no evidence that the diverse opposition groups have been able to form new or effective alliances with one another.

7. The Buddhist issue would appear to be an obvious windfall for the Communists, but so far there is no evidence that they have been able to exploit it effectively. They may have penetrated the Buddhist clergy to some extent, but are not presently exerting any discernible influence, despite the suggestions to the contrary in GVN pronouncements. To date the Buddhist crisis does not appear to have had any appreciable effect on the continuing counterinsurgency effort, though the morale and efficiency of the GVN's military and civil forces are likely to be impaired if the issue is prolonged.

8. The Buddhist crisis has also hurt the GVN internationally, with potentially important effects upon the future success of U.S. policy towards southeast Asia. Protests are growing in other predominantly Buddhist countries, with the implication that U.S. action could help resolve the crisis. Cambodia and Ceylon have made representations to the U.N. and more may be forthcoming. In other countries, including the U.S., the crisis has given new stimulus to criticism of U.S. policy on the grounds that the U.S. is supporting an oppressive and unrepresentative regime.

9. The future course of the Buddhist affair will be largely determined by the GVN's actions in the near term. It is likely that the issues recently raised can be resolved if the GVN executes its portion of the negotiated bargain. However, politically sophisticated segments of South Vietnamese society, Buddhists included, are mindful of Diem's past practice of often using negotiations as a stall for time and of making promises in order to weather an immediate crisis. The real danger in the present situation is that Diem may be tempted to employ such tactics which have served him well in the past but could prove disastrous if essayed this time. If demonstrations should be resumed, they would probably assume an increasingly political cast, and less moderate Buddhist leadership would be likely to come to the fore. Public order would be threatened. In particular, we cannot be sure how various army or police units would react if ordered to fire on demonstrations headed by Buddhist bonzes.

### *III. The effect of recent developments on U.S.-GVN relations*

10. The GVN has always shown some concern over the implications of U.S. involvement in South Vietnamese affairs and from time to time has felt moved to restrict U.S. activities and presence in South Vietnam. This attitude springs partly from legitimate, if hypersensitive, concern for the appearance as well as the fact of Vietnam's recently acquired sovereignty. To a considerable degree,



however, it springs from the Diem government's suspicion of U.S. intentions toward it, and from its belief that the extensive U.S. presence is setting in motion political forces which could eventually threaten Diem's political primacy.

11. The Buddhist affairs erupted at one of these periods of GVN sensitivity, and the strain has been aggravated by subsequent events. The GVN's initial handling of the issue gave the U.S. ground for serious embarrassment and concern which, in turn, produced a succession of forceful U.S. *démarches*. The Diem family has bitterly resented these U.S. actions and may well feel that the Buddhist protests were at least indirectly due to the U.S. presence. Under the circumstances further pressure to reduce that presence is likely.

12. A key role in this regard will be played by Diem's brother, Ngo dinh Nhu. He has always been Diem's chief political lieutenant, but the years since 1954 have witnessed a steady accretion of Nhu's personal power and authority—an accretion due partly to circumstance and primarily to deliberate effort on Nhu's part. Nhu has political ambitions of his own and almost certainly envisages himself as his brother's successor. For a variety of reasons, Nhu has long privately viewed the U.S. with some hostility and suspicion. American criticism of the GVN has especially irritated Nhu, for he is aware that he and his wife are often its primary targets. Above all, Nhu almost certainly doubts whether the support which the U.S. has given to his brother would be transferred to him.

13. In the negotiations with the Buddhists, Nhu urged his brother to take a firm line and is, by his own statement, wholly out of sympathy with the concessions made. On the basis of past performance, we think it unlikely that he will help to implement the settlement; his influence on Diem will be rather in the direction of delaying and hedging on commitments, a tendency to which Diem himself is already disposed. This will be the more likely since not only the Nhuses and Diem, but also his brothers Archbishop Thuc and Ngo dinh Can, the political boss of the central provinces, obviously continue to doubt the legitimacy of Buddhist complaints and to underestimate the intensity of the crisis.

#### IV. The outlook

14. If the Diem government moves effectively to fulfill its 16 June commitments, much of the resentment aroused by the Buddhist controversy could be allayed. However, even if relations between the GVN and the Buddhists are smoothed over, the general discontent with the Diem regime which the crisis has exacerbated and brought to the fore is likely to persist. Further, if—as is probable—the regime is dilatory, inept, and insincere in handling Buddhist matters, there will probably be renewed demonstrations, and South Vietnam will probably remain in a state of domestic political tension. Under these circumstances, the chances of a non-Communist assassination or coup attempt against Diem will be better than even. We cannot exclude the possibility of an attempted Communist coup, but a Communist attempt will have appreciably less likelihood of success so long as the majority of the government's opponents and critics remain—as they are now—alert to the Communist peril.

15. The chances of a non-Communist coup—and of its success—would become greater in the event renewed GVN/Buddhist confrontation should lead to large-scale demonstrations in Saigon. More or less prolonged riot and general disorder would probably result—with the security forces confused over which side to support. Under such circumstances, a small group, particularly one with prior contingency plans for such an eventuality, might prove able to topple the government. Conversely, a continued or resumed truce between the GVN and the Buddhists would serve to reduce the likelihood of such an overthrow.

16. Any attempt to remove Diem will almost certainly be directed against Nhu as well, but should Nhu survive Diem, we are virtually certain that he would attempt to gain power—in the first instance probably by manipulating the constitutional machinery. We do not believe that Nhu's bid would succeed, despite the personal political base he has sought to build through the Republican Youth (of which he is the overt, uniformed head), the strategic hamlet program (whose directing Interministerial Committee he chairs), and in the army. He and his wife have become too much the living symbols of all that is disliked in the present regime for Nhu's personal political power to long outlive his brother. There might be a struggle with no little violence, but enough of the army would almost certainly move to take charge of the situation, either rallying behind the constitutional successor to install Vice President Tho or backing another non-Communist civil leader or a military junta.

17. A non-Communist successor regime might prove no more effective than Diem in fighting the Viet Cong; indeed at least initially it might well prove con-



siderably less effective, and the counterinsurgency effort would probably be temporarily disrupted. However, there is a reasonably large pool of under-utilized but experienced and trained manpower not only within the military and civilian sectors of the present government but also, to some extent, outside. These elements, given continued support from the U.S., could provide reasonably effective leadership for the government and the war effort.

## APPENDIX 4

AUGUST 24, 1963.

STATE 243—STATE TO LODGE

It is now clear that whether military proposed martial law or whether Nhu tricked them into it, Nhu took advantage of its imposition to smash pagodas with police and Tung's Special Forces loyal to him, thus placing onus on military in eyes of world and Vietnamese people. Also clear that Nhu has maneuvered himself into commanding position.

U.S. Government cannot tolerate situation in which power lies in Nhu's hands. Diem must be given chance to rid himself of Nhu and his coterie and replace them with best military and political personalities available.

If, in spite of all of your efforts, Diem remains obdurate and refuses, then we must face the possibility that Diem himself cannot be preserved.

We now believe immediate action must be taken to prevent Nhu from consolidating his position further. Therefore, unless you in consultation with Harkins perceive overriding objections you are authorized to proceed along following lines:

(1) First, we must press on appropriate levels of GVN following line:

(a) USG cannot accept actions against Buddhists taken by Nhu and his collaborators under cover martial law.

(b) Prompt dramatic actions redress situation must be taken, including repeal of decree 10, release of arrested monks, nuns, etc.

(2) We must at same time also tell key military leaders that US would find it impossible to continue support GVN militarily and economically unless above steps are taken immediately which we recognize requires removal of Nhus from the scene. We wish give Diem reasonable opportunity to remove Nhus, but if he remains obdurate, then we are prepared to accept the obvious implication that we can no longer support Diem. You may also tell appropriate military commanders we will give them direct support in any interim period of breakdown central government mechanism.

(3) We recognize the necessity of removing taint on military for pagoda raids and placing blame squarely on Nhu. You are authorized to have such statements made in Saigon as you consider desirable to achieve this objective. We are prepared to take same line here and to have Voice of America make statement along lines contained in next numbered telegram whenever you give the word, preferably as soon as possible.

Concurrently, with above, Ambassador and country team should urgently examine all possible alternative leadership and make detailed plans as to how we might bring about Diem's replacement if this should become necessary.

Assume you will consult with General Harkins re any precautions necessary protect American personnel during crisis period.

You will understand that we cannot from Washington give you detailed instructions as to how this operation should proceed, but you will also know we will back you to the hilt on actions you take to achieve our objectives.

Needless to say we have held knowledge of this telegram to minimum essential people and assume you will take similar precautions to prevent premature leaks.

## APPENDIX 5

AUGUST 25, 1963.

*Cablegram from Ambassador Lodge to Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Assistant Secretary of State Roger Hilsman.*

Believe that chances of Diem's meeting our demands are virtually nil. At same time, by making them we give Nhu chance to forestall or block action by military. Risk, we believe, is not worth taking, with Nhu in control combat forces Saigon.

Therefore, propose we go straight to Generals with our demands, without informing Diem. Would tell them we prepared have Diem without Nhus but it is in effect up to them whether to keep him. Would also insist generals take steps to release Buddhist leaders and carry out June 16 agreement.



Request immediate modification instructions. However, do not propose move until we are satisfied with E and E plans. Harkins concurs. I present credentials President Diem tomorrow 11 A.M.

## APPENDIX 6

AUGUST 26, 1963.

*Cablegram from John Richardson, the Central Intelligence Agency's Saigon station chief, to John A. McCone, Director of Central Intelligence.*

During meeting with Harkins, Truehart, Mecklin and COS on morning 26 Aug. Lodge made decision that American official hand should not show. Consequently, Harkins will take no initiative with VNese generals. (Conein to convey points below to Gen. Khiem; Spera to Khanh; if Khiem agrees on Conein talking to Don, he will).

(A) Solicitation of further elaboration of action aspects of present thinking and planning. What should be done?

(B) We in agreement Nhus must go.

(C) Question of retaining Diem or not up to them.

(D) Bonzes and other arrestees must be released immediately and five-point agreeemnt of 16 June fully carried out.

(E) We will provide direct support during any interim period of breakdown central gov mechanism.

(F) We cannot be of any help during initial action of assuming power of state. Entirely their own action, win or lose. Don't expect be bailed out.

(G) If Nhus do no go and if Buddhists situation is not redressed as indicated, we would find it impossible continue military and economic support.

(H) It hoped bloodshed can be avoided or reduced to absolute minimum.

(I) It hoped that during process and after, developments conducted in such manner as to retain and increase the necessary relations between VNese and Americans which will allow for progress of country and successful prosecution of the war.

## APPENDIX 7

AUGUST 28, 1963.

*Cablegram from Mr. Richardson to Mr. McCone.*

Situation here has reached point of no return. Saigon is armed camp. Current indications are that Ngo family have dug in for last ditch battle. It is our considered estimate that General officers cannot retreat now. Conein's meeting with Gen. Khiem (Saigon 0346) reveals that overwhelming majority of general officers, excepting Dinh and Cao, are united, have conducted prior planning, realize that they must proceed quickly, and understand that they have no alternative but to go forward. Unless the generals are neutralized before being able to launch their operation, we believe they will act and that they have good chance to win. If General Dinh primarily and Tung secondly cannot be neutralized at outset, there may be widespread fighting in Saigon and serious loss of life.

We recognize the crucial stakes are involved and have no doubt that the generals do also. Situation has changed drastically since 21 August. If the Ngo family wins now, they and Vietnam will stagger on to final defeat at the hands of their own people and the VC. Should a generals' revolt occur and be put down, GVN will sharply reduce American presence in SVN. Even if they did not do so, it seems clear that American public opinion and Congress, as well as world opinion, would force withdrawal or reduction of American support for VN under the Ngo administration.

Bloodshed can be avoided if the Ngo family would step down before the coming armed action. . . . It is obviously preferable that the generals conduct this effort without apparent American assistance. Otherwise, for a long time in the future, they will be vulnerable to charges of being American puppets, which they are not in any sense. Nevertheless, we all understand that the effort must succeed and that whatever needs to be done on our part must be done. If this attempt by the generals does not take place or if it fails, we believe it no exaggeration to say that VN runs serious risk of being lost over the course of time.

## APPENDIX 8

AUGUST 29, 1963.

STATE 272—STATE TO LODGE AND HARKINS

1. Highest level meeting noon today review your 375 and reaffirmed basic course. Specific decisions follow:



2. In response to your recommendation, General Harkins is hereby authorized to repeat to such Generals as you indicate the messages previously transmitted by CAS officers. He should stress that the USG supports the movement to eliminate the Nhus from the government, but that before arriving at specific understandings with the Generals, General Harkins must know who are involved, resources available to them and overall plan for coup. The USG will support a coup which has good chance of succeeding but plans no direct involvement of U.S. armed forces. Harkins should state that he is prepared to establish liaison with the coup planners and to review plans, but will not engage directly in joint coup planning.

3. Question of last approach to Diem remains undecided and separate personal message from Secretary to you develops our concern and asks your comment.

4. On movement of U.S. forces, we do not expect to make any announcement or leak at present and believe that any later decision to publicize such movements should be closely connected to developing events on your side. We cannot of course prevent unauthorized disclosures or speculation, but we will in any event knock down any reports of evacuation.

5. You are hereby authorized to announce suspension of aid through Diem government at a time and under conditions of your choice. In deciding upon the use of this authority, you should consider importance of timing and managing announcement so as to minimize appearance of collusion with Generals and also to minimize danger of unpredictable and disruptive reaction by existing government. We also assume that you will not in fact use this authority unless you think it essential, and we see it as possible that Harkins' approach and increasing process of cooperation may provide assurance Generals desire. Our own view is that it will be best to hold this authority for use in close conjunction with coup, and not for present encouragement of Generals, but decision is yours.

#### APPENDIX 9

AUGUST 29, 1963.

STATE 279—STATE TO LODGE

Deeply appreciate your 375 which was a most helpful clarification. We fully understand enormous stakes at issue and the heavy responsibilities which you and Harkins will be carrying in the days ahead and we want to do everything possible from our end to help.

Purpose of this message is to explore further question of possible attempt to separate Diem and the Nhus. In your telegram you appear to treat Diem and the Nhus as a single package whereas we had indicated earlier to the Generals that if the Nhus were removed the question of retaining Diem would be up to them. My own personal assessment is (and this is not an instruction) that the Nhus are by all odds the greater part of the problem in Vietnam, internally, internationally and for American public opinion. Perhaps it is inconceivable that the Nhus could be removed without taking Diem with them or without Diem's abandoning his post. In any event, I would appreciate your comment on whether any distinction can or should be drawn as between Diem and Counsellor and Madame Nhu.

The only point on which you and General Harkins have different views is whether an attempt should be made with Diem to eliminate the Nhus and presumably take other steps to consolidate the country behind a winning effort against the Viet Cong. My own hunch, based in part on the report of Kattenburg's conversation with Diem is that such an approach could not succeed if it were cast purely in terms of persuasion. Unless such a talk included a real sanction such as a threatened withdrawal of our support, it is unlikely that it would be taken completely seriously by a man who may feel that we are inescapably committed to an anti-Communist Vietnam. But if a sanction were used in such a conversation, there would be a high risk that this would be taken by Diem as a sign that action against him and the Nhus was imminent and he might as a minimum move against the Generals or even take some quite fantastic action such as calling on North Vietnam for assistance in expelling the Americans.

It occurs to me, therefore, that if such an approach were to be made it might properly await the time when others were ready to move immediately to constitute a new government. If this be so, the question then arises as to whether an approach to insist upon the expulsion of the Nhus should come from Americans rather than from the Generals themselves. This might be the means by which



the Generals could indicate that they were prepared to distinguish between Diem and the Nhus. In any event, were the Generals to take this action it would tend to protect succeeding Vietnam administrations from the charge of being wholly American puppets subjected to whatever anti-American sentiment is inherent in so complex a situation.

I would be glad to have your further thoughts on these points as well as your views on whether further talks with Diem are contemplated to continue your opening discussions with him. You will have received formal instruction on other matters through other messages. Good luck.

## APPENDIX 10

AUGUST 29, 1963.

*Cablegram from Ambassador Lodge to Secretary Rusk.*

We are launched on a course from which there is no respectable turning back: the overthrow of the Diem government. There is no turning back in part because U.S. prestige is already publicly committed to this end in large measure and will become more so, as the facts leak out. In a more fundamental sense, there is no turning back because there is no possibility, in my view, that the war can be won under a Diem administration, still less that Diem or any member of the family can govern the country in a way to gain the support of the people who count, i.e., the educated class in and out of government service, civil and military—not to mention the American people. In the last few months (and especially days) they have in fact positively alienated these people to an incalculable degree. So that I am personally in full agreement with the policy which I was instructed to carry out by last Sunday's telegram.

2. The chance of bringing off a Generals' coup depends on them to some extent; but it depends at least as much on us.

3. We should proceed to make all-out effort to get Generals to move promptly. To do so we should have authority to do following:

(a) That Gen. Harkins repeat to Generals personally message previously transmitted by CAS officers. This should establish their authenticity. Gen. Harkins should have order on this.

(b) If nevertheless Generals insist on public statement that all U.S. aid to VN through Diem regime has been stopped, we would agree, on express understanding that Generals will have started at same time. (We would seek persuade Generals that it would be better to hold this card for use in event of stalemate. We hope it will not be necessary to do this at all.)

(c) VNese Generals doubt that we have the will power, courage, and determination to see this thing through. They are haunted by the idea that we will run out on them even though we have told them pursuant to instructions, that the game had started.

5. We must press on for many reasons. Some of these are:

(a) Explosiveness of the present situation which may well lead to riots and violence if issue of discontent with regime is not met. Out of this could come a pro-Communist or at least a neutralist set of politicians.

(b) The fact that war cannot be won with the present regime.

(c) Our own reputation for steadfastness and our unwillingness to stultify ourselves.

(d) If proposed action is suspended, I believe a body blow will be dealt to respect for us by VNese Generals. Also, all those who expect U.S. to straighten out this situation will feel let down. Our help to the regime in past years inescapably gives a responsibility which we cannot avoid.

6. I realize that this course involves a very substantial risk of losing VN. It also involves some additional risk to American lives. I would never propose it if I felt there was a reasonable chance of holding VN with Diem.

[Point 7 unavailable.]

8. . . . Gen. Harkins thinks that I should ask Diem to get rid of the Nhus before starting the Generals' action. But I believe that such a step has no chance of getting the desired result and would have the very serious effect of being regarded by the Generals as a sign of American indecision and delay. I believe this is a risk which we should not run. The Generals distrust us too much already. Another point is that Diem would certainly ask for time to consider such a far-reaching request. This would give the ball to Nhu.

9. With the exception of par. 8 above Gen. Harkins concurs in this telegram.



## APPENDIX 11

AUGUST 30, 1963.

*Cablegram from Ambassador Lodge to Secretary Rusk.*

I agree that getting the Nhus out is the prime objective and that they are "the greater part . . ."

This surely cannot be done by working through Diem. In fact Diem will oppose it. He wishes he had more Nhus, not less.

The best chance of doing it is by the Generals taking over the government lock, stock and barrel.

After this has been done, it can then be decided whether to put Diem back in again or go on without him. I am rather inclined to put him back, but I would not favor putting heavy pressure on the Generals if they don't want him. My greatest single difficulty in carrying out the instructions of last Sunday is inertia. The days come and go and nothing happens. It is, of course, natural for the Generals to want assurances and the U.S. Government has certainly been prompt in its reactions. But here it is Friday and, while in one way much has been done, there is not yet enough to show for the hours which we have all put in.

If I call on Diem to demand the removal of the Nhus, he will surely not agree. But before turning me down, he will pretend to consider it and involve us in prolonged delays. This will make the Generals suspicious of us and add to the inertia.

Such a call by me would look to the Nhus like an ultimatum and would result in their taking steps to thwart any operation dealing with them.

I agree with you that if a sanction were used, it could provoke an even more fantastic reaction. In fact I greatly dislike the idea of cutting off aid in connection with the Generals' operation and while I thank you for giving me the authority to make an announcement, I hope I will never have to use it.

It is possible, as you suggested . . . for the Generals when, as and if their operation gets rolling to demand the removal of the Nhus before bringing their operation to fruition. But I am afraid they will get talked out of their operation which will then disintegrate, still leaving the Nhus in office.

If the Generals' operation does get rolling, I would not want to stop it until they were in full control. They could then get rid of the Nhus and decide whether they wanted to keep Diem.

It is better for them and for us for them to throw out the Nhus than for us to get involved in it.

I am sure that the best way to handle this matter is by a truly VNese movement even if it puts me rather in the position of pushing a piece of spaghetti.

I am contemplating no further talks with Diem at this time.

## APPENDIX 12

AUGUST 31, 1963.

*Cablegram from Gen. Paul D. Harkins, United States commander in Saigon, to Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.*

Saw Khiem: he stated Big Minh had stopped planning at this time, and was working on other methods; others had called off planning also, himself and Khanh, following Minh. He knew Thao was making plans—but that few of military trusted him because of his VC background—and that he might still be working for the VC. The Generals were not ready as they did not have enough forces under their control compared to those under President and now in Saigon. He indicated they, the Generals, did not want to start anything they could not successfully finish.

. . . At a meeting yesterday, Mr. Nhu said he now went along with everything the U.S. wants to do, and even had the backing of Pres. Kennedy. I said this was news to me. Khiem said he wondered if Nhu was again trying to flush out the generals. He intimated the generals do not have too much trust in Nhu and that he's such a friend of Mr. Richardson the generals wonder if Mr. Nhu and Mme. Nhu were on the CIA payroll. . . .

. . . I asked if someone couldn't confront the Nhus with the fact that their absence from the scene was the key to the overall solution. He replied that for anyone to do that would be self-immolation—he also went on to say he doubted if the Nhus and Diem could be split.



. . . So we see we have an "organisation de confusion" with everyone suspicious of everyone else and none desiring to take any positive action as of right now. You can't hurry the East. . . .

## APPENDIX 13

## OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL ASSISTANT FOR COUNTERINSURGENCY AND SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

AUGUST 31, 1963.

## MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Meeting at the State Department, 1100, 31 August 1963; Subject; Vietnam.

Present: The Vice President, Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, Mr. Gilpatric, Mr. Bundy, General Taylor, Mr. Murrow, General Carter, Mr. Helms, Mr. Colby, Ambassador Nolting, Mr. Hilsman, Mr. Kattenburg, General Krulak.

1. Secretary Rusk stated that, in his judgment, we were back to where we were about Wednesday of last week, and this causes him to go back to the original problem and ask what in the situation led us to think well of a coup. Ruling out hatred of the Nhus, he said, there would appear to be three things:

a. The things that the Nhus had done or supported, which tended to upset the GVN internally.

b. The things that they had done which had an adverse external effect.

c. The great pressures of U.S. public opinion.

2. Mr. Rusk then asked if we should not pick up Ambassador Lodge's suggestion in his message of today (Saigon 391) and determine what steps are required to re-gird solidarity in South Vietnam—such as improvement in conditions concerning students and Buddhists and the possible departure of Madame Nhu. He said that we should determine what additional measures are needed to improve the international situation—such as problems affecting Cambodia—and to *improve the Vietnamese position wherein U.S. public opinion is concerned*. He then said that he is reluctant to start off by saying now that Nhu has to go; that it is unrealistic.

3. Mr. McNamara stated that he favored the above proposals of the Secretary of State, with one additional step—that is to establish quickly and firmly our line of communication between Lodge, Harkins and the GVN. He pointed out that at the moment our channels of communication are essentially broken and that they should be reinstituted at all costs.

4. Mr. Rusk added that we must do our best not to permit Diem to decapitate his military command in light of its obviously adverse effect on the prosecution of the war. At this point he asked if anyone present had any doubt in his mind but that the coup was off.

5. Mr. Kattenburg said that he had some remaining doubt; that we have not yet sent the generals a strong enough message; that the BOA statement regarding the withdrawal of aid was most important, but that we repudiated it too soon. He stated further that the group should take note of the fact that General Harkins did not carry out his instructions with respect to communication with the generals. Mr. Rusk interrupted Kattenburg to state that, to the contrary, he believed Harkins' conduct was exactly correct in light of the initial response which he received from General Kheim (they were referring to Harkins' report in MACV 1583).

6. Mr. Hilsman commented that, in his view, the generals are not now going to move unless they are pressed by a revolt from below. In this connection Ambassador Nolting warned that in the uncoordinated Vietnamese structure anything can happen, and that while an organized successful coup is out, there might be small flurries by irresponsible dissidents at any time.

7. Mr. Hilsman undertook to present four basic factors which bear directly on the problem confronting the U.S. now. They are, in his view:

a. The mood of the people, particularly the middle level officers, noncommissioned officers and middle level bureaucrats, who are most restive. Mr. McNamara interrupted to state that he had seen no evidence of this and General Taylor commented that he had seen none either, but would like to see such evidence as Hilsman could produce. Mr. Kattenburg commented that the middle level officers and bureaucrats are uniformly critical of the government, to which Mr. McNamara commented that if this is indeed the fact we should know about it.



b. The second basic factor, as outlined by Hilsman, was what effect will be felt on our programs elsewhere in Asia if we acquiesce to a strong Nhu-dominated government. In this connection, he reported that there is a Korean study now underway on just how much repression the United States will tolerate before pulling out her aid. Mr. McNamara stated that he had not seen this study and would be anxious to have it.

c. The third basic factor is Mr. Nhu, his personality and his policy. Hilsman recalled that Nhu has once already launched an effort aimed at withdrawal of our province advisors and stated that he is sure he is in conversation with the French. He gave, as supporting evidence, the content of an intercepted message, which Mr. Bundy asked to see. Ambassador Nolting expressed the opinion that Nhu will not make a deal with Ho Chi Minh on Ho's terms.

d. The fourth point is the matter of U.S. and world opinion, Hilsman stated that this problem was moving to a political and diplomatic plane. Part of the problem, he said, is the press, which concludes incorrectly that we have the ability to change the things in Vietnam of which they are critical. To this Mr. Murrow added that this problem of press condemnation is now worldwide.

8. Mr. Kattenburg stated that as recently as last Thursday it was the belief of Ambassador Lodge that, if we undertake to live with this repressive regime, with its bayonets at every street corner and its transparent negotiations with puppet bonzes, we are going to be thrown out of the country in six months. He stated that at this juncture it would be better for us to make the decision to get out honorably. He went on to say that, having been acquainted with Diem for ten years, he was deeply disappointed in him, saying that he will not separate from his brother. It was Kattenburg's view that Diem will get very little support from the military and, as time goes on, he will get less and less support and the country will go steadily down hill.

9. General Taylor asked what Kattenburg meant when he said that we would be forced out of Vietnam within six months. Kattenburg replied that in from six months to a year, as the people see we are losing the war, they will gradually go to the other side and we will be obliged to leave. Ambassador Nolting expressed general disagreement with Mr. Kattenburg. He said that the unfavorable activity which motivated Kattenburg's remarks was confined to the city and, while city support of Diem is doubtless less now, it is not greatly so. He said that it is improper to overlook the fact that we have done a tremendous job toward winning the Vietnam war, working with this same imperfect, annoying government.

10. Mr. Kattenburg added that there is one new factor—the population, which was in high hopes of expelling the Nhus after the VOA announcement regarding cessation of aid; now, under the heel of Nhu's military repression, they would quickly lose heart.

11. Secretary Rusk commented that Kattenburg's recital was largely speculative; that it would be far better for us to start on the firm basis of two things—that we will not pull out of Vietnam until the war is won, and that we will not run a coup. Mr. McNamara expressed agreement with this view.

12. Mr. Rusk then said that we should present questions to Lodge which fall within these parameters. He added that he believes we have good proof that we have been winning the war, particularly the contrast between the first six months of 1962 and the first six months of 1963. He then asked the Vice President if he had any contribution to make.

13. The Vice President stated that he agreed with Secretary Rusk's conclusions completely; that he had great reservations himself with respect to a coup, particularly so because he had never really seen a genuine alternative to Diem. He stated that from both a practical and a political viewpoint, it would be a disaster to pull out; that we should stop playing cops and robbers and get back to talking straight to the GVN, and that we should once again go about winning the war. He stated that after our communications with them are genuinely reestablished, it may be necessary for someone to talk rough to them—perhaps General Taylor. He said further that he had been greatly impressed with Ambassador Nolting's views and agreed with Mr. McNamara's conclusions.

14. General Taylor raised the question of whether we should change the disposition of the forces which had been set in motion as a result of the crisis. It was agreed that there should be no change in the existing disposition for the time being.

V. H. KRULAK,  
Major General, USMC.



## APPENDIX 14

SEPTEMBER 17, 1963.

CAP 63516—WHITE HOUSE TO LODGE

1. Highest level meeting today has approved broad outline of an action proposals program designed to obtain from GVN, if possible, reforms and changes in personnel necessary to maintain support of Vietnamese and U.S. opinion in war against Viet Cong. This cable reports this program and our thinking for your comment before a final decision. Your comment requested soonest.

2. We see no good opportunity for action to remove present government in immediate future; therefore, as your most recent messages suggest, we must for the present apply such pressures as are available to secure whatever modest improvements on the scene may be possible. We think it likely that such improvements can make a difference, at least in the short run. Such a course, moreover, is consistent with more drastic effort as and when means become available, and we will be in touch on other channels on this problem.

3. We share view in your 523 that best available reinforcement to your bargaining position in this interim period is clear evidence that all U.S. assistance is granted only on your say-so. Separate telegram discusses details of this program, but in this message we specifically authorize you to apply any controls you think helpful for this purpose. You are authorized to delay any delivery of supplies or transfer of funds by any agency until you are satisfied that delivery is in U.S. interest, bearing in mind that it is not our current policy to cut off aid, entirely. In other words, we share your view that it will be helpful for GVN to understand that your personal approval is a necessary part of all U.S. assistance. We think it may be particularly desirable for you to use this authority in limiting or rerouting any and all forms of assistance and support which now go to or through Nhu or individuals like Tung who are associated with him. This authorization specifically includes aid actions currently held in abeyance and you are authorized to set those in train or hold them up further in your discretion. We leave entirely in your hands decisions on the degree of privacy or publicity you wish to give to this process.

4. Subject to your comment and amendment our own list of possible helpful action by government runs as follows in approximate order of importance:

A. Clear the air.—Diem should get everyone back to work and get them to focus on winning the war. He should be broadminded and compassionate in his attitude toward those who have, for understandable reasons, found it difficult under recent circumstances fully to support him. A real spirit of reconciliation could work wonders on the people he leads; a punitive, harsh or autocratic attitude could only lead to further resistance.

B. Buddhists and students.—Let them out and leave them unmolested. This more than anything else would demonstrate the return of a better day and the refocusing on the main job at hand, the war.

C. Press.—The press should be allowed full latitude of expression. Diem will be criticized, but leniency and cooperation with the domestic and foreign press at this time would bring praise for his leadership in due course. While tendentious reporting is irritating, suppression of news leads to much more serious trouble.

D. Secret and combat police.—Confine its role to operations against the VC and abandon operations against non-Communist opposition groups thereby indicating clearly that a period of reconciliation and political stability has returned.

E. Cabinet changes to inject new untainted blood, remove targets of popular discontent.

F. Elections.—These should be held, should be free, and should be widely observed.

G. Assembly.—Assembly should be convoked soon after the elections. The government should submit its policies to it and should receive its confidence. An assembly resolution would be most useful for external image purposes.

H. Party.—Can Lao party should not be covert or semi-covert but a broad association of supporters engaged in a common, winning cause. This could perhaps be best accomplished by [words missing] starting afresh.

I. Repeal or suitable amendment Decree 10.

J. Rehabilitation by ARVN of pagodas.

K. Establishment of Ministry of Religious Affairs.



L. Liberation of passport issuances and currency restrictions enabling all to leave who wish to.

M. Acceptance of Buddhist Inquiry Mission from World Federation to report true facts of situation to world.

5. You may wish to add or subtract from the above list, but need to set psychological tone and image is paramount. Diem has taken positive actions in past of greater or less scope than those listed, but they have had little practical political effect since they were carried out in such a way as to make them hollow or, even if real, unbelievable (e.g., martial law already nominally lifted, Assembly elections scheduled, and puppet bronzes established).

6. Specific "reforms" are apt to have little impact without dramatic, symbolic move which convinces Vietnamese that reforms are real. As practical matter we share your view that this can best be achieved by some visible reduction in influence of Nhus, who are symbol to disaffected of all that they dislike in GVN. This we think would require Nhus departure from Saigon and preferably Vietnam at least for extended vacation. We recognize the strong possibility that these and other pressures may not produce this result, but we are convinced that it is necessary to try.

7. In Washington, in this phase, we would plan to maintain a posture of disapproval of recent GVN actions, but we would not expect to make public our specific requests of Diem. Your comment on public aspects of this phase is particularly needed.

8. We note your reluctance to continue dialogue with Diem until you have more to say, but we continue to believe that discussions with him are at a minimum an important source of intelligence and may conceivably be a means of exerting some persuasive effect even in his present state of mind. If you believe that full control of U.S. assistance provides you with means of resuming dialogue, we hope you will do so. We ourselves can see much virtue in effort to reason even with an unreasonable man when he is on a collision course. We repeat, however, that this is a matter for your judgment.

9. Meanwhile, there is increasing concern here with strictly military aspects of the problem, both in terms of actual progress of operations and of need to make effective case with Congress for continued prosecution of the effort. To meet these needs, President has decided to send Secretary of Defense and General Taylor to Vietnam, arriving early next week. It will be emphasized here that it is a military mission and that all political decisions are being handled through you as President's Senior Representative.

10. We repeat that political program outlined above awaits your comment before final decision. President particularly emphasizes that it is fully open to your criticism and amendment. It is obviously an interim plan and further decisions may become necessary very soon.

## APPENDIX 15

SEPTEMBER 18, 1963.

STATE 431—FROM THE PRESIDENT TO LODGE

I appreciate your prompt comment and I quite understand the problem you see in visit of McNamara and Taylor. At the same time my need for this visit is very great indeed, and I believe we can work out an arrangement which takes care of your basic concerns. Will you let me have your comment on the following as soon as possible:

1. We can make it clear here, and McNamara and Taylor can make it clear in Saigon to the GVN, that this visit is not designed to bring comfort to Diem. My own thought is that any visit McNamara makes to Diem he will want to speak some home truths on the military consequences of the current difficulties, and also to make it clear that the United States Government is not open to oriental divisive tactics.

2. We can readily set up this visit as one which you and I have decided on together, or even one which is sent in response to your own concern about winning the war in the current situation. For example, we could announce that the purpose of the mission is to consider with you the practical ways and means of carrying out my announced policy that we will support activities which will further the war effort in South Vietnam and avoid supporting activities which do not. The whole cast of the visit will be that of military consultation with you on the execution of the policy which you and I have determined.



3. As our last message said, my own central concern in sending this mission is to make sure that my senior military advisors are equipped with a solid on-the-spot understanding of the situation, as a basis both for their participation in our councils here, and for the Administrations accounting to the Congress on this critically important contest with the Communists. Having grown up in an Ambassador's house, I am well trained in the importance of protecting the effectiveness of the man on-the-spot, and I want to handle this particular visit in a way which contributes to and does not detract from your own responsibilities. But in the tough weeks which I see ahead, I just do not see any substitute for the ammunition I will get from an on-the-spot and authoritative military appraisal.

4. I do not think I can delay announcement of the McNamara mission beyond Saturday, and I will be grateful for a further prompt comment on this message so that we can be firmly together on the best possible handling of the announcement and of the mission itself.

## APPENDIX 16

SEPTEMBER 19, 1963.

SAIGON 544—FROM LODGE TO STATE—FOR PRESIDENT ONLY

1. Agree that no good opportunity for action to remove present government in immediate future is apparent and that we should, therefore, do whatever we can as an interim measure pending such an eventuality.

2. Virtually all the topics under paragraph 4, letters A to M, have been taken up with Diem and Nhu at one time or another, most of them by me personally. They think that most of them would either involve destroying the political structure on which they rest or loss of face or both. We, therefore, could *not* realistically hope for more than lip service. Frankly, *I see no opportunity at all for substantive changes*. Detailed comments on items A to M are contained in separate telegram.

3. There are signs that Diem-Nhu are somewhat bothered by my silence. According to one well placed source, they are guessing and off-balance and "desperately anxious" to know what U.S. posture is to be. They may be preparing some kind of a public relations package, possibly to be opened after the elections. I believe that for me to press Diem on things which are *not* in the cards and to repeat what we have said several times already would be a little shrill and would make us look weak, particularly in view of my talk with Nhu last night at a dinner where I had a golden opportunity to make the main points of your CAP 63516 as reported in 541.

4. Also, I doubt that a public relations package will meet needs of situation which seems particularly grave to me, notably in the light of General Big Minh's opinion expressed very privately yesterday that the Viet Cong are steadily gaining in strength; have more of the population on their side than has the GVN; that arrests are continuing and that the prisons are full; that more and more students are going over to the Viet Cong; that there is great graft and corruption in the Vietnamese administration of our aid; and that the "Heart of the Army is *not* in the war." All this by Vietnamese No. 1 General is now echoed by Secretary of Defense Thuan (See my 542), who wants to leave the country.

5. As regards your paragraph 3 on withholding of aid, I still hope that I may be informed of methods, as requested in my 478, September 11, which will enable us to apply sanctions in a way which will really affect Diem and Nhu without precipitating an economic collapse and without impeding the war effort. We are studying this here and have not yet found a solution. If a way to do this were to be found, it would be one of the greatest discoveries since the enactment of the Marshall Plan in 1947 because, so far as I know, the U.S. had never yet been able to control any of the very unsatisfactory governments through which we have had to work in our many very successful attempts to make these countries strong enough to stand alone.

6. I also believe that whatever sanctions we may discover should be directly tied to a promising coup d'etat and should *not* be applied without such a coup being in prospect. In this connection, I believe that we should pursue contact with Big Minh and urge him along if he looks like acting. I particularly think that the idea of supporting a Vietnamese Army independent of the government should be energetically studied.



7. I will, of course, give instructions that programs which one can be effectively held up should be held up and not released without my approval provided that this can be done without serious harmful effect to the people and to the war effort. Technical assistance and (omission) support to communications support programs may be one way. This would be a fly-speck in the present situation and would have *no* immediate effect, but I hope that U.S. (omission) may get Vietnamese officials into the habit of asking me to release items which are held up and that, over a long period of time, it might create opportunities for us to get little things done.

8. But it is not even within the realm of possibility that such a technique could lead them to do anything which causes loss of face or weakening of their political organization. In fact, to threaten them with suppression of aid might well defeat our purposes and might make a bad situation very much worse.

9. There should in any event be no publicity whatever about this procedure. If it is possible (omission) a program, I intend to (omission).

10. As regards your paragraph 6 and "dramatic symbolic moves," I really do not think they could understand this even if Thao wanted to, although I have talked about it to Diem, and to Nhu last night (See my 541). They have scant comprehension of what it is to appeal to public opinion as they have really no interest in any other opinion than their own. I have repeatedly brought up the question of Nhu's departure and have stressed that if he would just stay away until after Christmas, it might help get the Appropriation Bill through. This seems like a small thing to us but to them it seems tremendous as they are quite sure that the Army would take over if he even stepped out of the country.

11. Your paragraph 8. I have, of course, no objection to seeing Diem at any time that it would be helpful. But I would rather let him sweat for awhile and not go to see him unless I have something really new to bring up. I would much prefer to wait until I find some part of the AID program to hold up in which he is interested and then have him ask me to come and see him. For example, last night's dinner which I suspect Nhu of stimulating is infinitely better than for me to take the initiative for an appointment and to call at the office. Perhaps my silence had something to do with it.

## APPENDIX 17

SEPTEMBER 21, 1963.

### MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

It may be useful to put on paper our understanding of the purpose of your visit to South Vietnam. I am asking you to go because of my desire to have the best possible on-the-spot appraisal of the military and paramilitary effort to defeat the Viet Cong. The program developed after General Taylor's mission and carried forward under your close supervision has brought heartening results, at least until recently. The events in South Vietnam since May have now raised serious questions both about the present prospects for success against the Viet Cong and still more about the future effectiveness of this effort unless there can be important political improvement in the country. It is in this context that I now need your appraisal of the situation. If the prognosis in your judgment is not hopeful, I would like your views on what action must be taken by the South Vietnamese Government and what steps our Government should take to lead the Vietnamese to that action. . . .

Ambassador Lodge has joined heartily in supporting this mission and I will rely on you both for the closest exchange of views. It is obvious that the overall political situation and the military and paramilitary effort are closely interconnected in all sorts of ways, and in executing your responsibility for appraisal of the military and paramilitary problem I expect that you will consult fully with Ambassador Lodge on related political and social questions. I will also expect you to examine with Ambassador Lodge ways and means of fashioning all forms of our assistance to South Vietnam so that it will support our foreign policy objectives more precisely.

I am providing you separately with a letter from me to President Diem which Ambassador Lodge and you should discuss and which the Ambassador should deliver on the occasion of a call on President Diem if after discussion and reference to me I conclude that such a letter is desirable.

In my judgment the question of the progress of the contest in South Vietnam is of the first importance and in executing this mission you should take as much time as is necessary for a thorough examination both in Saigon and in the field.

JOHN F. KENNEDY.



## APPENDIX 18

SEPTEMBER 22, 1963.

STATE 458—EYES ONLY FOR AMBASSADOR LODGE FROM BALL

Understand desire for guidance expressed your 577. Pending further review of situation by President which will follow your consultation with McNamara and Taylor we wish to give you following interim guidance:

1. The United States intends to continue its efforts to assist the Vietnamese people in their struggle against the Viet Cong.

2. Recent events have put in question the possibility of success in these efforts unless there can be important improvements in the government of South Vietnam.

3. It is the policy of the United States to bring about such improvements. Further specific guidance on your meeting with Diem being developed here and will be subject further consultation with you. In any event the President believes object of this meeting should be to increase your authority and leverage with Diem government. In meantime CAP 63516 still represents Washington's current thinking on specifics. A possible Presidential letter to Diem is in preparation and will be forwarded for your comments before a decision on delivery.

## APPENDIX 19

SEPTEMBER 29, 1963.

## MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Diem, Thuan, Lodge, McNamara, Taylor Parkins, Flott

. . . The war was going well, thanks in large measure to the strategic hamlets' program. Due to that program the VC enemy was having increasing difficulties in finding food and recruits, and was being steadily forced into increasingly difficult and unrewarding tactical situations. . . . He said that the British had given the Vietnamese government valuable advice at the outset of the program based on British experience in Malaya. He said that for a variety of local reasons, his government had not followed the British advice in all instances. He recalled that the British had advised him to consolidate and hold firmly one area before extending the strategic hamlet program to another. They had also advised him to hold the arterial coastal highway and consolidate the area between it and the seacoast before trying to secure areas further inland. He noted that the British had said that the strategic hamlets' program should be limited at first to the most populous and most productive areas of the country. He remarked in this connection he had made important departures from the British plan but always for good and valid reasons. Outlining his thoughts on maps he explained that if he had disregarded even for a short time the underpopulated and comparatively unproductive highlands, these areas would have become a base for VC attacks and for a VC drive to the sea to cut the highway and split the Republic. He acknowledged their strategic hamlets' program was overextended and that in some areas the VC could attack and overwhelm the poorly garrisoned strategic hamlets. He said that he realized some strategic hamlets were set up before the defense personnel were properly trained or armed, but that on balance both the risks and the losses were acceptable. For example, he said he could push ahead rapidly with the establishment of ten sub-standard strategic hamlets. The VC could attack these and overwhelm, say, two of them, but if two fell eight others would survive and grow stronger. And the area within which the VC could operate with impunity would shrink faster than otherwise would have been the case.

Another reason he gave for making departures from the British plan was that by so doing he could put isolated, strategic hamlets into key crossroads and junction points and force on the VC considerable detours in their supply routes. He said he had taken a calculated risk of opening highways for the areas through which they passed were absolutely secure. He said on the whole he was satisfied with this gamble and that thanks to his willingness to make departures from the plan and accept risks the war effort was further along. . . . He noted the elections held a few days before had been a great success. Many more people voted than ever before, thanks in part to the fact that there were about fifty percent more ballot boxes than at the time of the last election. Communist efforts to disrupt the voting had been a failure, partly as a result of several security operations in which all three security services participated. Again, the vast extension of the strategic hamlets' program made it easier and



safer for people to vote than in past years, and he was touched at the interest that even the simplest peasants in exercising their suffrage and participating in the democratic process. In spite of the improved security situation at least two people were killed by VC because they voted, and he showed this loss deeply and personally. The discussion groups in the strategic hamlets had further increased people's interest in government and voting. (Ambassador's comment: This contrasts with well-founded observations. The truck loads of soldiers were carted around in trucks so that they could vote several times in one day.) . . . Diem noted that while the total number of VC had declined in the past year, the number of relatively large units, companies and battalions engaged had risen. He explained this was because of the success of the strategic hamlets' program. In the past the VC could get what they wanted from the village—food and recruits—with a mere handful of men. Now they were increasingly forced to mount a company scale attack to get into the village. Furthermore, since the whole rural environment had become much more actively hostile to the VC, they were forced to group in larger units to survive. These larger units, of course, offered better targets to the government forces. The fact that there was a greater use of large units by the VC is one more indication of how well the war was going for the government. It was one more indication that the VC found themselves more and more in a position of being like a foreign expeditionary corps rather than as a force that could exist and move in the population like a fish in the sea. . . .

Secretary McNamara said he was concerned over a number of things: that while the progress of the war was reasonably satisfactory, he was concerned over a number of things. There was the political unrest in Saigon and the evident inability of the government to provide itself with a broad political base. There was the disturbing probability that the war effort would then be damaged by the government's political deficiencies and the attendant loss of popularity. The recent wave of repressions have alarmed public opinion both in Vietnam and in the United States. . . . The Secretary warned Diem that public opinion in the U.S. seriously questioned the wisdom or necessity of the U.S. government's aiding a government that was so unpopular at home, and it seemed increasingly unlikely to forge the kind of national union or purpose that could bring the war to an early and victorious conclusion.

(Comment: Diem offered absolutely no assurances that he would take any steps in responses to the representations made to American visitors. In fact, he said nothing to indicate or acknowledge that he had received even friendly advice. His manner was one of at least outward serenity and of a man who had patiently explained a great deal and who hoped he had thus corrected a number of misapprehensions.)

#### APPENDIX 20

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

OCTOBER 2, 1963.

#### MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Report of McNamara-Taylor Mission to South Vietnam:

Your memorandum of September 21, 1963 directed that General Taylor and Secretary McNamara proceed to South Vietnam to appraise the military and para-military effort to defeat the Viet Cong and to consider, in consultation with Ambassador Lodge, related political and social questions. You further directed that, if the prognosis in our judgment was not hopeful, we should present our views of what action must be taken by the South Vietnam Government and what steps our Government should take to lead the Vietnamese to that action.

Accompanied by representatives of the State Department, CIA, and your Staff, we have conducted an intensive program of visits to key operational areas, supplemented by discussions with U.S. officials in all major U.S. Agencies as well as officials of the GVN and third countries.

We have also discussed our findings in detail with Ambassador Lodge, and with General Harkins and Admiral Felt.

The following report is concurred in by the Staff Members of the mission as individuals, subject to the exceptions noted.



## I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*A. Conclusions*

1. The military campaign has made great progress and continues to progress.
2. There are serious political tensions in Saigon (and perhaps elsewhere in South Vietnam) where the Diem-Nhu government is becoming increasingly unpopular.
3. There is no solid evidence of the possibility of a successful coup, although assassination of Diem or Nhu is always a possibility.
4. Although some, and perhaps an increasing number, of GVN military officers are becoming hostile to the government, they are more hostile to the Viet Cong than to the government and at least for the near future they will continue to perform their military duties.
5. Further repressive actions by Diem and Nhu could change the present favorable military trends. On the other hand, a return to more moderate methods of control and administration, unlikely though it may be, would substantially mitigate the political crisis.
6. It is not clear that pressures exerted by the U.S. will move Diem and Nhu toward moderation. Indeed, pressures may increase their obduracy. But unless such pressures are exerted, they are almost certain to continue past patterns of behavior.

*B. Recommendations*

We recommend that:

1. General Harkins review with Diem the military changes necessary to complete the military campaign in the Northern and Central areas (I, II, and III Corps) by the end of 1964, and in the Delta (IV Corps) by the end of 1965. This review would consider the need for such changes as:
  - a. A further shift of military emphasis and strength to the Delta (IV Corps).
  - b. An increase in the military tempo in all corps areas, so that all combat troops are in the Field an average of 20 days out of 30 and static missions are ended.
  - c. Emphasis on "clear and hold operations" instead of terrain sweeps which have little permanent value.
  - d. The expansion of personnel in combat units to full authorized strength.
  - e. The training and arming of hamlet militia at an accelerated rate, especially in the Delta.
  - f. A consolidation of the strategic hamlet program, especially in the Delta, and action to insure that future strategic hamlets are not built until they can be protected, and until civic action programs can be introduced.
2. A program be established to train Vietnamese so that essential functions now performed by U.S. military personnel can be carried out by Vietnamese by the end of 1965. It should be possible to withdraw the bulk of U.S. personnel by that time.
3. In accordance with the program to train progressively Vietnamese to take over military functions, the Defense Department should announce in the very near future presently prepared plans to withdraw 1,000 U.S. military personnel by the end of 1963. This action should be explained in low key as an initial step in a long-term program to replace U.S. personnel with trained Vietnamese without impairment of the war effort.
4. The following actions be taken to impress upon Diem our disapproval of his political program.
  - a. Continue to withhold commitment of funds in the commodity import program, but avoid a formal announcement. The significance of the withholding of commitments for the 1964 military budget should be brought home to the top military officers in working level contacts between USOM and MACV and the Joint General Staff; up to now we have stated \$95 million may be used by the Vietnamese as a planning level for the commodity import program for 1964. Henceforth we could make clear that this is uncertain both because of lack of final appropriation action by the Congress *and* because of executive policy.
  - b. Suspend approval of the pending AID loans for the Saigon-Cholon Waterworks and Saigon Electric Power Project. We should state clearly that we are doing so as a matter of policy.



c. Advise Diem that MAP and CIA support for designated units, now under Colonel Tung's control (mostly held in or near the Saigon area for political reasons) will be cut off unless these units are promptly assigned to the full authority of the Joint General Staff and transferred to the field.

d. Maintain the present purely "correct" relations with the top GVN, and specifically between the Ambassador and Diem. Contact between General Harkins and Diem and Defense Secretary Thuan on military matters should not, however, be suspended, as this remains an important channel of advice. USOM and USIA should also seek to maintain contacts where these are needed to push forward programs in support of the effort in the field, while taking care not to cut across the basic picture of U.S. disapproval and uncertainty of U.S. and intentions. We should work with the Diem government but not support it.<sup>1</sup>

As we pursue these courses of action, the situation must be closely watched to see what steps Diem is taking to reduce repressive practices and to improve the effectiveness of the military effort. We should set no fixed criteria, but recognize that we would have to decide in 2-4 months whether to move to more drastic action or try to carry on with Diem even if he had not taken significant steps.

5. At this time, no initiative should be taken to encourage actively a change in government. Our policy should be to seek urgently to identify and build contacts with an alternative leadership if and when it appears.

6. The following statement be approved as current U.S. policy toward South Vietnam and constitute the substance of the government position to be presented both in Congressional testimony and in public statements.

a. The security of South Vietnam remains vital to United States security. For this reason, we adhere to the overriding objective of denying this country to Communism and of suppressing the Viet Cong insurgency as promptly as possible. (By suppressing the insurgency we mean reducing it to proportions manageable by the national security forces of the GVN, unassisted by the presence of U.S. military forces.) We believe the U.S. part of the task can be completed by the end of 1965, the terminal date which we are taking as the time objective of our counterinsurgency programs.

b. The military program in Vietnam has made progress and is sound in principle.

c. The political situation in Vietnam remains deeply serious. It has not yet significantly affected the military effort, but could do so at some time in the future. If the result is a GVN ineffective in the conduct of the war, the U.S. will review its attitude toward support for the government. Although we are deeply concerned by repressive practices, effective performance in the conduct of the war should be the determining factor in our relations with the GVN.

d. The U.S. has expressed its disapproval of certain actions of the Diem-Nhu regime and will do so again if required. Our policy is to seek to bring about the abandonment of repression because of its effect on the popular will to resist. Our means consist of expressions of disapproval and the withholding of support from GVN activities that are not clearly contributing to the war effort. We will use these means as required to assure an effective military program.

## II. MILITARY SITUATION AND TRENDS

### A. *The standards of measure*

The test of the military situation is whether the GVN is succeeding in widening the area of effective control of the population and the countryside. This is difficult to measure, and cannot be stated simply in terms of the number of strategic hamlets built or the number of roads that can now be travelled without escort. Nor can the overall situation be gauged solely in terms of the extent of GVN offensive action, relative weapon losses and defections, VC strength figures, or other measures of military performance. All of these factors are important and must be taken into account; however, a great deal of judgment is required in their interpretation.

We have looked at these factors carefully, but we have also given great weight to the evidence of the men on the spot—the U.S. military advisors and the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Colby believes that the official "correct" relationship should be supplemented by selected and restricted unofficial and personal relationships with individuals in the GVN, approved by the Ambassador, where persuasion could be fruitful without derogation of the official U.S. posture.



USOM field representatives—as to whether government control is in fact extending and becoming more accepted and solid in the various areas. We have been greatly impressed with the variation of the situation from area to area and from province to province; there is a different war in each area and province and an example can be found somewhere to support any attitude toward the state of the counterinsurgency campaign. Our task has been to observe the situation as broadly as possible to avoid giving exaggerated importance to any single angle of observation.

### *B. Overall progress*

With allowance for all uncertainties, it is our firm conclusion that the GVN military program has made great progress in the last year and a half, and that this progress has continued at a fairly steady rate in the past six months even through the period of greatest political unrest in Saigon. The tactics and techniques employed by the Vietnamese under U.S. monitorship are sound and give promise of ultimate victory.

Specifically, progress is most clear in the northern areas (I and II Corps); especially noteworthy work has been done in key coastal provinces where VC strength once threatened to cut the country in half but has now been substantially reduced. In the central area and the highlands (III Corps), progress has been steady though slower, and the situation remains difficult in the provinces to the west and north of Saigon itself. [Material Missing]

Throughout the northern two-thirds of the country the strategic hamlet program has matured effectively and freedom of rural movement has grown steadily.

The Delta remains the toughest area of all, and now requires top priority in both GVN and U.S. efforts. Approximately 40% of the people live there; the area is rich and has traditionally resisted central authority; it is the center of Viet Cong strength—over one-third of the “hard core” are found there; and the maritime nature of the terrain renders it much the most difficult region to pacify.

A first step has just been taken by the move of a third division to the Delta, but further major actions are needed. They include priority decisions by the GVN in the use of its resources, the consolidation rather than further spread of strategic hamlets in many areas, the elimination of many fixed outposts, better hamlet defenses and more trained hamlet militia. Regular army units should be reserved for use in mobile actions and for clear and hold operations in support of the strategic hamlet program. Though there are unresolved problems in several key provinces close to Saigon, as well as in the southernmost parts where the VC are strongly established, it is clear that the Delta situation has generally improved over the past year, even with the limited resources allocated to it. Despite recent evidences of greater VC effort and better weapons, the Delta campaign can continue to go forward if the essential priority is assigned to Delta requirements.

### *C. Military indicators*

From a more strictly military standpoint, it should be noted that this overall progress is being achieved against a Viet Cong effort that has not yet been seriously reduced in the aggregate, and that is putting up a formidable fight notably in the Delta and key provinces near Saigon. The military indicators are mixed, reflecting greater and more effective GVN effort but also the continued toughness of the fight.

|                                                | June   | July   | August | September<br>(estimated) | Month aver-<br>age year ago |
|------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Number of government initiated:                |        |        |        |                          |                             |
| Small operations.....                          | 851    | 781    | 733    | 906                      | 490                         |
| Large operations.....                          | 125    | 163    | 166    | 141                      | 71                          |
| Vietcong killed.....                           | 1,896  | 1,918  | 1,685  | 2,034                    | 2,000                       |
| GVN killed.....                                | 413    | 521    | 410    | 525                      | 431                         |
| GVN weapons lost.....                          | 590    | 780    | 720    | 802                      | 390                         |
| VC weapons captured.....                       | 390    | 375    | 430    | 400                      | 450                         |
| Vietcong military defectors.....               | 420    | 310    | 220    | 519                      | 90                          |
| Vietcong-initiated incidents of all types..... | 1,310  | 1,380  | 1,375  | 1,675                    | 1,660                       |
| Vietcong attacks.....                          | 410    | 410    | 385    | 467                      | 410                         |
| Estimated Vietcong strength:                   |        |        |        |                          |                             |
| Hard core.....                                 | 21,000 | 21,000 | 21,000 | 21,000                   | 22,000                      |
| Irregular.....                                 | 85,000 | 82,000 | 76,000 | 70,000                   | 98,000                      |



Recent days have been characterized by reports of greater Viet Cong activity, countrywide, coupled with evidence of improved weaponry in their hands. Some U.S. advisors, as well as some Vietnamese, view this increased activity as a logical reaction to the steadily growing strategic hamlet program, which they believe is progressively separating the Viet Cong from the rural population and from their sources of food and reinforcements. Others view it as a delayed effort to capitalize upon the political trouble. All agree that it reflects a continuing capability for offensive action.

#### *D. The strategic hamlet program*

In this generally favorable military picture, two main factors have been the strategic hamlet program and the effectiveness of the U.S. advisory and support effort.

We found unanimous agreement that the strategic hamlet program is sound in concept, and generally effective in execution although it has been overextended in some areas of the Delta. The teamwork of U.S. military men and civilians is generally excellent, and on the GVN side a number of the province chiefs who handled the program poorly in its initial phases have been replaced by men who appear to have a better grasp of the central purpose of the program—to bring people under clear GVN control, in a way that really solidifies their support of their government and opposition to the VC. The economic and civic action element of the program (schools, medicine, fertilizer, etc.) has been carried forward on the U.S. side with considerable effectiveness, but has necessarily lagged behind the physical completion of hamlets and in insecure areas has made little progress. Without this element, coupled with effective hamlet defense measures, what are called “strategic hamlets” may be only nominally under GVN control. We were particularly struck by some evidence that a hamlet’s readiness to defend itself often bears a direct relation to whether the Province Chief, with U.S. help, has managed to make a convincing start in civic action.

#### *E. The U.S. military advisory and support effort*

We may all be proud of the effectiveness of the U.S. military advisory and support effort. With few exceptions, U.S. advisors report excellent relations with their Vietnamese counterparts, whom they characterize as proud and willing soldiers. The stiffening and exemplary effect of U.S. behavior and attitudes has had an impact which is not confined to the war effort, but which extends deeply into the whole Vietnamese way of doing things.

The U.S. advisory effort, however, cannot assure ultimate success. This is a Vietnamese war and the country and the war must, in the end, be run solely by the Vietnamese. It will impair their independence and the development of their initiative if we leave our advisors in place beyond the time they are really needed. In some areas reductions in the U.S. effort and transfer of U.S. responsibilities to the Vietnamese can now be carried out without material impairment of the total war effort. As a start, we believe that a reduction of about 1000 U.S. personnel (for which plans have been in preparation since the spring) can be carried out before the end of 1963. No further reductions should be made until the requirements of the 1964 campaign become firm.

#### *F. Conclusion*

Acknowledging the progress achieved to date, there still remains the question of when the final military victory can be attained. If, by victory, we mean the reduction of the insurgency to something little more than sporadic banditry in outlying districts, it is the view of the vast majority of military commanders consulted that success may be achieved in the I, II and III Corps area by the end of CY 1964. Victory in the IV Corps will take longer—at least well into 1965. These estimates necessarily assume that the political situation does not significantly impede the effort.

### III. ECONOMIC SITUATION AND TRENDS

The current economic situation in South Vietnam is, in the main, satisfactory. The internal price level is reasonably stable. Commercial inventories are high and national bank reserves of foreign exchange stand at approximately \$160 million which equals approximately 11 to 12 months. Imports at current rate (\$240 million imports less \$75 to \$80 million exports). The effective rate of exchange of the piastre to the dollar is within the range of reasonable economic value.



Trends are difficult to discuss but the business community was optimistic before the present crises. Rice exports for the current calendar year are projected at approximately \$80 million against \$8.75 million last year. Total exports are anticipated at \$70 million as against \$55 million last year. Banking circles point to one bearish factor in the export picture. Rubber, which represents more than half in value of all exports, faces a situation of declining world market prices and some plantations may curtail operations in the next year.

On the domestic side South Vietnam is almost self-sufficient in cotton textiles and is on its way to satisfying its own fertilizer and cement requirements by 1966. At the beginning of the current year banking circles noted a healthy increase in local investments in small enterprises which reflects, in their judgment an increase of confidence in the future that is unusual for recent years. The prospects for next year, under normal circumstances, appear reasonably good. If the Government encourages diversification in agriculture, exports of such products together with the increasing availability of rice should offset the decline in foreign exchange earnings from rubber.

The projected GVN budget for CY 1964 totals P27 billion: tax revenues are estimated at P11 billion, leaving an internal budget deficit of P16 billion. External resources (resulting from U.S. operations but requiring also use of foreign exchange reserves) are estimated to generate an additional P9.5 billion, leaving a P6.5 billion estimated deficit. This deficit might be somewhat reduced by additional tax revenues. To meet the remaining deficit, borrowings from the National Bank would still be required with a resulting increase in the money supply.

The money supply has been increasing rather sharply in the last nine months, although the inflationary effect has been dampened by the recent arrival of large shipments under USOM's commodity import program. This has been accompanied by an increase in import licensing brought about principally by the GVN's adoption at the beginning of this year of an open general licensing system for certain manufactured goods such as trucks, automobiles, fabricated steel and some industrial raw materials. The banks estimate that the open general licensing system will result in a \$10 million increase in GVN-financed imports in CY 1963.

In short, while the general economic situation is good, the prospects for holding the line on inflation and the balance of payments do not appear bright for CY 1964 unless the GVN can be persuaded to impose severe restraints.

#### *Effect of the Political Crisis on the Economic Situation*

At the present time the current political problems have not had a significant effect on the internal economic situation. French banking sources report a slight increase in the rate of withdrawals from private Vietnamese bank deposits over the last two months; but this increase has only been on the order of 1 to 2 percent.

Commercial inventory stocks seem to be increasing, but this can be explained by the recent increase in arrivals of foreign goods. In any case prices have remained stable with exception of a slight increase in the cost of cement, automobiles and certain industrial equipment.

The value of the piastre has fallen 10% on the Hong Kong market in the last month. Virtually no abnormal flight of capital has yet been observed in banking circles.

The most apparent effect of the crisis of the past several weeks is a slowdown in investment decisions, both in industry and in the limited capital market. Inventors and industrialists are worried about a reduction in U.S. aid. They are aware of the suspension in the issuances of procurement authorizations and are therefore concerned about the availability of imported raw materials and spare parts.

Since the Saigon business community has lived through some violent times before this, they have not reacted to events with as much panic as might have been expected. If the U.S. should long suspend import commitments, however, it should be apparent that the private sector of the economy will react in an inflationary manner.

#### IV. POLITICAL SITUATION AND TRENDS

Although our observations of the political situation were necessarily less extensive than of the military picture, they were ample to confirm that the existing situation is one of high tension. We reviewed the situation carefully with the



relevant U.S. officials and were also impressed by frank interviews with GVN officials and with third country representatives.

In essence, discontent with the Diem/Nhu regime, which had been widespread just below the surface during recent years, has now become a seething problem. The Buddhist and student crises have precipitated these discontents and given them specific issues. But the problem goes deeply into the personalities, objectives, and methods of operation of Diem and Nhu over a long period.

The evidence appears overwhelming that Diem and Nhu operate in close collaboration, and that each needs the other. They undoubtedly regard themselves as carrying out a social and political revolution for the good of their country, using all means—including the strategic hamlet program—to build up a secure base of political strength in the rural areas.

At the same time, the positive and educative sides of their actions, aimed primarily at the countryside, but with extensive countrywide educational efforts as well, have been increasingly matched by negative and repressive measures of control against the urban population. The urban elite or "Establishment"—which includes intellectuals, civilian officials at all levels, and a high proportion of military officers—has never been trusted by Diem and Nhu. Always sensitive to signs of opposition—with some justification from events in 1954-55 and the attempted coups of 1960 and 1962—the regime has turned increasingly to police methods, particularly secret arrests, that have almost all the bad effects of outright totalitarianism even though a good deal of freedom to criticize still remains.

Concurrently, the palace has always manipulated and controlled the government structure to ensure its own control. The degree to which centralized control and intervention have been carried, and the often quixotic nature of its use, have had a steadily growing adverse effect on efficiency and morale.

Both of these adverse characteristics of the regime, and the resentment of them, focus more and more on Nhu. Not merely is he the hatchet man, but his statements on "personalism" and his building up with Madame Nhu of a wide personal apparatus have smacked more and more of outright totalitarianism. A further disturbing feature of Nhu is his flirtation with the idea of negotiating with North Vietnam, whether or not he is serious in this at present. This deeply disturbs responsible Vietnamese and, more basically, suggests a possible basic incompatibility with U.S. objectives.

Nhu's role and scope of action have increased, and he may well have the designs imputed to him of succeeding his brother in due course. Diem is still quite a long way from being a figurehead, and his personal prestige in the country has survived remarkably well. But Diem does depend heavily on Nhu, their central ideas are very close if not identical, and it would be remarkable if Diem dropped Nhu from a commanding position.

Until the Buddhist and student crises, it was probably true that the alienation between Diem and the elite was more a matter of basically divergent views of the right social structure and of Diem and Nhu's handling of individuals in the government than it was a matter of reaction to repressions. However, the crises have now brought the repressions so directly into the lives of many of the elite that more orderly methods, which might previously have kept the loyalty of the needed amount of talent, now probably cannot do so without a convincing degree of restoration of personal security. Yet both more orderly methods and a restoration of personal security cut diametrically across the grain of Diem's and especially Nhu's view of what is necessary to maintain their power and move toward their idea of social revolution.

Thus, the discontent of the elite—reflected chiefly in the progressive loss of responsible men—has now reached the point where it is uncertain that Diem can keep or enlist talent to run the war. The loss of such men as Mau and Tuyen, and the deeply disturbed attitude of such a crucial figure as Thuan, are the strongest evidences of the seriousness of the situation.

This is not to discount groups other than the elite. However, the Buddhists and students cannot in themselves either threaten the regime or do more than focus issues—although of course they seriously damage the regime's standing in the U.S. and elsewhere, with uninhibited press reactions that contribute further to the persecution complex that drives Diem and Nhu into repression. The business community is a passive factor only. Urban labor is simply trying to hold its position, being anti-regime but not to the point of being an independent source of trouble. The rural peasantry appear little affected even by the Buddhist issue. If these groups can be kept even in an acquiescent state the war could go forward.



As matters stand, political tension in the urban centers is so high that it could boil over at any time into another cycle of riots, repressions, and resignations. This tension would disappear in a very short time if Nhu were removed. Whether it could be reduced to acceptable proportions by measures short of this is a very doubtful question, but it is clear that such measures would have to include both more moderate control methods and a better government climate particularly for civilian officials.

## V. EFFECT OF POLITICAL TENSION

### A. *On military operations*

So far this has not significantly affected countryside operations in any area. U.S. personnel in the field testified that a few officer or civilian counterparts showed concern over the Buddhist and student issues, but not to the extent, as yet, of materially affecting their doing their jobs. The rural population has been almost untouched. The pace of GVN operations was sharply cut for a short period at the end of August by transfers of units and general uncertainty, but has now largely renewed its previous intensity. The Delta particularly has been so concerned with the war that it has been virtually unaffected.

Basically, the unifying factors embodied in the hatred of the military for Communism remain very sharp. This hatred is real and pervasive. It transcends domestic policies in the minds of most officers.

However, there are disturbing elements that could change this picture greatly unless the political tension can be reduced. Certain high officers have been heavily preoccupied with coup possibilities. Those who have had relatives directly involved in the regime's repressions are deeply disturbed though not necessarily ready to act against Diem.<sup>1</sup> Resentment of Nhu exists in top military circles and probably to some extent at middle levels. The fact that the great bulk of military officers—and Province Chiefs—come from urban areas (simply because of educational requirements in many cases) clearly does open up the possibility of progressive loss of morale and effectiveness, as well as coup participation, if the regime does not cease its oppressions against Buddhists, students, and real or supposed opposition individuals.

### B. *On civilian officials*

On the civilian official side, which is also relevant to the war effort, the reaction to the regime's actions has been sharper. The Embassy and USOM report unanimously that their normal counterparts have become afraid of associating too closely with Americans, and that there is a general atmosphere of watch-and-wait, just going through the motions of the job but failing to exert what limited initiative and imagination they had previously been ready to exert in face of the constant and power-directed interventions of Nhu. The decline in the contribution of these officials is less serious than any similar decline among the military and province chiefs, but is nonetheless a potentially significant and growing factor if tension persists because these officials play a substantial role in the strategic hamlet program.

In summary, the political tension has not yet significantly affected progress in the field, nor does it seem likely to have major effects in the near future. Beyond that, however, the prognosis must be considered uncertain if political tension persists or mounts.

## VI. OVERALL EVALUATION

From the above analysis it is clear that the situation requires a constant effort by the U.S. to obtain a reduction of political tensions and improved performance by the Vietnamese Government. We cannot say with assurance whether the effort against the Viet Cong will ultimately fail in the absence of major political improvements. However, it does seem clear that after another period of repressive action progress may be reduced and indeed reversed. Although the present momentum might conceivably continue to carry the effort forward even if Diem remains in power and political tensions continue, any significant slowing in the

<sup>1</sup> A specific example of this is the Commandant of the Marine Corps in Saigon. His brother, along with many other relatives of military officers and cabinet members, was picked up in the student roundups of early September. Some were tortured, and—as in the case of the Commandant's brother—released only after intercession. However, the Commandant shows no inclination to take action against the Diem government.



rate of progress would surely have a serious effect on U.S. popular support for the U.S. effort.

## VII. U.S. LEVERAGES TO OBTAIN DESIRED CHANGES IN THE DIEM REGIME

### *A. Conduct of U.S. Representatives*

U.S. personnel in Saigon might adopt an attitude of coolness toward their Vietnamese counterparts, maintaining only those contacts and communications which are necessary for the actual conduct of operations in the field. To some extent this is the attitude already adopted by the Ambassador himself, but it could be extended to the civilian and military agencies located in Saigon. The effect of such action would be largely psychological.

### *B. Economic Leverage*

Together, USOM's Commodity Import Program (CIP) and the PL 480 program account for between 60 and 70 percent of imports into Vietnam. The commitment of funds under the CIP has already been suspended. CIP deliveries result in the generation of piastres, most of which go to the support of the defense budget. It is estimated that CIP pipelines will remain relatively large for some five or six months, and within this period there would not be a serious material effect. Even within this period, however, the flow of piastres to support the defense budget will gradually begin to decline and the GVN will be forced to draw down its foreign exchange reserves or curtail its military expenditures.

Within the domestic economy the existing large pipelines would mean that there would be no material reason for inflation to begin in the short term period. However, the psychological effect of growing realization that the CIP program has been suspended might be substantial in 2-4 months. Saigon has a large number of speculative traders, and although there is considerable police effort to control prices, this might not be able to contain a general trend of speculation and hoarding. Once inflation did develop, it could have a serious effect on the GVN budget and the conduct of the war.

Apart from CIP two major AID projects are up for final approval—the Saigon-Cholon Waterworks (\$9 million) and the Saigon Electric Power Project (\$4 million). Suspension of these projects would be a possible means of demonstrating to Congress and the world that we disapprove of GVN policies and are not providing additional aid not directly essential to the war effort.

### *C. Paramilitary and other assistance*

(1) USOM assistance to the Combat Police and USOM and USIS assistance to the Director General of Information and the ARVN PsyWar Program could be suspended. These projects involve a relatively small amount of local currency but their suspension, particularly in the case of USIS, might adversely affect programs which the U.S. wishes to see progress.

(2) However, there would be merit in a gesture aimed at Colonel Tung, the Special Forces Commander, whose forces in or near Saigon played a conspicuous part in the pagoda affair and are a continuing support for Diem. Colonel Tung commands a mixed complex of forces, some of which are supported by MAP and others presently through CIA. All of those now in or near Saigon were trained either for combat missions or for special operations into North Vietnam and Laos. Purely on grounds of their not being used for their proper missions, the U.S. could inform Diem that we would cut off MAP and CIA support unless they were placed directly under Joint General Staff and were committed to field operations.

The practical effect of the cut-off would probably be small. The equipment cannot be taken out of the hands of the units, and the pay provided to some units could be made up from the GVN budget. Psychologically, however, the significance of the gesture might be greater. At the least it would remove one target of press criticism of the U.S., and would probably also be welcomed by the high military officers in Vietnam, and certainly by the disaffected groups in Saigon.

At the same time, support should continue, but through General Harkins rather than CIA, for border surveillance and other similar field operations that are contributing to the war effort.

We have weighed this cut-off action carefully. It runs a risk that Colonel Tung would refuse to carry out external operations against the Lao corridor and North Vietnam. It might also limit CIA's access to the military. However, U.S. liaison with high military officers could probably be fully maintained through the U.S.



military advisors. On balance, we conclude that these possible disadvantages are outweighed by the gains implicit in this action.

(3) Consideration has been given both by USOM and the military (principally the JCS in Washington) to the possibility of redirecting economic and military assistance in such a fashion as to bypass the central government in Saigon. Military studies have shown the technical feasibility, though with great difficulty and cost, of supplying the war effort in the countryside over lines of communications which do not involve Saigon, and it is assumed that the same conclusions would apply to USOM deliveries to the field under the rural strategic hamlet program. However, there is a consensus among U.S. agencies in Saigon that such an effort is not practical in the face of determined opposition by the GVN unless, of course, a situation had developed where the central government was no longer in control of some areas of the country. Nor is it at all clear that such diversion would operate to build up the position of the military or to cut down Nhu's position.

#### *D. Propaganda*

Although the capability of USIS to support the United States campaign of pressure against the regime would be small, the Ambassador believes consideration must be given to the content and timing of the United States pronouncements outside the country. He has already suggested the use of the Voice of America in stimulating, in its broadcasts to Vietnamese, discussions of democratic political philosophies. This medium could be used to exploit a wide range of ascending political pressure. In addition, a phased program of United States official pronouncements could be developed for use in conjunction with the other leverages as they are applied. We must recognize the possibility that such actions may incite Diem to strong countermeasures.

#### *E. The leverage of conditioning our military aid on satisfactory progress*

Coupled with all the above there is the implicit leverage embodied in our constantly making it plain to Diem and others that the long term continuation of military aid is conditioned upon the Vietnamese Government demonstrating a satisfactory level of progress toward defeat of the insurgency.

#### *F. Conclusions*

A program of limited pressures, such as the CIP suspension, will not have large material effects on the GVN or the war effort, at least for 2-4 months. The psychological effects could be greater, and there is some evidence that the suspension is already causing concern to Diem. However, the effect of pressures that can be carried out over an extended period without detriment to the war effort is probably limited with respect to the possibility of Diem making necessary changes.

We have not analyzed with care what the effect might be of a far more intensive level of pressure such as cessation of MAP deliveries or long continued suspension of the commodity import program. If the Diem government should fail to make major improvements, serious consideration would have to be given to this possible course of action, but we believe its effect on the war effort would be so serious—in psychological if not in immediate material terms—that it should not be undertaken at the present time.

### VIII. COUP POSSIBILITIES

#### *A. Prospects of a spontaneous coup*

The prospects of an early spontaneous replacement of the Diem Regime are not high. The two principal sources of such an attempt, the senior military officers and the students, have both been neutralized by a combination of their own inability and the regime's effective countermeasures of control. The student organizations have been emasculated. The students themselves have displayed more emotion than determination and they are apparently being handled with sufficient police sophistication to avoid an explosion.

The generals appear to have little stomach for the difficult job of secretly arranging the necessary coalescence of force to upset the Regime.

Diem/Nhu are keenly aware of the capability of the generals to take over the country, utilizing the tremendous power now vested in the military forces. They, therefore, concentrate their manipulative talent on the general officers, by transfers, and by controls over key units and their locations. They are aware



that these actions may reduce efficiency, but they tolerate it rather than risk the prospect that they be overthrown and their social revolution frustrated. They have established a praetorian guard to guarantee considerable bloodshed if any attack is made. The generals have seen slim hope of surmounting these difficulties without prohibitive risk to themselves, the unity of the Army and the Establishment itself.

Despite these unfavorable prospects for action in the short term, new factors could quickly arise, such as the death of Diem or an unpredictable and even irrational attack launched by a junior officer group, which would call urgently for U.S. support or counteraction. In such a case, the best alternative would appear to be the support of constitutional continuity in the person of the Vice President, behind whom arrangements could be developed for a more permanent replacement after a transitional period.

#### *B. Prospects for improvement under an alternative government*

The prospects that a replacement regime would be an improvement appear to be about 50-50.<sup>1</sup> Initially, only a strongly authoritarian regime would be able to pull the government together and maintain order. In view of the pre-eminent role of the military in Vietnam today, it is probable that this role would be filled by a military officer, perhaps taking power after the selective process of a junta dispute. Such an authoritarian military regime, perhaps after an initial period of euphoria at the departure of Diem/Nhu would be apt to entail a resumption of the repression at least of Diem, the corruption of the Vietnamese Establishment before Diem, and an emphasis on conventional military rather than social, economic and political considerations, with at least an equivalent degree of xenophobic nationalism.

These features must be weighed, however, against the possible results of growing dominance or succession by Nhu, which would continue and even magnify the present dissension, unhappiness and unrest.

#### *C. Possible U.S. actions*

Obviously, clear and explicit U.S. support could make a great difference to the chances of a coup. However, at the present time we lack a clear picture of what acceptable individuals might be brought to the point of action, or what kind of government might emerge. We therefore need an intensive clandestine effort, under the Ambassador's direction, to establish necessary contacts to allow U.S. to continuously appraise coup prospects.

If and when we have a better picture, the choice will still remain difficult whether we would prefer to take our chances on a spontaneous coup (assuming some action by Diem and Nhu would trigger it) or to risk U.S. prestige and having the U.S. hand show with a coup group which appeared likely to be a better alternative government. Any regime that was identified from the outset as a U.S. "puppet" would have disadvantages both within South Vietnam and in significant areas of the world, including other underdeveloped nations where the U.S. has a major role.

In any case, whether or not it proves to be wise to promote a coup at a later time, we must be ready for the possibility of a spontaneous coup, and this too requires clandestine contacts on an intensive basis.

### IX. ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVE POLICIES

Broadly speaking, we believe there are three alternative policies the U.S. could pursue to achieve its political and military objectives:

1. Return to avowed support of the Diem regime and attempt to obtain the necessary improvements through persuasion from a posture of "reconciliation." This would not mean any expression of approval of the repressive actions of the regime, but simply that we would go back in practice to business as usual.
2. Follow a policy of selective pressures: "purely correct" relationships at the top official level, continuing to withhold further actions in the commodity import program, and making clear our disapproval of the regime. A further element in this policy is letting the present impression stand that the U.S. would not be averse to a change of Government—although we would not take any immediate actions to initiate a coup.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Sullivan (State) believes that a replacement regime which does not suffer from the overriding danger of Nhu's ambition to establish a totalitarian state (the control of which he might easily lose to the Communists in the course of his flirtations) would be inevitably better than the current regime even if the former did have the deficiencies described.



3. Start immediately to promote a coup by high ranking military officers. This policy might involve more extended suspensions of aid and sharp denunciations of the regime's actions so timed as to fit with coup prospects and planning.

Our analysis of these alternatives is as follows:

1. Reconciliation. We believe that this course of action would be ineffective from the standpoint of events in South Vietnam alone, and would also greatly increase our difficulties in justifying the present U.S. support effort both to the Congress and generally to significant third nations. We are most unlikely, after recent events, to get Diem to make the necessary changes; on the contrary, he would almost certainly regard our reconciliation as an evidence that the U.S. would sit still for just about anything he did. The result would probably be not only a continuation of the destructive elements in the Regime's policies but a return to larger scale repressions as and when Diem and Nhu thought they were necessary. The result would probably be sharp deterioration in the military situation in a fairly short period.

2. Selective Pressures. We have examined numerous possibilities of applying pressures to Diem in order to incline him to the direction of our policies. The most powerful instrument at our disposal is the control of military and economic aid but any consideration of its use reveals the double-edged nature of its effects. Any long term reduction of aid cannot but have an eventual adverse effect on the military campaign since both the military and the economic programs have been consciously designed and justified in terms of their contribution to the war effort. Hence, immediate reductions must be selected carefully and be left in effect only for short periods.

We believe that the present level of pressures is causing, and will cause, Diem some concern, while at the same time not significantly impairing the military effort. We are not hopeful that this level (or indeed any level) of pressure will actually induce Diem to remove Nhu from the picture completely. However, there is a better chance that Diem will at least be deterred from resuming large scale oppressions.

At the same time, there are various factors that set a time limit to pursuing this course of action in its present form. Within 2-4 months we have to make critical decisions with the GVN about its 1964 budget and our economic support level. In addition, there is a significant and growing possibility that even the present limited actions in the economic field—more for psychological than for economic reasons—would start a wave of speculation and inflation that would be difficult to control or bring back into proper shape. As to when we would reverse our present course, the resumption of the full program of economic and military aid should be tied to the actions of the Diem government.

As a foundation for the development of our long-term economic and military aid programs, we believe it may be possible to develop specific military objectives to be achieved on an agreed schedule. The extent to which such objectives are met, in conjunction with an evaluation of the regime's political performance, would determine the level of aid for the following period.

3. Organizing a coup. For the reasons stated earlier, we believe this course of action should not be undertaken at the present time.

On balance we consider that the most promising course of action to adopt at this time is an application of selective short-term pressures, principally economic, and the conditioning of long-term aid on the satisfactory performance by the Diem government in meeting military and political objectives which in the aggregate equate to the requirements of final victory. The specific actions recommended in Section I of this report are consistent with this policy.

CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE.

## APPENDIX 21

OCTOBER 5, 1963.

TO: LODGE—VIA CAS CHANNEL, CAP 63560

In conjunction with decisions and recommendations in separate DEPTTEL, President today approved recommendation that no initiative should now be taken to give any active covert encouragement to a coup. There should, however, be urgent covert effort with closest security under broad guidance of Ambassador to identify and build contacts with possible alternative leadership as and when it appears. Essential that this effort be totally secure and fully deniable and separated entirely from normal political analysis and reporting and other activities of country team. We repeat that this effort is not repeat not to be aimed at active promotion of coup but only at surveillance and readiness. In



order to provide plausibility to denial suggest you and no one else in Embassy issue these instructions orally to Acting Station Chief and hold him responsible to you alone for making appropriate contacts and reporting to you alone.

All reports to Washington on this subject should be on this channel.

## APPENDIX 22

OCTOBER 5, 1963.

TO STATE FROM LODGE—CAS 1445

1. Lt. Col. Conein met with Gen. Duong Van Minh at Gen. Minh's Headquarters on Le Van Duyet for one hour and ten minutes morning of 5 Oct. 63. This meeting was at the initiative of Gen. Minh and has been specifically cleared in advance by Ambassador Lodge. No other persons were present. The conversation was conducted in French.

2. Gen. Minh stated that he must know American Government's position with respect to a change in the Government of Vietnam within the very near future. Gen. Minh added the Generals were aware of the situation is deteriorating rapidly and that action to change the Government must be taken or the war will be lost to the Viet Cong because the Government no longer has the support of the people. Gen. Minh identified among the other Generals participating with him in this plan:

Maj. Gen. Tran Van Don; Brig. Gen. Tran Thien Khiem; and Maj. Gen. Tran Van Kim.

3. Gen. Minh made it clear that he did not expect any specific American support for an effort on the part of himself and his colleagues to change the Government but he stated he does need American assurances that the USG will not attempt to thwart this plan.

4. Gen. Minh also stated that he himself has no political ambitions nor do any of the other General Officers except perhaps, he said laughingly, Gen. Ton That Dinh. Gen. Minh insisted that his only purpose is to win the war. He added emphatically that to do this continuation of American Military and Economic Aid at the present level (He said one and one half million dollars per day) is necessary.

5. Gen. Minh outlined three possible plans for the accomplishment of the change of Government:

a. Assassination of Ngo Dinh Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can keeping President Diem in Office. Gen. Minh said this was the easiest plan to accomplish.

b. The encirclement of Saigon by various military units particularly the unit at Ben Cat. (Comment: Fifth Division elements commanded by Gen. Dinh).

c. Direct confrontation between military units involved in the coup and loyalist military units in Saigon. In effect, dividing the city of Saigon into sectors and cleaning it out pocket by pocket. Gen. Minh claims under the circumstances Diem and Nhu could count on the loyalty of 5,500 troops within the city of Saigon.

6. Conein replied to Gen. Minh that he could not answer specific questions as to USG non-interference nor could he give any advice with respect to tactical planning. He added that he could not advise concerning the best of the three plans.

7. Gen. Minh went on to explain that the most dangerous men in South Vietnam are Ngo Dinh Kau, Ngo Dinh Can and Ngo Trong Hieu, Minh stated that Hieu was formerly a Communist and still has Communist sympathies. When Col. Conein remarked that he had considered Col. Tung as one of the more dangerous individuals, Gen. Minh stated "if I get rid of Nhu, Can and Hieu, Col. Tung will be on his knees before me."

8. Gen. Minh also stated that he was worried as to the role of Gen. Tran Thien Khiem since Khiem may have played a double role in August. Gen. Minh asked that copies of the documents previously passed to Gen. Khiem (plan of Camp Long Thanh and munitions inventory at that camp) be passed to Gen. Minh personally for comparison with papers passed by Khiem to Minh purportedly from CAS.

9. Minh further stated that one of the reasons they are having to act quickly was the fact that many regimental, battalion and company commanders are working on coup plans of their own which could be abortive and a "catastrophe".

10. Minh appeared to understand Conein's position of being unable to comment at the present moment but asked that Conein again meet with Gen. Minh to discuss the specific plan of operations which Gen. Minh hopes to put into action. No specific date was given for this next meeting. Conein was again noncommittal in



his reply. Gen. Minh once again indicated his understanding and stated that he would arrange to contact Conein in the near future and hoped that Conein would be able to meet with him and give the assurance outlined above.

OCTOBER 5, 1963.

SAIGON CAS 34026, TO STATE FROM LODGE (REF: CAS SAIGON 1445) EYES ONLY FOR SECRETARY RUSK FROM LODGE

Reference Big Minh-Conein meeting (Cas Saigon 1445). While neither General Harkins nor I have great faith in Big Minh, we need instructions on his approach. My recommendation, in which General Harkins concurs, is that Conein when next approached by Minh should:

1. Assure him that U.S. will not attempt to thwart his plans.
2. Offer to review his plans, other than assassination plans.
3. Assure Minh that U.S. aid will be continued to Vietnam under Government which gives promise of gaining support of people and winning the war against the Communists. Point out that it is our view that this is most likely to be the case if Government includes good proportion of well qualified civilian leaders in key positions. (Conein should press Minh for details his thinking Re composition future Government). I suggest the above be discussed with Secretary McNamara and General Taylor who contacted Minh in recent visit.

#### APPENDIX 23

OCTOBER 6, 1963.

FROM CIA TO LODGE—74228—RE CAS 1445

1. Believe CAP 63560 gives general guidance requested REFTEL. We have following additional general thoughts which have been discussed with President. While we do not wish to stimulate coup, we also do not wish to leave impression that U.S. would thwart a change of government or deny economic and military assistance to a new regime if it appeared capable of increasing effectiveness of military effort, ensuring popular support to win war and improving working relations with U.S. We would like to be informed on what is being contemplated but we should avoid being drawn into reviewing or advising on operational plans or any other act which might tend to identify U.S. too closely with change in government. We would, however, welcome information which would help us assess character of any alternate leadership.

2. With reference to specific problem of General Minh you should seriously consider having contact take position that in present state his knowledge he is unable present Minh's case to responsible policy officials with any degree of seriousness. In order to get responsible officials even to consider Minh's problem, contact would have to have detailed information clearly indicating that Minh's plans offer a high prospect of success. At present contact sees no such prospect in the information so far provided.

3. You should also consider with Acting Station Chief whether it would be desirable in order to preserve security and deniability in this as well as similar approaches to others whether appropriate arrangements could be made for follow-up contacts by individuals brought in especially from outside Vietnam. As we indicated in CAP 63560 we are most concerned about security problem and we are confining knowledge these sensitive matters in Washington to extremely limited group, high officials in White House, State, Defense and CIA with whom this message cleared.

#### APPENDIX 24

OCTOBER 11, 1963.

#### NATIONAL SECURITY ACTION MEMORANDUM No. 263

TO: SECRETARY OF STATE, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, AND CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

Subject: South Vietnam.

At a meeting on October 5, 1963, the President considered the recommendations contained in the report of Secretary McNamara and General Taylor on their mission to South Vietnam.



The President approved the military recommendations contained in Section I B (1-3) of the report, but directed that no formal announcement be made of the implementation of plans to withdraw 1,000 U.S. military personnel by the end of 1963.

After discussion of the remaining recommendations of the report, the President approved an instruction to Ambassador Lodge which is set forth in State Department telegram No. 534 to Saigon.

McGEORGE BUNDY.

Copy furnished:

Director of Central Intelligence.

Administrator, Agency for International Development.

## APPENDIX 25

### DEPARTMENT OF STATE BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

Research Memorandum RFE-90.

OCTOBER 22, 1963.

To: The Secretary.

Through: S/S.

From: INR—Thomas L. Hughes.

Subject: *Statistics on the War Effort in South Vietnam Show Unfavorable Trends.*

This report reviews the more significant statistics on the Communist insurgency in South Vietnam as indicators of trends in the military situation since July 1963.

#### ABSTRACT

Statistics on the insurgency in South Vietnam, although neither thoroughly trustworthy nor entirely satisfactory as criteria, indicate an unfavorable shift in the military balance. Since July 1963, the trend in Viet Cong casualties, weapons losses, and defections has been downward while the number of Viet Cong armed attacks and other incidents has been upward. Comparison with earlier periods suggests that the military position of the government of Vietnam may have been set back to the point it occupied six months to a year ago. These trends coincide in time with the sharp deterioration of the political situation. At the same time, even without the Buddhist issue and the attending government crisis, it is possible that the Diem regime would have been unable to maintain the favorable trends of previous periods in the face of the accelerated Viet Cong effort.

#### *Statistics as indicators*

Statistics, in general, are only partial and not entirely satisfactory indicators of progress in the total counterinsurgency effort in South Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> First, some statistics are incomplete, as for example, those relating to Viet Cong attacks against strategic hamlets and desertions within the South Vietnamese military and security services. Second, all statistics are acquired largely if not entirely from official South Vietnamese sources. As such, their validity must, to some degree at least, remain questionable, even though the efforts of the United States military and civilian advisers have improved the quality of this data during the past year or [words missing]

Third, there are several other important indicators which are extremely difficult, if not impossible to handle statistically. These include: morale and efficiency within the bureaucracy and the armed services, the degree of locally acquired or volunteered intelligence, popular attitudes toward the Viet Cong and the government, and the status and impact of the government's political, social, and economic activities in support of the strategic hamlet program. Nonetheless, statistics touch on some significant aspects of the military situation and provide a guide at least to trends in the fighting.

<sup>1</sup> The statistics used in this paper were compiled by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and by the Office of the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA) in the Department of Defense and are based on field reports submitted by the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV).



### *Viet Cong incidents*

Statistics show that the Viet Cong have accelerated their military and subversive effort since July 1963. From January 1962 until July 1963, the total number of Viet Cong armed attacks, as well as all other incidents (sabotage, terrorism, and propaganda), dropped consistently. However, since July of this year, total incidents and armed attacks have increased appreciably. If the present trend continues through the end of this year, total incidents will exceed by more than 10% the level for the period July-December 1962. Large Viet Cong attacks (company-size or larger) have also increased appreciably since July of this year, and, if the trend continues, could exceed by almost 30% the level for July-December 1962.

In addition, the Viet Cong during the last half of 1963 have shown increased daring, planning, and coordination in their attacks. This has been evidenced by an attack against a United States helicopter base, and by simultaneous actions against two or more strategic hamlets and even against two district capitals. Until this period, towns had not been attacked since September 1961, when the capital of Phuoc Thanh province was raided by a large Viet Cong force.

### *Casualties*

Although the Viet Cong have incurred relatively heavy losses during some of their more daring recent attacks, their overall casualties since July of this year have not been correspondingly high. If the accelerated Viet Cong effort and losses suffered are maintained at present levels during the rest of this year, casualties will remain about 10% below the level in July-December 1962, the peak period in Viet Cong casualties last year.

In contrast, casualties among the South Vietnamese military and security forces since July of this year are increasing and, at the present rate, could exceed by about 20% the level for the preceding six-month period. This would raise the total casualties for 1963 by some 30% above the 1961 and 1962 levels. Indeed, the ratio of Viet Cong to South Vietnamese forces killed and captured dropped from five-to-one for the last half of 1962 to three-to-one for the period July-September 18, 1963. This ratio would be still less favorable to the government if casualties among such paramilitary groups as the village militia and *Montagnard* scouts were taken into account. Casualty statistics on the groups are not complete and are not shown in this report. During the period August-September 18, 1963, however, their casualties exceeded 500 as compared with the combined total of more than 2,300 casualties among the Army, Civil Guard, and Self Defense Corps for the same period.

### *Weapons losses*

During 1962, weapons losses among both the Viet Cong and government forces increased progressively, although government losses were somewhat greater than those of the Viet Cong. The increase continued during January-April 1963, but losses on both sides were about even. However, during May-August, Viet Cong weapons losses dropped by more than 10%, while losses among government forces increased by about 15%. If the trend noted during the last three weeks of September should continue throughout the year, the Viet Cong will lose almost 70% fewer weapons than the government. Moreover, a large number of the Viet Cong weapons lost are of the home-made variety while the great bulk of government weapons losses are of standard or modern-type pieces.

### *Defections and desertions*

Viet Cong military defections increased progressively during 1963 until June, dropping from a high of 414 in May to a low of 107 for about the first three weeks of September. (These Viet Cong are usually members of the insurgent armed forces, although only a small percentage are believed to be hard-core cadres. They generally defect to South Vietnamese military forces who interrogate and screen them and determine their disposition.)

In addition to the military defectors, some 13,700 persons "rallied" to the government from April through August 1963 under a national surrender and amnesty campaign. This campaign, known as "Chieu Hoi," was officially inaugurated on April 19. The South Vietnamese government regards the bulk of these as Viet Cong. United States officials, who do not screen these statistics, believe the vast majority to be refugees and persons who, for one reason or another, have left areas controlled or formerly controlled by the Viet Cong.



## I. STATISTICAL TRENDS, 1962-63

[Figures in parenthesis denote percentage]

|                                                              | Jan. 1-<br>June 30,<br>1962 | July 1-Dec. 30,<br>1962 (and<br>percent of<br>change) | Jan. 1-June 30,<br>1963 (and<br>percent of<br>change) | July 1-<br>Sept. 18,<br>1963 <sup>1</sup>               | Percent of<br>previous<br>period                     |                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Vietcong incidents (total)-----                           | 10,481                      | 8,595 (-18)                                           | 6,847 (-20)                                           | 3,777                                                   | 55                                                   |                                                                     |
| 2. Vietcong armed attacks (total)-----                       | 3,024                       | 2,441 (-19)                                           | 1,941 (-20)                                           | 1,067                                                   | 55                                                   |                                                                     |
| Company-size and larger-----                                 | 156                         | 63 (-40)                                              | 72 (+14)                                              | 34                                                      | 47                                                   |                                                                     |
| 3. Vietcong casualties (total)-----                          | 13,755                      | 17,338 (+26)                                          | 13,944 (-20)                                          | 6,425                                                   | 46                                                   |                                                                     |
| 4. GVN casualties (total)-----                               | 6,036                       | 6,846 (+13)                                           | 8,056 (+18)                                           | 4,220                                                   | 52                                                   |                                                                     |
|                                                              | January-<br>April<br>1962   | May-<br>August<br>1962                                | Septem-<br>ber-Dec-<br>ember<br>1962                  | January-<br>April<br>1963<br>(and percent<br>of change) | May-<br>August<br>1963<br>(and percent<br>of change) | Through<br>Sept. 18, 1963<br>(and percent of<br>previous<br>period) |
| 5. Vietcong weapons losses-----                              | 1,202                       | 1,526                                                 | 1,806                                                 | 1,917                                                   | 1,703 (-11)                                          | 335 (20)                                                            |
| GVN weapons losses-----                                      | 1,777                       | 1,884                                                 | 1,534                                                 | 1,974                                                   | 2,260 (+15)                                          | 644 (28)                                                            |
| 6. Vietcong defections <sup>2</sup> (1962 total: 1,956)----- |                             |                                                       |                                                       | 1,178                                                   | 1,307 (+10)                                          | 107 ( 8)                                                            |

<sup>1</sup> Although only 42 percent of this period has elapsed, the statistics in this column are already 46-55 percent of the total figures for the previous 6-month period, as shown in the last column.

<sup>2</sup> This excludes "Chieu Hoi" returnees which have totaled 13,664 through August 1963 but which have declined sharply since July 1963.

## II. CONDENSED FIGURES ON MILITARY ACTIVITY FROM JAN. 1, 1962—VIET CONG-INITIATED INCIDENTS

|                    | Total attacks | Large-scale<br>attacks<br>(company-size<br>and larger) | Terrorism | Sabotage | Prop  | Total<br>incidents |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------|-------|--------------------|
| 1962: <sup>1</sup> |               |                                                        |           |          |       |                    |
| January-----       | 549           | 21                                                     | 839       | 180      | 257   | 1,825              |
| February-----      | 500           | 20                                                     | 613       | 137      | 210   | 1,460              |
| March-----         | 588           | 27                                                     | 660       | 290      | 423   | 1,961              |
| April-----         | 497           | 27                                                     | 1,024     | 220      | 192   | 1,933              |
| May-----           | 528           | 38                                                     | 892       | 154      | 251   | 1,825              |
| June-----          | 362           | 23                                                     | 736       | 157      | 222   | 1,477              |
| July-----          | 448           | 12                                                     | 735       | 158      | 223   | 1,564              |
| August-----        | 378           | 10                                                     | 885       | 146      | 233   | 1,642              |
| September-----     | 391           | 10                                                     | 624       | 178      | 182   | 1,375              |
| October-----       | 419           | 14                                                     | 583       | 189      | 166   | 1,357              |
| November-----      | 421           | 8                                                      | 614       | 144      | 132   | 1,311              |
| December-----      | 384           | 9                                                      | 670       | 107      | 185   | 1,346              |
| Total-----         | 5,465         | 219                                                    | 8,875     | 2,060    | 2,676 | 19,076             |
| 1963:              |               |                                                        |           |          |       |                    |
| January-----       | 252           | 10                                                     | 447       | 49       | 179   | 927                |
| February-----      | 195           | 14                                                     | 433       | 69       | 91    | 788                |
| March-----         | 344           | 11                                                     | 653       | 131      | 154   | 1,282              |
| April-----         | 383           | 12                                                     | 688       | 105      | 155   | 1,331              |
| May-----           | 357           | 13                                                     | 608       | 93       | 150   | 1,208              |
| June-----          | 410           | 12                                                     | 652       | 107      | 142   | 1,311              |
| July-----          | 407           | 9                                                      | 698       | 80       | 183   | 1,368              |
| August-----        | 319           | 12                                                     | 569       | 93       | 186   | 1,167              |
| September 18-----  | 341           | 13                                                     | 613       | 115      | 173   | 1,242              |
| Total-----         | 3,008         | 106                                                    | 5,361     | 842      | 1,413 | 10,624             |

<sup>1</sup> These figures closely parallel year-end figures furnished by COMUSMACV.



2. CASUALTIES <sup>1</sup>

|                        | GVN |     |                    |       | Vietcong |     |          |       |
|------------------------|-----|-----|--------------------|-------|----------|-----|----------|-------|
|                        | KIA | WIA | Capture<br>Missing | Total | KIA      | WIA | Captured | Total |
| January 1962:          |     |     |                    |       |          |     |          |       |
| ARVN—Army of Vietnam   | 116 | 221 | 8                  |       |          |     |          |       |
| CG—Civil Guard         | 76  | 108 | 43                 |       |          |     |          |       |
| SDC—Self-Defense Corps | 107 | 146 | 65                 |       |          |     |          |       |
| Total                  | 299 | 475 | 116                | 890   | 1,294    | 212 | 390      | 1,896 |
| February 1962:         |     |     |                    |       |          |     |          |       |
| ARVN                   | 72  | 118 | 7                  |       |          |     |          |       |
| CG                     | 68  | 76  | 42                 |       |          |     |          |       |
| SDC                    | 104 | 106 | 75                 |       |          |     |          |       |
| Total                  | 244 | 300 | 124                | 668   | 1,205    | 316 | 353      | 1,874 |
| March 1962:            |     |     |                    |       |          |     |          |       |
| ARVN                   | 97  | 219 | 28                 |       |          |     |          |       |
| CG                     | 160 | 223 | 27                 |       |          |     |          |       |
| SDC                    | 266 | 295 | 85                 |       |          |     |          |       |
| Total                  | 523 | 737 | 140                | 1,400 | 1,456    | 551 | 523      | 2,530 |
| April 1962:            |     |     |                    |       |          |     |          |       |
| ARVN                   | 94  | 164 | 1                  |       |          |     |          |       |
| CG                     | 108 | 146 | 66                 |       |          |     |          |       |
| SDC                    | 185 | 222 | 84                 |       |          |     |          |       |
| Total                  | 387 | 532 | 151                | 1,070 | 1,596    | 292 | 415      | 2,303 |
| May 1962:              |     |     |                    |       |          |     |          |       |
| ARVN                   | 62  | 140 | 2                  |       |          |     |          |       |
| CG                     | 131 | 154 | 24                 |       |          |     |          |       |
| SDC                    | 197 | 215 | 68                 |       |          |     |          |       |
| Total                  | 390 | 509 | 94                 | 993   | 1,756    | 352 | 524      | 2,632 |
| June 1962:             |     |     |                    |       |          |     |          |       |
| ARVN                   | 84  | 133 | 13                 | 230   |          |     |          |       |
| CG                     | 91  | 186 | 19                 | 296   |          |     |          |       |
| SDC                    | 150 | 294 | 45                 | 489   |          |     |          |       |
| Total                  | 325 | 613 | 77                 | 1,015 | 1,666    | 413 | 441      | 2,520 |
| July 1962:             |     |     |                    |       |          |     |          |       |
| ARVN                   | 86  | 165 | 13                 | 264   |          |     |          |       |
| CG                     | 62  | 149 | 46                 | 257   |          |     |          |       |
| SDC                    | 235 | 372 | 153                | 761   |          |     |          |       |
| Total                  | 384 | 686 | 212                | 1,282 | 1,544    | 424 | 542      | 2,510 |
| August 1962:           |     |     |                    |       |          |     |          |       |
| ARVN                   | 67  | 149 | 2                  | 218   |          |     |          |       |
| CG                     | 103 | 170 | 15                 | 288   |          |     |          |       |
| SDC                    | 207 | 307 | 46                 | 560   |          |     |          |       |
| Total                  | 377 | 626 | 63                 | 1,066 | 2,271    | 367 | 669      | 3,307 |
| September 1962:        |     |     |                    |       |          |     |          |       |
| ARVN                   | 125 | 231 | 2                  | 358   |          |     |          |       |
| CG                     | 46  | 101 | 3                  | 150   |          |     |          |       |
| SDC                    | 248 | 314 | 54                 | 616   |          |     |          |       |
| Total                  | 419 | 646 | 59                 | 1,124 | 2,218    | 365 | 446      | 3,029 |
| October 1962:          |     |     |                    |       |          |     |          |       |
| ARVN                   | 77  | 238 | 2                  | 317   |          |     |          |       |
| CG                     | 63  | 142 | 3                  | 208   |          |     |          |       |
| SDC                    | 225 | 239 | 59                 | 523   |          |     |          |       |
| Total                  | 365 | 619 | 64                 | 1,048 | 1,967    | 286 | 373      | 2,626 |
| November 1962:         |     |     |                    |       |          |     |          |       |
| ARVN                   | 66  | 233 | 15                 | 314   |          |     |          |       |
| CG                     | 72  | 156 | 6                  | 234   |          |     |          |       |
| SDC                    | 272 | 445 | 71                 | 788   |          |     |          |       |
| Total                  | 410 | 834 | 92                 | 1,336 | 1,982    | 368 | 561      | 2,911 |

See footnotes at end of table.



2. CASUALTIES <sup>1</sup>—Continued

|                                | GVN   |       |                    |        | Vietcong |       |          |        |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------|--------------------|--------|----------|-------|----------|--------|
|                                | KIA   | WIA   | Capture<br>Missing | Total  | KIA      | WIA   | Captured | Total  |
| December 1962:                 |       |       |                    |        |          |       |          |        |
| ARVN.....                      | 50    | 232   | 1                  | 283    |          |       |          |        |
| CG.....                        | 50    | 118   | 7                  | 175    |          |       |          |        |
| SDC.....                       | 194   | 268   | 70                 | 532    |          |       |          |        |
| Total.....                     | 294   | 618   | 78                 | 990    | 2,203    | 289   | 463      | 2,955  |
| Total, 1962.....               | 4,417 | 7,195 | 1,270              | 12,882 | 21,158   | 4,235 | 5,700    | 31,093 |
| January 1963:                  |       |       |                    |        |          |       |          |        |
| ARVN.....                      | 153   | 432   | 10                 | 595    |          |       |          |        |
| CG.....                        | 83    | 152   | 12                 | 247    |          |       |          |        |
| SDC.....                       | 217   | 324   | 80                 | 621    |          |       |          |        |
| Total.....                     | 453   | 908   | 102                | 1,463  | 1,754    | 318   | 379      | 2,451  |
| February 1963:                 |       |       |                    |        |          |       |          |        |
| ARVN.....                      | 82    | 224   | 6                  | 312    |          |       |          |        |
| CG.....                        | 87    | 139   | 10                 | 236    |          |       |          |        |
| SDC.....                       | 210   | 293   | 66                 | 569    |          |       |          |        |
| Total.....                     | 379   | 656   | 82                 | 1,117  | 1,084    | 303   | 292      | 1,679  |
| March 1963:                    |       |       |                    |        |          |       |          |        |
| ARVN.....                      | 75    | 306   | 4                  | 385    |          |       |          |        |
| CG.....                        | 161   | 259   | 11                 | 431    |          |       |          |        |
| SDC.....                       | 174   | 286   | 51                 | 511    |          |       |          |        |
| Total.....                     | 410   | 851   | 66                 | 1,327  | 1,443    | 368   | 205      | 2,016  |
| April 1963:                    |       |       |                    |        |          |       |          |        |
| ARVN.....                      | 192   | 352   | 15                 | 559    |          |       |          |        |
| CG.....                        | 91    | 136   | 13                 | 240    |          |       |          |        |
| SDC.....                       | 223   | 390   | 68                 | 681    |          |       |          |        |
| Total.....                     | 506   | 878   | 96                 | 1,480  | 1,660    | 256   | 388      | 2,304  |
| May 1963: Total.....           | 435   | 889   | 94                 | 1,418  | 1,895    | 295   | 695      | 2,885  |
| June 1963:                     |       |       |                    |        |          |       |          |        |
| ARVN.....                      | 99    | 256   | 2                  | 357    |          |       |          |        |
| CG.....                        | 89    | 158   | 6                  | 253    |          |       |          |        |
| SDC.....                       | 201   | 358   | 82                 | 641    |          |       |          |        |
| Total.....                     | 389   | 772   | 90                 | 1,251  | 1,862    | 310   | 437      | 2,609  |
| July 1963:                     |       |       |                    |        |          |       |          |        |
| ARVN.....                      | 178   | 476   | 23                 | 677    |          |       |          |        |
| CG.....                        | 103   | 198   | 51                 | 352    |          |       |          |        |
| SDC.....                       | 248   | 397   | 232                | 877    |          |       |          |        |
| Total.....                     | 529   | 1,071 | 306                | 1,906  | 1,918    | 372   | 387      | 2,677  |
| August 1963:                   |       |       |                    |        |          |       |          |        |
| ARVN.....                      | 92    | 313   | 14                 | 419    |          |       |          |        |
| CG.....                        | 68    | 104   | 14                 | 186    |          |       |          |        |
| SDC.....                       | 150   | 218   | 151                | 519    |          |       |          |        |
| Total.....                     | 310   | 635   | 179                | 1,124  | 1,447    | 206   | 416      | 2,069  |
| Sept. 18, 1963:                |       |       |                    |        |          |       |          |        |
| ARVN.....                      | 83    | 251   | 2                  | 336    |          |       |          |        |
| CG.....                        | 101   | 221   | 84                 | 406    |          |       |          |        |
| SDC.....                       | 151   | 211   | 86                 | 448    |          |       |          |        |
| Total.....                     | 335   | 683   | 172                | 1,190  | 1,249    | 101   | 329      | 1,679  |
| Total, 1963 <sup>2</sup> ..... | 3,746 | 7,343 | 1,187              | 12,276 | 14,312   | 2,529 | 3,528    | 20,369 |

<sup>1</sup> COMUSMACV has reported the following statistics for 1962 on Viet Cong casualties: Killed, 20,919; wounded, 4,235; captured, 5,518; total 30,673.

<sup>2</sup> These figures do not include GVN casualties for other paramilitary forces, which are incomplete but which in August and September 1963 totaled 571.



III. DESERTIONS IN THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY AND SECURITY SERVICES <sup>1</sup>

| Date           | RVNF <sup>2</sup> | Civil Guard<br>and Self-<br>defense Corps | Total  | Percent of<br>combined strength<br>of RVNAF,<br>Civil Guard,<br>Self-defense Corps <sup>3</sup> |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1962:          |                   |                                           |        |                                                                                                 |
| January.....   | 933               | 1,553                                     | 2,486  | 0.8                                                                                             |
| February.....  | 483               | 1,082                                     | 1,565  | .5                                                                                              |
| March.....     | 1,168             | 2,110                                     | 3,278  | 1.0                                                                                             |
| April.....     | 1,273             | 1,424                                     | 2,697  | .8                                                                                              |
| May.....       | 1,344             | 1,057                                     | 2,401  | .7                                                                                              |
| June.....      | 1,160             | 1,638                                     | 2,798  | .8                                                                                              |
| July.....      | 855               | 1,997                                     | 2,852  | .8                                                                                              |
| August.....    | 867               | 2,105                                     | 2,972  | .8                                                                                              |
| September..... | 629               | 1,269                                     | 1,898  | .5                                                                                              |
| October.....   | 767               | 1,505                                     | 2,272  | .6                                                                                              |
| November.....  | 847               | 1,711                                     | 2,558  | .7                                                                                              |
| December.....  | 877               | 1,270                                     | 2,147  | .6                                                                                              |
| Total.....     | 11,203            | 18,721                                    | 29,924 | 4.7                                                                                             |
| 1963:          |                   |                                           |        |                                                                                                 |
| January.....   | 865               | 1,814                                     | 2,679  | .7                                                                                              |
| February.....  | 723               | 1,389                                     | 2,122  | .5                                                                                              |
| March.....     | 656               | 2,260                                     | 2,916  | .7                                                                                              |
| April.....     | 853               | 2,018                                     | 2,871  | .7                                                                                              |
| May.....       | 999               | 2,165                                     | 3,164  | .8                                                                                              |
| June.....      | 877               | 1,441                                     | 2,318  | .6                                                                                              |
| July.....      | 686               | 2,289                                     | 2,975  | .7                                                                                              |
| August.....    | 830               | 2,501                                     | 3,331  | .8                                                                                              |
| Total.....     | 6,489             | 15,877                                    | 22,376 | 4.7                                                                                             |

<sup>1</sup> From January 1962 through May 1963, the above statistics include, in addition, to deserters all other persons who have been absent without official leave (a.w.o.l.) for any length of time or for any reason. The statistics have not been adjusted to take into account those persons who returned to duty. From June through August 1963, the statistics consist entirely of deserters and exclude a.w.o.l.s. but still have not been adjusted to account for returnees.

<sup>2</sup> Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force.

<sup>3</sup> From January through December 1962, the combined strength of these services increased from 315,454 to 390,220. From January through August 1963, the increase was from 392,460 to 404,799.

<sup>4</sup> Average.

3. WEAPON LOSSES <sup>1</sup>

|                         | Vietcong | GVN   |
|-------------------------|----------|-------|
| 1961.....               | 2,753    | 5,982 |
| 1962:                   |          |       |
| January-April.....      | 1,202    | 1,777 |
| May-August.....         | 1,526    | 1,884 |
| September-December..... | 1,806    | 1,534 |
| Total.....              | 4,534    | 5,195 |
| 1963:                   |          |       |
| January.....            | 683      | 457   |
| February.....           | 399      | 253   |
| March.....              | 367      | 467   |
| April.....              | 468      | 797   |
| May.....                | 564      | 463   |
| June.....               | 394      | 580   |
| July.....               | 374      | 663   |
| August.....             | 371      | 554   |
| Sept. 18.....           | 335      | 644   |
| Total.....              | 3,955    | 4,878 |

4. VIETCONG DEFECTIONS <sup>2</sup>

|               |       |
|---------------|-------|
| 1962.....     | 1,956 |
| 1963:         |       |
| January.....  | 168   |
| February..... | 245   |
| March.....    | 394   |
| April.....    | 371   |
| May.....      | 414   |
| June.....     | 394   |
| July.....     | 308   |
| August.....   | 191   |
| Sept. 18..... | 107   |
| Total.....    | 2,592 |

<sup>1</sup> Many Vietcong weapons lost are of the homemade variety.

<sup>2</sup> This does not include "defectors" coming in under the "Chieu Hoi" or amnesty program.



Many of them, however, may well have assisted the Viet Cong in some way voluntarily or under duress. The number of "Chieu Hoi" returnees increased progressively from April 19 to June 1963, when a high of about 3,200 was reached. By August, returnees dropped to a low of about 1,600. Complete statistics are not yet available for September.

Until June 1963, statistics on South Vietnamese desertions included all military and security personnel who had been absent from duty without official leave for any reason or for any length of time. Moreover, there was apparently no attempt to adjust these all-inclusive statistics to account for persons who had returned to duty. Including "awols," the 1962 monthly average of deserters was .7% of the combined strength of the military and security services. On this basis, there was no change in the monthly average during the first five months of 1963. Beginning in June, however, statistics on deserters excluded "awols" although they were still not adjusted to cover returnees. Even so, on the new basis, the monthly average of deserters increased from .6% in June 1963 to .8% in August 1963. Complete statistics are not yet available for September.

#### *Conclusions*

On the basis of available statistical trends, there appear to have been a number of significant and unfavorable changes in the military situation in South Vietnam since July of this year. Indeed, virtually all of the indicators noted in this report suggest that the military position of the Vietnam Government may have reverted to the point it had reached six months to a year ago. While it is difficult to relate precisely cause and effect of adverse changes in the military situation in South Vietnam, their occurrence at a time when the political situation has deteriorated must be considered as more than coincidental. At the same time, even without the Buddhist crisis and the more serious political difficulties following in its wake, it is possible that the Diem government would have been unable to maintain the favorable trends of preceding periods in the face of the accelerated Viet Cong effort since July 1963.

#### APPENDIX 26

OCTOBER 25, 1963.

#### SAIGON 1964—FROM LODGE TO M'GEORGE BUNDY

1. I appreciate the concern expressed by you in ref. a relative to the Gen. Don/Conein relationship, and also the present lack of firm intelligence on the details of the general's plot. I hope that ref. b will assist in clearing up some of the doubts relative to general's plans, and I am hopeful that the detailed plans promised for two days before the coup attempt will clear up any remaining doubts.
2. CAS has been punctilious in carrying out my instructions. I have personally approved each meeting between Gen. Don and Conein who has carried out my orders in each instance explicitly. While I share your concern about the continued involvement of Conein in this matter, a suitable substitute for Conein as the principal contact is not presently available. Conein, as you know, is a friend of some eighteen years' standing with Gen. Don, and General Don has expressed extreme reluctance to deal with anyone else. I do not believe the involvement of another American in close contact with the generals would be productive. We are, however, considering the feasibility of a plan for the introduction of an additional officer as a cut-out between Conein and a designee of Gen. Don for communication purposes only. This officer is completely unwitting of any details of past or present coup activities and will remain so.
3. With reference to Gen. Harkins' comment to Gen. Don which Don reports to have referred to a presidential directive and the proposal for a meeting with me, this may have served the useful purpose of allaying the General's fears as to our interest. If this were a provocation, the GVN could have assumed and manufactured any variations of the same theme. As a precautionary measure, however, I of course refused to see Gen. Don. As to the lack of information as to General Don's real backing, and the lack of evidence that any real capabilities for action have been developed, ref. b provides only part of the answer. I feel sure that the reluctance of the generals to provide the U.S. with full details of their plans at this time, is a reflection of their own sense of security and a lack of confidence that in the large American community present in Saigon their plans will not be prematurely revealed.
4. The best evidence available to the Embassy, which I grant you is not as complete as we would like it, is that Gen. Don and the other generals involved



with him are seriously attempting to effect a change in the government. I do not believe that this is a provocation by Ngo Dinh Nhu, although we shall continue to assess the planning as well as possible. In the event that the coup aborts, or in the event that Nhu has masterminded a provocation, I believe that our involvement to date through Conein is still within the realm of plausible denial. CAS is perfectly prepared to have me disavow Conein at any time it may serve the national interest.

5. I welcome your reaffirming instructions contained in CAS Washington 74228. It is vital that we neither thwart a *coup* nor that we are even in a position where we do not know what is going on.

6. We should not thwart a *coup* for two reasons. First, it seems at least an even bet that the next government would not bungle and stumble as much as the present one has. Secondly, it is extremely unwise in the long range for us to pour cold water on attempts at a coup, particularly when they are just in their beginning stages. We should remember that this is the only way in which the people in Vietnam can possibly get a change of government. Whenever we thwart attempts at a coup, as we have done in the past, we are incurring very long lasting resentments, we are assuming an undue responsibility for keeping the incumbents in office, and in general are setting ourselves in judgment over the affairs of Vietnam. Merely to keep in touch with this situation and a policy merely limited to "not thwarting" are courses both of which entail some risks but these are lesser risks than either thwarting all coups while they are stillborn or our not being informed of what is happening. All the above is totally distinct from not wanting U.S. military advisors to be distracted by matters which are not in their domain, with which I heartily agree. But obviously this does not conflict with a policy of not thwarting. In judging proposed coups, we must consider the effect on the war effort. Certainly a succession of fights for control of the Government of Vietnam would interfere with the war effort. It must also be said that the war effort has been interfered with already by the incompetence of the present government and the uproar which this has caused.

7. Gen. Don's intention to have no religious discrimination in a future government is commendable and I applaud his desire not to be "a vassal" of the U.S. But I do not think his promise of a democratic election is realistic. This country simply is not ready for that procedure. I would add two other requirements. First, that there be no wholesale purges of personnel in the government. Individuals who were particularly reprehensible could be dealt with later by the regular legal process. Then I would be impractical, but I am thinking of a government which might include Tri Quang and which certainly should include men of the stature of Mr. Buu, the labor leader.

8. Copy to Gen. Harkins.

#### APPENDIX 27

OCTOBER 25, 1963.

From : McGeorge Bundy  
To : Lodge  
CAP 63590.

Your 1964 most helpful.

We will continue to be grateful for all additional information giving increased clarity to prospects of action by Don or others, and we look forward to discussing with you the whole question of control and cutout on your return, always assuming that one of these D-Days does not turn out to be real. We are particularly concerned about hazard that an unsuccessful coup, however carefully we avoid direct engagement, will be laid at our door by public opinion almost everywhere. Therefore, while sharing your view that we should not be in position of thwarting coup, we would like to have option of judging and warning on any plan with poor prospects of success. We recognize that this is a large order, but President wants you to know of our concern.

#### APPENDIX 28

OCTOBER 30, 1963.

From : McGeorge Bundy  
To : Lodge  
CAS 79109

1. Your 2023, 2040, 2041 and 2043 examined with care at highest levels here. You should promptly discuss this reply and associated messages with Harkins whose responsibilities toward any coup are very heavy especially after you leave (see para. 7 below). They give much clearer picture group's alleged plans and also indicate chances of action with or without our approval now so significant



that we should urgently consider our attitude and contingency plans. We note particularly Don's curiosity your departure and his insistence Conein be available from Wednesday night on, which suggests date might be as early as Thursday.

2. Believe our attitude to coup group can still have decisive effect on its decisions. We believe that what we say to coup group can produce delay of coup and that betrayal of coup plans to Diem is not repeat not our only way of stopping coup. We therefore need urgently your combined assessment with Harkins and CAS (including their separate comments if they desire). We concerned that our line-up of forces in Saigon (being cabled in next message) indicates approximately equal balance of forces, with substantial possibility serious and prolonged fighting or even defeat. Either of these could be serious or even disastrous for U.S. interests, so that we must have assurance balance of forces clearly favorable.

3. With your assessment in hand, we might feel that we should convey message to Don, whether or not he gives 4 or 48 hours notice that would (A) continue explicit hands-off policy, (B) positively encourage coup, or (C) discourage.

4. In any case, believe Conein should find earliest opportunity express to Don that we do not find presently revealed plans give clear prospect of quick results. This conversation should call attention important Saigon units still apparently loyal to Diem and raise serious issue as to what means coup group has to deal with them.

5. From operational standpoint, we also deeply concerned Don only spokesman for group and possibility cannot be discounted he may not be in good faith. We badly need some corroborative evidence whether Minh and others directly and completely involved. In view Don's claim he doesn't handle "military planning" could not Conein tell Don that we need better military picture and that Big Minh could communicate this most naturally and easily to Stillwell? We recognize desirability involving MACV to minimum, but believe Stillwell far more desirable this purpose than using Conein both ways.

6. Complexity above actions raises question whether you should adhere to present Thursday schedule. Concur you and other U.S. elements should take no action that could indicate U.S. awareness coup possibility. However, DOD is sending berth-equipped military aircraft that will arrive Saigon Thursday and could take you out thereafter as late as Saturday afternoon in time to meet your presently proposed arrival Washington Sunday. You could explain this being done as convenience and that your Washington arrival is same. A further advantage such aircraft is that it would permit your prompt return from any point en route if necessary. To reduce time in transit, you should use this plane, but we recognize delaying your departure may involve greater risk that you personally would appear involved if any action took place. However, advantages your having extra two days in Saigon may outweigh this and we leave timing of flight to your judgment.

7. Whether you leave Thursday or later, believe it essential that prior your departure there be fullest consultation Harkins and CAS and that there be clear arrangements for handling (A) normal activity, (B) continued coup contacts, (C) action in event a coup starts. We assume you will wish Truehart as charge to be head of country team in normal situation, but highest authority desires it clearly understood that after your departure Harkins should participate in supervision of all coup contacts and that in event a coup begins, he become head of country team and direct representative of President, with Truehart in effect acting as POLAD. On coup contacts we will maintain continuous guidance and will expect equally continuous reporting with prompt account of any important divergences in assessments of Harkins and Smith.

8. If coup should start, question of protecting U.S. nationals at once arises. We can move Marine Battalion into Saigon by air from Okinawa within 24 hours—if available. We are sending instructions to CINCPAC to arrange orderly movement of seaborne Marine Battalion to waters adjacent to South Vietnam in position to close Saigon within approximately 24 hours.

9. We are now examining post-coup contingencies here and request your immediate recommendations on position to be adopted after coup begins, especially with respect to requests for assistance of different sorts from one side or the other also request you forward contingency recommendations for action if coup (A) succeeds, (B) fails, (C) is indecisive.



10. We reiterate burden of proof must be on coup group to show a substantial possibility of quick success; otherwise, we should discourage them from proceeding since a miscalculation could result in jeopardizing U.S. position in Southeast Asia.

## APPENDIX 29

OCTOBER 30, 1963.

From: Harkins, Saigon.  
To: Taylor, Washington, D.C.  
NR 2028.

Your JCS 4188-63 arrived as I was in the process of drafting one for you along the same lines. I share your concern. I have not as yet seen SAIGON 768. I sent to the Embassy for a copy at 0830 this morning—as of now 1100—the Embassy has not released it. Also CINCPAC 0-300040Z infor JCS came as a surprise to me as I am unaware of any change in local situation which indicates necessity for actions directed. Perhaps I'll find the answer in SAIGON 768. Or perhaps actions directed in CINCPAC 300040Z are precautionary in light of Gen. Don's statement reported in CAS 1925 that a coup would take place in any case not later than November 2. It might be noted Don also is supposed to have said CAS SAIGON 1956—that though the coup committee would not release the details, the Ambassador would receive the complete plan for study two days prior to the scheduled times for the coup.

I have not been informed by the Ambassador that he has received any such plan. I talked to him yesterday on my return from Bangkok and he offered no additional information. He has agreed to keep me completely informed if anything new turns up.

Incidentally he leaves for Washington tomorrow (31st) afternoon. If the coup is to happen before the second he's hardly going to get two days notice.

One thing I have found out, Don is either lying or playing both ends against the middle. What he told me is diametrically opposed to what he told Col. Conein. He told Conein the coup will be before November 2nd. He told me he was not planning a coup. I sat with Don and Big Minh for 2 hours during the parade last Saturday. No one mentioned coups. To go on:

Both CAS SAIGON 1896 and 1925 were sent first and delivered to me after dispatch. My 1991 was discussed with the Ambassador prior to dispatch. My 1993 was not, basically because I had not seen CAS SAIGON 1925 before dispatch and I just wanted to get the record straight from my side and where my name was involved.

The Ambassador and I are certainly in touch with each other but whether the communications between us are effective is something else. I will say Cabot's methods of operations are entirely different from Amb Noltings as far as reporting in the military is concerned.

Fritz would always clear messages concerning the military with me or my staff prior to dispatch. So would John Richardson if MACV was concerned. This is not so today. Cite CAS 1896 and 1925 for examples. Also you will recall I was not the recipient of several messages you held when you were here.

CINCPAC brought this matter up again when I saw him in Bangkok, this past weekend. He is going to make a check when he returns to see if he holds messages I have not received. Have just received SAIGON 768. I will have to report you are correct in believing that the Ambassador is forwarding military reports and evaluations without consulting me. For his weekly report to the President, at his request, I furnish him a short military statement. For preparation of 768 I made no mention of the Delta. I will answer 768 separately today.

There is a basic difference apparently between the Ambassadors thinking and mine on the interpretation of the guidance contained in CAP 63560 dated 6 October and the additional thoughts, I repeat, thoughts expressed in CAS Washington 74228 dated 9 October. I interpret CAP 63560 as our basic guidance and that CAS 74228 being additional thoughts did not change the basic guidance in that no initiative should now be taken to give any active covert encouragement to a coup. The Ambassador feels that 74228 does change 63560 and that a change of government is desired and feels as stated in CAS SAIGON 1964 that the only way to bring about such a change is by a coup.

I'm not opposed to a change in government, no indeed, but I'm inclined to feel that at this time the change should be in methods of governing rather than complete change of personnel. I have seen no batting order proposed by any of the coup groups. I think we should take a hard look at any proposed list



before we make any decisions. In my contacts here I have seen no one with the strength of character of Diem, at least in fighting communists. Clearly there are no Generals qualified to take over in my opinion.

I am not a Diem man per se. I certainly see the faults in his character. I am here to back 140 million SVN people in their fight against communism and it just happens that Diem is their leader at this time. Most of the Generals I have talked to agree they can go along with Diem, all say it's the Nhu family they are opposed to.

Perhaps the pressures we have begun to apply will cause Diem and Nhu to change their ways. This is apparently not evident as yet. I'm sure the pressures we have begun to apply if continued will affect the war effort. To date they have not. I am watching this closely and will report when I think they have.

I do not agree with the Ambassadors assessment in 768 that we are just holding our own. The GVN is a way ahead in the I, II and parts of the III corps and making progress in the Delta. Nothing has happened in October to change the assessment you and Secretary McNamara made after your visit here.

I would suggest we not try to change horses too quickly. That we continue to take persuasive actions that will make the horses change their course and methods of action. That we win the military effort as quickly as possible, then let them make any and all the changes they want.

After all, rightly or wrongly, we have backed Diem for eight long hard years. To me it seems incongruous now to get him down, kick him around, and get rid of him. The U.S. has been his mother superior and father confessor since he's been in office and he has leaned on us heavily.

Leaders of other under-developed countries will take a dim view of our assistance if they too were led to believe the same fate lies in store for them.

#### APPENDIX 30

OCTOBER 30, 1963.

From: General Harkins, Saigon.  
To: General Taylor, Washington.  
Nr: MAC 2033.

1. Admiral Felt not addee this message but will be provided copy upon his arrival Saigon tomorrow.

2. I now hold copy of SAIGON 768 and this amplifies my MAC 2028 which initially responded to your JCS 4188-63.

3. Saigon 768 was Ambassador Lodge personal report to President in response to DEPTTEL 576 which is possible explanation why I had not seen 768 until one week after dispatch and only then when I requested a copy so that I might intelligently respond to your JCS 4188-63 which referred to 768.

4. Upon receipt of DEPTTEL 576 Ambassador Lodge requested that I provide him brief suggested inputs for responses to questions 1 and 2 (a) 1 of DEPTTEL 576 in that they were principally military in nature. I have done this on weekly basis but have had no knowledge as to whether my suggested brief inputs were utilized in his personal report since as indicated above these were not opened to me.

5. My suggested brief inputs for para 1 which were provided the Ambassador for use as he saw fit in drafting his personal evaluations for the past three weeks follow:

16 Oct: On balance we are gaining in the contest with the VC. There will continue to be minor ups and downs but the general trend has been and continues upward.

23 Oct: While significant changes are, and will be, difficult to identify on a day to day or even weekly comparative basis as regards the contest with the Viet Cong, the general trend continues to be favorable. The tempo of RVN-initiated operations is increasing and recently the tempo of VC-initiated activity has fallen off.

30 Oct: No change from that previously reported. National day affairs this past week tended to bring about a slight reduction in the tempo of RVN initiated actions, however VC initiated actions also waned and on balance the trend continues to be favorable.

6. My suggested brief inputs for paragraph 2 (a) which were provided the Ambassador for use as he saw fit in drafting his personal evaluations for the past three weeks follow:

16 Oct: The government has responded at many points when we have cited need for improvement in the campaign against the VC (shift of boundaries;



placement of VNSF activities in corps areas under OPCON of corps comdr: reallocation of forces). Additionally Gen Don and Gen Stilwell, my G-3 have spent the last week in the conduct of a Corps by Corps assessment of the present situation with a view to further desirable reallocation of forces. Based on their recommendations I will make further recommendations to Pres. Diem (for inclusion in ANS to para 2 (a) Ambassador was advised that US/GVN military relations remain good).

23 Oct: Response received from the government in reaction to military areas where we have cited needed improvement has been favorable in some areas, while in other areas no indication of response has been received to date. In no case have they flatly resisted recommended improvements. Favorable indications are the commitment of nearly half of the general reserve to operations, plans for possible further redistribution of forces, and a recognition of the requirement to effect consolidation in the strategic hamlet program.

30 Oct: No specific responses have been received from the government this past week in reaction to military areas where we have cited need for improvement. This is believed due in great part to their preoccupation with National day affairs.

7. Comparison of my 23 October suggested brief inputs quoted above with Saigon 768 indicates Ambassador Lodge did not see fit to utilize my suggestions to any significant degree. It also apparent that upon further reflection Ambassador determined that more detailed response was required than he initially felt necessary when he requested brief inputs on principally military items.

8. I believe certain portions SAIGON 768 require specific comment. These follow:

Para F of answer to question 1—View of Vice Pres Tho that there are only 15 to 20 all-around hamlets in the area south of Saigon which are really good is ridiculous and indicates need for him to get out of Saigon and visit countryside so as to really know of progress which is being made. In past two weeks I have visited nine Delta provinces (Tay Ninh, Binh Duong, Hau Nghia, Long An, Kien Phong, Kien Hoa, An Giang, Phong Dinh, Chuong Thien), eight of which are south of Saigon, and I do not find the province chiefs or sector advisors to hold the same views as Vice Pres Tho.

Para H of answer to question 1—I am unable to concur in statement that quote one cannot drive as much around the country as one could two years ago end of quote. I believe it will be some time before, if we ever do, experience mass surrenders of the VC. I am unable to concur in statement that VC is quote in fact, reckoned at a higher figure than it was two years ago end quote. I have not observed the signs that hatred of the government has tended to diminish the Army's vigor, enthusiasm and enterprise. I find it difficult to believe the few rumors one hears regarding Generals being paid off with money and flashy cars. Most cars I see in use by Generals are same they have been using for past two years and few if any qualify as flashy to my mind. I do not concur with the evaluation of the 14 October report of the Delta Subcommittee of the Committee on Province Rehabilitation which states that the VC are gaining. Moreover I take exception to the implication that the report represents official country team agency views and is consequently authoritative in the views it presents. Agency representatives on this sub-committee served as individuals in reporting to the COPROR Committee, incidentally there were wide divergencies even among sub-committee members. COPROR Committee received but did not place its stamp of approval or concurrence on report of its Sub-Committee. COPROR Committee returned the report to its Sub-Committee for rework. Consequently this report has not as yet been submitted to country team nor has it been referred to individual country team agencies for review and/or comment. Any views quoted from this Sub-Committee report therefore have no rpt no validity as expressions of country team or individual agency views.

Para J of answer to question 1—With regard to the quote existing political control over troop movements, which prevents optimum use of the Army end quote. I do not deny that political influences enter into this picture however I feel we have made and are making significant strides in this area and do not concur that time is not working for us—so long as political controls remain as at present.

Para J of answer to question 1—As indicated in paras 5 and 6 above and in other reports I have filed my evaluation is that from the military point of view the trend is definitely in RVN favor consequently I cannot concur that quote we at present are not doing much more than holding our own end quote.



Answer under (a) to question 2—I am correctly quoted here but para 6 above gives full context of my suggested input.

Answer under (c) to question 2—As indicated para 6 above Ambassador was advised that US/GVN military relations remain good.

## APPENDIX 31

OCTOBER 30, 1963.

From : Lodge.

To : State ;

CAS 2063.

1. We must, of course, get best possible estimate of chance of coup's success and this estimate must color our thinking, but do not think we have the power to delay or discourage a coup. Don has made it clear many times that this is a Vietnamese affair. It is theoretically possible for us to turn over the information which has been given to us in confidence to Diem and this would undoubtedly stop the coup and would make traitors out of us. For practical purposes therefore I would say that we have very little influence on what is essentially a Vietnamese affair. In addition, this would place the heads of the Generals, their civilian supporters, and lower military officers on the spot, thereby sacrificing a significant portion of the civilian and military leadership needed to carry the war against the VC to its successful conclusion. After our efforts not to discourage a coup and this change of heart, we would foreclose any possibility of change of the GVN for the better. Diem/Nhu have displayed no intentions to date of a desire to change the traditional methods of control through police action or take any repeat any actions which would undermine the power position or solidarity of the Ngo family. This, despite our heavy pressures directed DEPTTEL 534. If our attempt to thwart this coup were successful, which we doubt, it is our firm estimate that younger officers, small groups of military, would then engage in an abortive action creating chaos ideally suited to VC objectives.

2. While we will attempt a combined assessment in a following message, time has not yet permitted substantive examination of this matter with General Harkins. My general view is that the U.S. is trying to bring this medieval country into the 20th Century and that we have made considerable progress in military and economic ways but to gain victory we must also bring them into the 20th Century politically and that can only be done by either a thoroughgoing change in the behavior of the present government or by another government. The Viet Cong problem is partly military but it is also partly psychological and political.

3. With respect to paragraph 3 Ref., I believe that we should continue our present position of keeping hands off but continue to monitor and press for more detailed information. CAS has been analyzing potential coup forces for some time and it is their estimate that the Generals have probably figured their chances pretty closely and probably also expect that once they begin to move, not only planned units, but other units will join them. We believe that Vietnam's best Generals are involved in directing this effort. If they can't pull it off, it is doubtful other military leadership could do so successfully. It is understandable that the Generals would be reticent to reveal full details of their plan for fear of leaks to the GVN.

4. Re para. 4, Ref., we expect that Conein will meet Don on the night of 30 Oct or early morning 31 Oct. We agree with Para. 4, Ref., that we should continue to press for details and question Don as to his estimate of the relative strengths of opposing forces. We do not believe, however, that we should show any signs of attempting to direct this affair ourselves or of giving the impression of second thoughts on this Vietnamese initiation. In the meantime, we will respond specifically to CAS Washington 79126. Please note that CAS Saigon 2059 corrects CAS Saigon 2023 and two regiments of the 7th Division are included in the coup forces.

5. Apparently Para. 5, Ref., overlooks CAS 1445, 5 Oct 1963 which gave an account of the face to face meeting of General "Big Minh" and Conein at Minh's instigation and through the specific arrangement of Gen Don. Minh specifically identified Gen Don as participating in a plan to change the government. Please note that Minh's remarks parallel in every way the later statements of Gen. Don. We believe that the limitation of contact to Don and Cein is an appropriate security measure consonant with our urging that the smallest number of persons be aware of these details.



6. We do not believe it wise to ask that "Big Minh" pass his plans to Gen. Stilwell. The Vietnamese believe that there are members of the U.S. military who leak to the Government of Vietnam. I do not doubt that this is an unjust suspicion but it is a fact that this suspicion exists and there is no use in pretending that it does not.

7. I much appreciate your furnishing the berth-equipped military aircraft which I trust is a jet. I intend to tell Pan American that a jet has been diverted for my use and therefore I will no longer need their services. This will undoubtedly leak to the newspapers and the GVN may study this move with some suspicion. I will answer any inquiries on this score to the effect that I am most pleased by this attention and that this is obviously done as a measure to insure my comfort and save my time. To allay suspicions further, I will offer space on the aircraft to MACV for emergency leave cases, etc., and handle this in as routine fashion as possible. I wish to reserve comment as to my actual time of departure until I have some additional information, hopefully tomorrow.

8. Your para. 7 somewhat perplexes me. It does not seem sensible to have the military in charge of a matter which is so profoundly political as a change of government. In fact, I would say to do this would probably be the end of any hope for a change of government here. This is said impersonally as a general proposition, since Gen. Harkins is a splendid General and an old friend of mine to whom I would gladly entrust anything I have. I assume that the Embassy and MACV are able to handle normal activities under A, that CAS can continue coup contacts under B, and as regards C, we must simply do the very best we can in the light of events after the coup has started.

9. We appreciate the steps taken as outlined in para. 8. However, we should remember that the GVN is not totally inept in its foreign soundings and that these moves should be as discreet and security conscious as possible. I would, of course, call for these forces only in case of extreme necessity since my hope coincides with the Generals that this will be an all-Vietnamese affair.

10. We anticipate that at the outset of the coup, unless it moves with lightning swiftness, the GVN will request me or Gen. Harkins to use our influence to call it off. I believe our responsibilities should be that our influence certainly could not be superior to that of the President who is Commander-in-Chief and that if he is unable to call it off, we would certainly be unable to do so and would merely be risking American lives attempting to interfere in this Vietnamese problem. The Government might request aircraft. Helicopters, for the evacuation of key personalities that would have to be studied closely, but we would certainly not commit our planes and pilots between the battle lines of the opposing forces. We should, rather, state that we would be willing to act in this fashion during a truce in which both sides agree to the removal of key personalities. I believe that there would be immediate political problems in attempting to take these personalities to another neighboring country and probably we would be best served in depositing them in Saipan where the absence of press, communications, etc., would allow us some leeway to make a further decision as to their ultimate disposition. If senior Vietnamese personalities and their families requested asylum in the Embassy or other American installations, we would probably have to grant it in light of our previous action with respect to Tri Quang. This will undoubtedly present later problems but hopefully the new government might feel disposed to help us solve this problem. Naturally, asylum would be granted on the same basis as the Buddhists, i.e., physical presence at the Embassy or other location.

11. As to requests from the Generals, they may well have need of funds at the last moment with which to buy off potential opposition. To the extent that these funds can be passed discreetly, I believe we should furnish them, provided we are convinced that the proposed coup is sufficiently well organized to have a good chance of success. If they are successful, they will undoubtedly ask for prompt recognition and some assurance that military and economic aid will continue at normal level. We should be prepared to make these statements if the issue is clear-cut predicating our position on the President's stated desire to continue the war against the VC to final victory. VOA might be an important means of disseminating this message. Should the coup fail, we will have to pick up the pieces as best we can at that time. We have a commitment to the Generals from the August episode to attempt to help in the evacuation of their dependents. We should try to live up to this if conditions will permit. American complicity will undoubtedly be charged and there might be some acts



taken against specific personalities which we should anticipate and make provision against as best we can. Should the coup prove indecisive and a protracted struggle is in progress, we should probably offer our good offices to help resolve the issue in the interest of the war against the VC. This might hold some benefit in terms of concessions by GVN. We will naturally incur some opprobrium from both sides in our role as mediator. However, this opprobrium would probably be less distasteful than a deadlock which would open the door to the VC. We consider such a deadlock as the least likely possibility of the three.

12. As regards your para. 10, I do not know what more proof can be offered than the fact these men are obviously prepared to risk their lives and that they want nothing for themselves. If I am any judge of human nature, Don's face expressed of sincerity and determination on the morning that I spoke to him. Heartily agree that a miscalculation could jeopardize position in Southeast Asia. We also run tremendous risks by doing nothing.

If we were convinced that the coup was going to fail, we would, of course, do everything we could to stop it.

13. Gen. Harkins has read this and does not concur.

## APPENDIX 32

OCTOBER 30, 1963.

CAS 79407 FROM BUNDY TO LODGE

1. Our reading your thoughtful 2063 leads us to believe a significant difference of shading may exist on one crucial point (see next para.) and on one or two lesser matters easily clarified.

2. We do not accept as a basis for U.S. policy that we have no power to delay or discourage a coup. In your paragraph 12 you say that if you were convinced that the coup was going to fail you would of course do everything you could do to stop it. We believe that on this same basis you should take action to persuade coup leaders to stop or delay any operation which, in your best judgment, does not clearly give high prospect of success. We have not considered any betrayal of generals to Diem, and our 79109 explicitly reject that course. We recognize the danger of appearing hostile to generals, but we believe that our own position should be on as firm ground as possible, hence we cannot limit ourselves to proposition implied in your message that only conviction of certain failure justifies intervention. We believe that your standard for intervention should be that stated above.

3. Therefore, if you should conclude that there is not clearly a high prospect of success, you should communicate this doubt to generals in a way calculated to persuade them to desist at least until chances are better. In such a communication you should use the weight of U.S. best advice and explicitly reject any implication that we oppose the effort of the generals because of preference for present regime. We recognize need to bear in mind generals' interpretation of U.S. role in 1960 coup attempt, and your agent should maintain clear distinction between strong and honest advice given as a friend and any opposition to their objectives.

4. We continue to be deeply interested in up-to-the-minute assessment of prospects and are sending this before reply to our CAS 79126. We want continuous exchange latest assessments on this topic.

5. To clarify our intent, paragraph 7 of our 79109 is rescinded and we restate our desires as follows:

a. While you are in Saigon you will be Chief of Country Team in all circumstances and our only instruction is that we are sure it will help to have Harkins fully informed at all stages and to use advice from both him and Smith in framing guidance for coup contacts and assessment. We continue to be concerned that neither Conein nor any other reporting source is getting the clarity we would like with respect to alignment of forces and level of determination among generals.

b. When you leave Saigon and before there is a coup, Truehart will be Chief of the Country Team. Our only modification of existing procedures is that in this circumstance we wish all instruction to Conein to be conducted in immediate consultation with Harkins and Smith so that all three know what is said in Conein. Any disagreement among the three on such instruction should be reported to Washington and held for our resolution, when time permits.

c. If you have left and a coup occurs, we believe that emergency situation requires, pending your return, that direction of country team be vested in most senior officer with experience of military decisions, and the officer in our view



is Harkins. We do *not* intend that this switch in final responsibility should be publicized in any way, and Harkins will of course be guided in basic posture by our instructions, which follow in paragraph 6. We do not believe that this switch will have the effect suggested in your paragraph 8.

6. This paragraph contains our present standing instructions for U.S. posture in the event of a coup.

a. U.S. authorities will reject appeals for direct intervention from either side, and U.S.-controlled aircraft and other resources will not be committed between the battle lines or in support of either side, without authorization from Washington.

b. In event of indecisive contest, U.S. authorities may in their discretion agree to perform any acts agreeable to both sides, such as removal of key personalities or relay of information. In such actions, however, U.S. authorities will strenuously avoid appearance of pressure on either side. It is not in the interest of USG to be or appear to be either instrument of existing government or instrument of coup.

c. In the event of imminent or actual failure of coup, U.S. authorities may afford asylum in their discretion to those to whom there is any express or implied obligation of this sort. We believe however that in such a case it would be in our interest and probably in interest of those seeking asylum that they seek protection of other Embassies in addition to our own. This point should be made strongly if need arises.

d. But once a coup under responsible leadership has begun, and within these restrictions, it is in the interest of the U.S. Government that it should succeed.

7. We have your message about return to Washington and we suggest that all public comment be kept as low-key and quiet as possible, and we also urge that if possible you keep open the exact time of your departure. We are strongly sensitive to great disadvantage of having you out of Saigon if this should turn out to be a week of decision, and if it can be avoided we would prefer not to see you pinned to a fixed hour of departure now.

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