

5
INFORMATION

~~TOP SECRET~~--EYES ONLY

Monday, October 21, 1968 - 12:40 pm

Mr. President:

At Tab A, in the attached sensitive and interesting file, is Hilsman's famous cable of August 24, 1963.

You may be interested in Bill Bundy's memorandum of July 30, 1966, to Bill Moyers, at the top of the file, as well as in other items.

I am taking the liberty of having a copy of this file Xeroxed for your personal records, since we have been requested to return the file to the Secretary of State.

W. W. Rostow

~~TOP SECRET~~--EYES ONLY

WWRosto :rm

DECLASSIFIED

Authority JFK 177-10001-10469

By gw, NARA, Date 2-26-98



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

October 21, 1968

~~TOP SECRET~~-EYES ONLY
SENSITIVE Attachments

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. WALT W. ROSTOW
THE WHITE HOUSE

Walt:

In accordance with our telephone conversation this morning, the Secretary has asked me to forward to you the attached package containing messages and memoranda relating to the period prior to the overthrow of the Diem government in 1963.

The famous Hilsman cable of August 24, 1963 is the first cable under TAB A of the attachment. Please return these papers for our records when they have served your purpose. I am also enclosing a copy of Hilsman's March 14, 1964 final letter to Secretary Rusk.

BHR
Benjamin H. Read
Executive Secretary

Attachment:

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Authority IFC# 177-10001-10470

By W, NARA, Date 2-26-98

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~~TOP SECRET~~

July 30, 1966

Note to Mr. Moyers - EYES ONLY

You will see that the attached is both full and necessarily somewhat personal. I leave it to your judgment how it should be handled. I have been guided by your injunction that this should be on precisely that basis, and have consulted no other person, except for the physical necessity of obtaining the August 1963 files for a reason which I did not specify.

William P. Bundy

~~TOP SECRET~~ EYES ONLY

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 13292, Sec. 3.4
By *jdul/jc* NARA, Date 3-2-09

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~~TOP SECRET~~

July 30, 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. MOYERS - EYES ONLY

SUBJECT: Discussion Concerning the Diem Regime in August-October 1963

Your specific question to me concerned the celebrated cable of August 24, 1963, which in effect directed Lodge and the Mission to start exploring ways to find alternative leadership to Diem. That message is in fact more complex and perhaps less clear than that one-sentence summary. It is attached as TAB A.

According to my oral information from Michael Forrestal in mid-September (I myself was away from mid-August to mid-September), the message was cleared by phone with President Kennedy in Hyannisport, it being a Saturday night. There is a sharp difference of recollection between Mr. Forrestal and General Krulak (then in the JCS as their Vietnam man) as to whether General Taylor ever cleared the message. I believe it is agreed that Mr. Gilpatric did so by phone from his Eastern Shore farm, on the basis that the matter was essentially political. Secretaries Rusk and McNamara were both out of town and unavailable until early in the following week.

While the August 24 cable is a vital part of the story and indeed reflects a true "breakpoint" in Washington thinking, there is so much more to it that I think it would be a mistake merely to look at that cable. The prior and ensuing events were roughly as follows:

1. Lodge was nominated to Saigon in June and there began immediately to be dope stories in the press that he was going out to clean up the situation and do something about Diem. I cannot say who was responsible for those stories, but my

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By 80 NARA. Date 4-20-98

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predecessor, Mr. Hilsman, had unfortunate tendencies in this direction. Undoubtedly, Diem came to regard Lodge's arrival as a calculated challenge to him.

2. On August 18th, while Lodge was en route to Saigon, Diem and Nhu ordered the Army into the pagodas in Saigon, bringing to a flash point the simmering Buddhist crisis that had been going on since May. The timing must have been related to Lodge's arrival.

3. After a few days of back and forth trying to establish whether the Army really had been acting at all on its own, the August 24th cable was sent.

4. In the ensuing week, as the top-level outgoings attached as TAB B show, we went up the hill and down again as to the possibility of the military taking action against Diem. This was primarily a CIA operation, and I have dug out from my own files a chronology of principal CAS contacts in the whole August-October period. This is attached as TAB C. In essence, we made quiet approaches to key military men, who finally told us that they simply could not make it at that time. Undoubtedly, however, the idea that they might act, and that if they did we would support them, was planted at that time.

5. On or about September 7th, President Kennedy -- based on discussions of which I have no record or knowledge, made a press conference sharply critical of Diem. Shortly thereafter, we suspended further transactions under the Commodity Import Program, the proceeds of which were of course fundamental to the support of the Vietnamese war effort. The suspension of transactions did not at all mean that support ceased in fact, since there was a pipeline of at least 2 - 3 months already on the way.

6. By mid-September, there was acute controversy within the government, and a large and regrettable spate of newspaper leaks that pretty clearly identified the respective sides -- Hilsman and others in State believing that Diem must go, while DoD, JCS, and CIA (both in Washington and in the field) were opposed to any change. I myself

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returned from Europe on September 14, and vividly recall that Mike Forrestal came to me at once to describe the whole controversy and its background, and to say that people like myself, who had taken no emotional position, should now get into the situation fully and see if we could help straighten it out.

7. In the middle of the week of September 16th, President Kennedy chaired a small White House meeting at which it was decided that the only way to get a solid government position would be for Secretary McNamara and General Taylor to take a small and select group at once to Saigon for a hard look. I worked with Secretary McNamara in the selection of this group, which included Bill Sullivan from State, Mike Forrestal from the White House, and Bill Colby from CIA. This group left on September 23rd.

8. The McNamara/Taylor mission stayed in Vietnam through October 1st, making field trips but focusing primarily on the widest possible contact in all quarters to assess the political situation. The mission returned on October 2nd and immediately presented a full report to President Kennedy, of which I enclose my own editing copy as TAB.D. The report speaks for itself. Unfortunately, its public image has always derived from the White House release of October 2nd which picked up the McNamara/Taylor prediction that it should be possible to scale down the US military effort in Vietnam by the end of 1965. However, the real guts of the report was its conclusion that Diem simply had to be drastically reformed if we were to have any hope that he could be an effective leader. This unanimous conclusion of the group solidified top-level Washington thinking that we might be forced to seek some alternative to Diem. (To the best of my recollection, the then Vice President's views were not stated in the meetings at that time, although they may well have been conveyed privately to President Kennedy, and may not have been in accord with the report and the consensus that appeared to develop from it.)

9. However, from an action standpoint, the decisions were to continue the suspension of transactions under the Commodity Import Program, for Lodge to await contact with Diem but to use any such contact to press him on reform, and that -- as to any possible military coup -- we would not actively promote such a coup, but

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would stay in close contact with military leaders who might be involved in such efforts. The last point was the subject of a careful Top Secret annex to the NSC Action Memorandum, of which I have no precise copy, although I have drafts that confirm the above statements.

10. During October, Diem refused to see Lodge until very late in the month, just prior to the actual coup. My recollection is that Lodge finally saw him in Dalat about October 27-28, and made a strong pitch for reforms, with some apparent response from Diem. However, the latter had not taken any action by the date of the coup -- November 1st.

11. With respect to contacts with the military, these were principally carried out by a CIA officer under Lodge's personal direction. They were directed to our knowing exactly what might be afoot, and the only message conveyed on the US side was that, if a change of government did take place at any time or for any reason, the US would support the new government if it were in fact effective and prepared to carry on the war. This message, while general, undoubtedly encouraged the military plotters. In the early part of the month, they seemed to be disorganized, and there seemed to be at least two or three rather feeble efforts on foot at once. However, in the last week of October, it became clear to us all from the CIA source that serious action by the group led by General Don might in fact be imminent.

12. Hence, in the two or three days prior to November 1st, there was a last series of meetings as to whether we should do anything to forestall or interrupt a coup if it did take place. We were deeply concerned as to the balance of forces in Saigon, and thought it entirely possible that a coup attempt would produce a blood bath in Saigon with no decisive result and resulting government chaos. However, we finally concluded that we did not have the leverage or the contacts to prevent a coup -- nor could we confidently take the other side and tell Diem what we knew might be brewing. Hence, in the end we stood aside, and the Don/Big Minh group did in fact carry out its coup on November 1st with great success. The element of the coup that we of course most regretted was the killing of Diem and Nhu. While we had repeatedly told the military leaders that we

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strongly believed that -- if a coup did take place -- Diem and Nhu should be treated honorably and perhaps sent into exile, there may be some question whether it would have forestalled the killing if we had said this hard and firmly on the very first evening and before the killings took place on the following morning. However, at that time, neither we nor the military knew where Diem and Nhu were, and in the uncertainty whether they were perhaps organizing a counter-blow, and in the general heat of conflict, -- which involved armed battle near the palace that night -- any ~~errors~~^{words} from us might well have fallen on deaf ears in any case. We really do not know at what level the order to kill Diem and Nhu was given, and there is some evidence that it may have been done on the individual initiative of colonel-level officers who happened to be the ones to apprehend them and who had deep personal grievances against both.

* * * * *

The above is an account of the events as seen through the eyes of one reasonably close participant (from mid-September on). It is of course very incomplete, particularly as to President Kennedy's personal thinking. However, I believe it is accurate as far as it goes.

William P. Bundy

~~TOP SECRET~~

Enclosures

Tab A - To Saigon 243 Aug 24

Tab B - To Saigon 249 Aug 26
To Saigon 256 Aug 27
To Saigon 268 Aug 28
To Saigon 269 Aug 28
To Saigon 272 Aug 29
To Saigon 279 Aug 29
To Saigon 284 Aug 30
Ro Siagon 294 Aug 31
To Saigon 295 Aug 31

50

TPD

INDICATE: ☐ COLLECT
☒ CHARGE TO

~~TOP SECRET~~

Classification

1502

57

2. ACN ...

Origin

ACTION: AmEmbassy SAIGON - OPERATIONAL IMMEDIATE

243

Index

EYES ONLY - AMBASSADOR LODGE
FOR CINCPAC/POLAD EXCLUSIVE FOR ADMIRAL FELT
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Re CAS Saigon 0265 reporting General Don's views; Saigon 320, and Saigon 316, and Saigon 329.

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.

US 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

Drafted by:

FE:RHilsman:ml 8/24/63

Telegraphic transmission and

classification approved by:

M - W. Averell Harriman

COMANCOS:

FE - Mr. Hilsman (K)

WH - Mr. Forrestal

S/S-0 - Mr. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

Getsinger

U - Mr. Ball

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FORM 5-61, PS-322

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Classification

Authority JFK # 177-10001-10454

7. no, NARA. Date 4-20-98

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Classification

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 the 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.

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(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 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.
to prevent premature ~~leaks~~

GP-2.

END.

BALL

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OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

59,5704

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June 20, 1963

Origin

ACTION: Amembassy SAIGON OPERATIONAL IMMEDIATE

Info:

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ EYES ONLY FOR AMBASSADOR

Following summarizes FYI highest level meeting noon Aug. 26.

After discussion E & E plans DOD was directed to consider prepositioning US forces in case they required in Viet-Nam. Circular message approved to discourage travel by private US citizens to Viet-Nam and to permit US official travel only as authorized by Department. No public announcement would be made at this time. Also decided to make Saigon's 327 on GVN censorship available to editors in unclassified version not repeat not for publication.

Agreed answers to three questions were urgently needed.

1. What exactly meant by "direct support to the military in an interim period if the central government is ineffective". This interpreted at meeting as possibility of supplying military leaders in the field with logistic support directly without going through central government. Urgent study will be made to see whether alternatives could be worked out to prevent ~~prevent~~ heavy concentration through Saigon. (This being done by Joint Staff with immediate query to Harkins on this point.)

Drafted by: FE:Roger Hillsman:cst 8/26/63

Telegraphic transmission and classification approved by:

U - George Ball

Clearances:

S/S - Mr. McKesson White House-Mr. Foster

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Classification

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FORM DS-322

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Authority: AAC 002R-263-1-17

By: JDL Date: 9-18-18

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2. What is the power status and interrelationship of generals?

Which generals are involved with Minh, Khan, and Khiem? What are their plans?

3. Generals should be queried as to who their alternative leadership candidates would be.

A Who's Who of key personalities in present situation being urgently prepared here.

Another meeting will be held late afternoon August 27. Trust you will give us soonest and if possible in time for meeting your continuing assessment on numbered points 2 and 3 above.

End

RUSK

GP-1

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Origin

ACTION: Amembassy SAIGON - EMERGENCY 256

Info:

INFO: CINCPAC POLAD - EXCLUSIVE FOR FELT

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KENNEDY LIBRARY

Examination of reports to date gives considerable hope but leaves
unanswered questions regarding:

- A. present balance of forces between coup and counter-coup elements
- B. personal force of character of coup participants, and
- C. security of the operation.

Proceeding from the concept outlined in DEPTTEL 243 as modified, now
desire your prompt interim appraisal of present prospects to include
specifically:

1. Are Generals now committed to the coup plan in CAS Saigon 0346
sufficiently strong and sufficiently united to give high prospect of success
in immediate future?
2. Would their chances be improved or lessened by delay, with respect
to such factors as
 - a. Additional local military and political support at critical moment?

Drafted by:

FE:RHillsman:jmt 8/27/63

Telegraphic transmission and
classification approved by:

FE - Roger Hillsman

Clearances:

The White House - Mr. Bundy (dft) The Secretary (substance) *[initials]*
DOD - Mr. McNamara (dft) S/S - Mr. McKesson *[initials]*
JCS - Gen. Taylor (dft) *[initials]*

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Authority JEX-177-10001-10456
By *[initials]* NARA: Date 4-20-98

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EYES ONLY - AMBASSADOR LODGE

- b. Security, including hazard to coup participants and compromise of U.S. role?
 - c. Public attitudes?
 - d. Nhu's own capability for counter-coup or further action of his own?
 - 3. In particular, what is your best estimate of orientation and comparative strength of forces in Saigon area?
 - 4. If operation is initially indecisive how is balance likely to tip as other forces become involved?
 - 5. More generally, highest authority asks whether you and Harkins, in light of developing situation, presently favor operation as currently planned by generals.
- We wish to give you all possible support in best available course but not to insist on any decision that developing evidence makes it wise to modify.

END.

RUSK

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INCOMING TELEGRAM

Department of State

17E

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CORRECTION ISSUED:

8/28/63; 1:30 P.M.; DMJ

Control: 22804

Rec'd: AUGUST 28, 1963

7:18 A.M.

5i

Action
SS.

EYES ONLY

Info

FROM: SAIGON - CORRECTED PAGES 1 AND 2

TO: Secretary of State

NO: 364, AUGUST 28, 6 P.M. (SECTION ONE OF TWO)

KENNEDY

June

1964

EMERGENCY

ACTION DEPARTMENT 364, INFO CINCPAC OPERATIONAL IMMEDIATE 234

DEPARTMENT EYES ONLY FOR SECRETARY

CINCPAC EXCLUSIVE FOR FELT

DEPTEL 256.

DECLASSIFIED

Authority JFC 477-10001-10457

By jw NARA. Date 3-4-98

IN APPRAISING CURRENT PROSPECTS, IT MUST BE BORNE IN MIND THAT OUR KNOWLEDGE OF COMPOSITION OF COUP GROUP AND THEIR PLANS IS DERIVED FROM SINGLE SOURCE. WE HAVE HIGH CONFIDENCE AUTHENTICITY OF THIS INFORMATION BUT ARE TAKING STEPS ASSURE OURSELVES THAT GENERALIZING MINH IS INVOLVED. (CONTRARY CAS 0346, MINH HAS ASKED SEE CAS REPRESENTATIVES TOMORROW MORNING AT JGS.) VICE PRESIDENT THO'S REMARKS TO ME THIS MORNING (REPORTED BELOW) WERE ENTIRELY CONSISTENT WITH HIS HAVING BEEN BROUGHT IN ON PLANS BUT DO NOT PROVE HE HAS BEEN. TURNING TO NUMBERED QUESTIONS REFTEL:

1. GENERALS CITED (CAS 0346) AS MEMBERS COUP COMMITTEE ARE BEST GROUP THAT COULD BE ASSEMBLED IN TERMS OF ABILITY AND ORIENTATION. CERTAIN OF THEM (VMIG MINH, KHANH AND KIM) ARE CONSIDERED TO HAVE PERSONAL FORCE OF CHARACTER. WE BELIEVE THAT THEY WOULD ALL UNITE UNDER LEADERSHIP OF BIG MINH. QUESTION OF THEIR STRENGTH IS DEALT WITH IN PARA 3 BELOW.

2. WE BELIEVE THAT ALL FACTORS CITED PARA 2 REFTEL ARGUE FOR PROMPT ACTION AND THAT CHANCES OF SUCCESS WOULD BE DIMINISHED BY

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-2- 364, AUGUST 28, 6 P.M., FROM SAIGON (SECTION ONE OF TWO)

DELAY. IN PARTICULAR, WE ARE CONCERNED OVER POSSIBILITY ATTEMPT BY NHU TO ARREST LEADERS. WE ASSUME GENERALS ARE GUARDING AGAINST THIS POSSIBILITY.

3. LINEUP AND ORIENTATION OF FORCES IN METROPOLITAN AREA FOR DETAILED LISTING, REFER TO MACV 1551 INTEL DTG: 280625Z, REPEATED STATE.

A. THE FORCES LISTED IN ABOVE MESSAGE AS NON-ARVN TOTAL 7,750 AND MUST BE CONSIDERED COMMITTED TO DEFENSE OF PALACE, IF ALL ARE IN FACT ALIGNED UNDER TUNG. POSSIBILITY EXISTS, HOWEVER, THAT GENERALS MAY BE ABLE TO DRIVE WEDGE BETWEEN TUNG AND TU, POLICE COMMISSIONER, WHO COMMANDS BULK OF POLICE.

B. THE ARVN FORCES LISTED ARE ALL UNDER THE COMMAND OF GENERAL DINH WITH EXCEPTION 6TH ABN BN MENTIONED BELOW. SIGNIFICANT, HOWEVER, THAT WITH MINOR EXCEPTIONS, TROOPS ARE NOT ORGANIC TO THE III CORPS, WHICH HE NORMALLY HEADS. THESE TROOPS FALL INTO TWO MAIN CATEGORIES: (1) THE FORCES OF THE CAPITAL MILITARY DISTRICT, HEADED BY GENERAL LA WHO IS DINH'S DEPUTY FOR THE SAIGON -CHOLON AREA, AND (2) UNITS OF THE GENERAL RESERVE (AIRBORNE AND MARINE BRIGADES), NORMALLY CONTROLLED BY THE JCS.

C. COLONEL VIEN, COMMANDING THE ABN BRIGADE, HAS THE SINGLE, MOST POWERFUL AND COHESIVE UNIT IN SAIGON. THUS, HIS ACTIONS ARE CRUCIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF INITIAL MOVES. HIS LOYALTIES HAVE RUN TO DIEM AND HE IS CLOSE TO DINH. BUT HE IS ALSO AWARE OF THE OUTSPOKEN OPPOSITION OF THE BULK OF HIS OFFICERS TO THE PRESENT REGIME. WE HAVE REPORTS THAT THIS HAS CAUSED A REORIENTATION OF HIS THINKING AND THAT HE WOULD IMMEDIATELY SWING IF DINH SWUNG, AND, ALTERNATIVELY, THAT HE COULD BE PERSUADED TO SWING WITHOUT DINH BEFORE OR IN THE OPENING STAGES OF THE REVOLT. IF THE GENERALS CAN COUNT ON THE AIRBORNE, SUCCESS MIGHT COME QUICKLY AND WITH MINIMUM VIOLENCE

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Department of State PERMANENT RECORD COPY

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SSControl: 22804
Rec'd: AUGUST 28, 1963
7:18 A.M.

Info

FROM: SAIGON

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TO: Secretary of State

NO: 364, AUGUST 28, 6 P.M. (SECTION ONE OF TWO)

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22

EMERGENCY

ACTION DEPARTMENT 364, INFO CINCPAC OPERATIONAL IMMEDIATE 234

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June 1964

DEPTEL 256.

IN APPRAISING CURRENT PROSPECTS, IT MUST BE BORNE IN MIND THAT OUR KNOWLEDGE OF COMPOSITION OF COUP GROUP AND THEIR PLANS IS DERIVED FROM SINGLE SOURCE. WE HAVE HIGH CONFIDENCE AUTHENTICITY OF THIS INFORMATION BUT ARE TAKING STEPS ASSURE OURSELVES THAT GENERALIZING MINH IS INVOLVED. (CONTRARY CAS 0346, MINH HAS ASKED SEE CAS REPRESENTATIVES TOMORROW MORNING AT JGS.) VICE PRESIDENT THO'S REMARKS TO ME THIS MORNING (REPORTED BELOW) WERE ENTIRELY (#) HIS HAVING BEEN BROUGHT IN ON PLANS BUT DO NOT PROVE HE HAS BEEN. TURNING TO NUMBERED QUESTIONS REFTEL:

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-2- 364, AUGUST 28, 6 P.M., FROM SAIGON (SECTION ONE OF TWO)

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FOR DETAILED LISTING, REFER TO MACV 1551 INTEL DTG: 280625Z,
REPEATED STATE.

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VIOLENCE

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-3- 364, AUGUST 28, 6 P.M., FROM SAIGON (SECTION ONE OF TWO)

VIOLENCE. IF NOT, THE STRUGGLE MIGHT BE BLOODY AND EXTENDED. UNDER LATTER CIRCUMSTANCES, ESTIMATE HERE IS THAT THE GENERALS WOULD RESORT TO STRATAGEM TO NEUTRALIZE VIEN, RATHER THAN ASSAULT FORCES HE COMMANDS. ON BALANCE, WE BELIEVE THAT GENERALS CANNOT COUNT ON VIEN, BUT MAY HAVE SUPPORT OF CERTAIN UNITS OF THE BRIGADE. CERTAINLY, THE 6TH BN HAS BEEN POSITIONED AT JGS HQ, UNDER JGS CONTROL, BECAUSE THE COUP GROUP IS CONFIDENT OF ITS COMMANDER'S LOYALTY.

D. THE TWO MARINE BNS ARE ALSO IN KEY POSITIONS. SECURITY MISSION OF ONE BATTALION (SECOND IS NEARBY IN RESERVE) EXTENDS FROM PALACE TO WATERFRONT, AN AREA WHICH INCLUDES NUMEROUS VITJM (VITAL?) INSTALLATIONS: PTT, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, AMERICAN BILLETTS. THIS BN IS CLOSELY REGULAR UNIT TO PALACE. ESTIMATE IS THAT COMMANDER, COLONEL KHANG, WILL OPT FOR THE GENERALS.

E. WE MUST ASSUME BULK OF REMAINING ARVN FORCES ARE UNDER EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF GENERAL LA. HIS TROOPS ARE NUMEROUS BUT LACK COHENSION, BEING PRIMARILY INDEPENDENT COMPANIES AND LIGHTLY ARMED. THEY ARE CERTAINLY NOT SHOCK TROOPS. IN A SHOWDOWN, LA WOULD NOT NECESSARILY TAKE ORDERS FROM DINH.

F. IN GENERAL, ABOVE REMARKS APPLY EQUALLY TO AIR AND NAVAL ELEMENTS IN SAIGON AREA. THEY ARE NOT ORGANIZED OR EQUIPPED FOR GROUND COMBAT AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS THEREFORE LIMITED. NEITHER IS LIKELY TO ACT AS A COHESIVE ENTITY.

GP-1

PLH

LODGE

NOTE: PASSED WHITE HOUSE-CIA-OSD WITH SPECIAL CAPTIONS 8/28/63
(#) OMISSION. CORRECTION TO FOLLOW.

* AS RECEIVED.

~~TOP SECRET~~

INCOMING TELEGRAM

Department of State

PERMANENT RECORD COPY

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Action

Control: 22834

SS

Rec'd: AUGUST 28, 1963

7:36 AM

Info

FROM: SAIGON

TO: Secretary of State

NO: 364, AUGUST 28, 6 PM (SECTION TWO OF TWO)

KENNEDY

June

1964

EMERGENCY

ACTION DEPARTMENT 364, INFORMATION CINCPAC OPERATIONAL IMMEDIATE 234.

DEPARTMENT EYES ONLY FOR SECRETARY

CINCPAC EXCLUSIVE FOR FELT

G. IMPLICIT IN FOREGOING IS THEME THAT WHILE DINH IS COMMANDER, HIS CONTROL OF THE HETEROGENEOUS FORCES ASSIGNED IS FAR FROM ASSURED. HIS MAJOR SUBORDINATES MAY FOLLOW HIS BIDDING, BUT THEY ALSO PRESERVE FREEDOM OF ACTION TO NON-COMPLY OR EVEN ACT IN DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED MANNER. SHOULD DINH BE REMOVED OR NEUTRALIZED, HIS DEPUTY (COLONEL CO), IS COMPETENT TO CARRY ON AND WOULD, UNQUESTIONABLY, SIDE WITH THE GENERALS.

H. SHOULD THE INITIAL MOVES RESULT IN STALEMATE, THE ISSUE MAY TURN ON RELATIVE ABILITY TO REINFORCE. OUR ESTIMATE IS THAT TIME AS WELL AS FORCE WILL WORK TO ADVANTAGE OF INSURGENTS AND FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

(1) THE MOST IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE TROOPS ARE THE 2 ABN BNS AND UNITS OF THE III CORPS. BALANCE HERE MIGHT NOT BE IN FAVOR OF GENERALS.

(2) FIRST REINFORCEMENT FROM IV CORPS WOULD BE 47TH REGT FROM LONG AN PROVINCE, BORDERING THE SAIGON AREA ON THE SOUTH. NEWLY ARRIVED FROM II CORPS, IT WOULD BE RESPONSIVE TO KHANH RATHER THAN CAO-- AND LATTER COULD NOT STOP ITS MOVEMENT TO /CAPITAL.

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NAME OF OFFICER	DATE OF ACTION	
OFFICE SYMBOL		

~~TOP SECRET~~

-2- 364, AUGUST 28, 6 PM (SECTION TWO OF TWO) FROM SAIGON
CAPITAL.

(3) MOST READILY DEPLOYABLE MAJOR UNIT IN NORTH IS KHANH'S
9TH DIVISIONS. IF TAN SON NHUT AND/OR BIEN HOA OPEN, 3-4 BNS
COULD BE SHIFTED SAIGON DAILY VIA C-123'S.

(4) OVER THE LONG RUN, THE COUP GROUP HAS MORE FORCE AT
HIS DISPOSAL THAN DO DINH, CAO, TUNG.

AND MOST OF ALL, THEIR THINKING REFLECTS THE SENTIMENTS OF THE
MAJORITY OF THE OFFICER CORPS.

4. AS STATED ABOVE, WE BELIEVE BALANCE WOULD TIP IN FAVOR OF
COUP GROUP IN EVENT INITIAL STATEMENT. CHANCES OF THIS WOULD BE
GREATLY ENHANCED IF AT CRITICAL JUNCTURE J.S. PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED THAT
ALL AID THROUGH THE DIEM GOVERNMENT HAD CEASED AND WOULD BE
RESUMED AS SOON AS CONDITIONS WARRANTED. IT WOULD BE SOMEWHAT
BETTER FOR PUBLIC STANDING OF FUTURE GOVERNMENT IF THIS WERE NOT
DONE. HOWEVER, BELIEVE I SHOULD HAVE STANDBY AUTHORITY TO MAKE
DECLARATION TO THIS EFFECT, IMPLYING TERMINATION OF AID TO
PRESENT GVN IF IN MY JUDGMENT IT IS NECESSARY TO SUCCESS COUP.

ANOTHER FACTOR FAVORING COUP FORCES IS STALEMATE WOULD BE
U.S. ASSISTANCE IN TERMS MILITARY ADVICE, COMMUNICATIONS,
TROOP LIFT, ETC.

5. ON BASIS OF WHAT WE NOW KNOW BOTH GENERAL HARKINS AND I FAVOR
OPERATION.

FOLLOWING IS BRIEF MEMO MY CONVERSATION WITH THO THIS MORNING:

BEGIN TEXT. AT CALL ON VICE PRESIDENT THO I BEGAN BY SAYING
HOW HONORED I WAS TO BE IN VIET-NAM AND BEGAN A VERY CON-
VENTIONAL CONVERSATION ABOUT HIS HOME IN THE DELTA, THE U.N.,
AND THE POSSIBILITY OF VIET-NAM SOMEDAY HAVING A FAVORABLE TRADE
BALANCE. ALL OF A SUDDEN HE STOPPED AND HIS WHOLE TONE OF
VOICE CHANGED AND HE SAID: "IT CAN'T GO ON IN THIS WAY.
WE ABSOLUTELY MUST GET OUT OF THE STATE WE ARE IN. EMOTIONS
ARE RISING SO HIGH THAT IT IS VERY DANGEROUS. RELATIONS BETWEEN
THE U.S. AND VIET-NAM ARE BECOMING QUESTION OF INTERNAL POLITICS
BOTH HERE AND IN YOUR COUNTRY. YOU HAVE A VERY GREAT
RESPONSIBILITY

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

-3- 364, AUGUST 28, 6 PM (SECTION TWO OF TWO) FROM SAIGON

RESPONSIBILITY AS AMBASSADOR. PEOPLE EXPECT MUCH FROM YOU.
I DON'T KNOW HOW TO DO IT BUT IT ABSOLUTELY MUST BE DONE."
END TEXT

REPORT OF FURTHER MEETING WITH KHIEM FOLLOWS VIA CAS CHANNELS.

GP-1

LODGE

REE

NOTE: PASSED WHITE HOUSE, OSD, CIA 8:30 AM 8/28/63

~~TOP SECRET~~

OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

171995j

INDICATE: ☐ collect
☐ CHARGE TO

TDP SECRET

Classification

EYES ONLY RECORDED FOR MEDICAL LIBRARY

Origin

ACTION: Amembassy-SAIGON - EMERGENCY
TOP SECRET EYES ONLY FOR AMBASSADOR AND GEN. HARKINS

June 1964

Info

Info: Cincpac Polad-Exclusive for Admiral Felt

1. Your 364 reviewed this morning at highest levels and is most helpful. We note that you continue to favor the operation; we also assume your concurrence in conclusion of CAS Saigon 0363, which we share, that if this operation starts it must succeed. But it remains unclear to us that balance of forces in Saigon yet gives necessary high confidence of success, and we need daily assessment from you on this critical point. In particular, we share your view that Big Minh's position and views are important and we await report of his conversation.

2. More broadly, we are assuming that whatever cover you and we maintain, prestige of U.S. will necessarily be engaged in success or failure of this effort. Thus we ask for your ~~present~~ present estimate of latest point at which operation could be suspended and what would be consequences of such suspension. We continue to believe Nhus must go and coup will be needed, but we do not repeat not which to bind you against your better judgment at any stage. Conversely, while we

Drafted by:

Telegraphic transmission and

Text Received from White House

classification approved by: S/S - JAMcKesson

Clearances:

The Secretary

FE - RHilsman

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Classification

FORM DS-322

DECLASSIFIED

Authority JFK #177-10001-10458

By NARA Date 2-26-98

TOP SECRET
Classification

Generals' ~~operation~~ assume ~~operation~~ still subject to ~~any~~ delay or cancellation, if you believe the is cast, we need to know it.

3. In addition to recommendation in your 364, which we are still considering, what other actions do you recommend to ~~xxxx~~ increase prospects of success? Specifically, do you think we should

(a) add discreet diplomatic and military endorsement to approach made by CAS to generals, especially to emphasize official view of the USG that Nhus should be replaced, but without direct comment on coup planning?

(b) through General Harkins and other military officers discreetly hint to General Dinh, Colonel Vien and other military leaders who are potential fence-sitters that US opposed to continuation of Nhus?

(c) add financial inducements as ~~appropriate~~ appropriate in affecting all individual decisions of uncertain key figures?

(d) undertake and ~~discrete~~ discreetly publicize movements of US forces in Pacific toward South Vietnam, in addition to present E and E contingency deployments?

(e) indicate our concern ^{by} ~~is~~ beginning evacuation of appropriate US dependent personnel?

TOP SECRET

Classification

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Classification

4. We have concurred until now in your belief that nothing should be said to Diem, but changing circumstances, including his probable knowledge that something is afoot, lead us to ask again if you see value in one last man-to-man effort to persuade him to govern himself and decisively to eliminate political influence of Nhus. All evidence indicates to us that removal of Nhus is center of problem.

5. We understand that what we have told Generals is that they will have to proceed at their own risk and will not be ^{bailed} ~~jumped~~ out by us. While this is sound initial approach, we must surely be ready to play every effective card at decisive moments. Therefore request your report of ~~and~~ additional actions you and Harkins expect to take or recommend after coup begins to insure its success.

6. We shall be meeting tomorrow here at noon, our time, with President, and count on having your report by then to keep Washington in fullest coordination with you and Harkins.

~~EXLXX~~
GP 1

END

RUSK

TOP SECRET

Classification

OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

INDICATE: ☐ COLLECT
☐ CHARGE TO

~~TOP SECRET~~

Classification

17200
5K

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Origin

ACTION: Amembassy, SAIGON - EMERGENCY

Info:

EYES ONLY FOR THE AMBASSADOR FROM THE PRESIDENT

You are getting separately a longer message
(Deptel 268) which reflects ~~interdepartmental~~ meeting
with me this morning. In this personal message I want to
emphasize again that I wish to have your independent judgment
and also that of General Harkins at every stage. The basic
policies set forth in DEPTELS 243 and 256 represent my best
current judgment, but this judgment in turn is heavily
dependent on your on-the-spot advice, and I trust you will
not hesitate to recommend delay or change in plans if at
any time you think it wise.

Messages from Harkins to Joint Chiefs give some impression
of uncertainty on his part as to presently planned timing
of action by Generals, so I am asking through General Taylor
for a direct message from Harkins to me as Commander-in-Chief,
giving his personal assessment of the total situation and his
best advice as to present and future courses. You will

Drafted by:

Text Received from the
White House

Telegraphic transmission and

classification approved by: JAMcKesson - SS

Clearances:

The Secretary
FE-RHilsman

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Classification

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FORM DS-322

Authority JF 4177-10011-10459

By: hw NARA Date: 2-26-98

~~TOP SECRET~~

Classification

get a copy of Taylor's message, and you should explain to Harkins that I have high confidence in his judgment. While naturally there are differences of emphasis among the many officials concerned here in Washington, ~~WHICH~~ Washington will act as a ~~XXXX~~ unit under my direction, and that unit has respect for what Harkins has accomplished and for his candid judgment at every stage.

In all this, I continue to think of you as my personal representative and repose greatest confidence ~~inly~~ in you.

~~XXXX~~ GP-1

END

RHSK

~~TOP SECRET~~

Classification

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W

~~TOP SECRET~~

Action

Control: 24015

SS

Rec'd: AUGUST 29, 1963

Info

7:03 AM

FROM: SAIGON

TO: Secretary of State

NO: 375, AUGUST 29, 6 PM

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EMERGENCY

ACTION DEPARTMENT 375, INFORMATION OPERATIONAL IMMEDIATE
CINCPAC 242.

EYES ONLY

DECLASSIFIED

Authority FE 477-10001-10460

CINCPAC EXCLUSIVE FOR FELT

By ju, NARA. Date 2-26-98

1. 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 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:

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OFFICE SYMBOL		

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-2- 375, AUGUST 29, 6 PM; FROM SAIGON

(A) THAT GENERAL HARKINS REPEAT TO GENERALS PERSONALLY MESSAGES PREVIOUSLY TRANSMITTED BY CAS OFFICERS. THIS SHOULD ESTABLISH THEIR AUTHENTICITY. (GENERAL HARKINS SHOULD HAVE ORDER FROM PRESIDENT ON THIS.)

(B) IF NEVERTHELESS GENERALS INSIST ON PUBLIC STATEMENT THAT ALL U.S. AID TO VIETNAM 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.)

4. VIETNAMESE 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 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 VIETNAMESE 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 US A LARGE RESPONSIBILITY WHICH WE CANNOT AVOID.

6. I REALIZE THAT THIS COURSE INVOLVES A VERY SUBSTANTIAL RISK OF LOSING VIETNAM. IT ALSO INVOLVES SOME ADDITIONAL RISK TO AMERICAN LIVES. I WOULD NEVER PROPOSE IT IF I FELT THERE WAS A REASONABLE CHANCE OF HOLDING VIETNAM WITH DIEM.

7. IN RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS (C) IN DEPTTEL 268, I WOULD NOT HESITATE TO USE FINANCIAL INDUCEMENTS (I SAW A USEFUL

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

-3- 375, AUGUST 29, 6 PM; FROM SAIGON

OPPORTUNITY.

AS TO (D) I FAVOR SUCH MOVES, PROVIDED IT IS MADE CLEAR THEY ARE NOT REPEAT NOT CONNECTED WITH EVACUATION AMERICANS. AS FOR (E); I FEAR EVACUATION OF U.S. PERSONNEL NOW WOULD ALARM THE GENERALS AND DEMORALIZE THE PEOPLE.

8. IN RESPONSE TO YOUR PARA 4, GENERAL 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 PARAGRAPH 8 ABOVE GENERAL HARKINS CONCURS IN THIS TELEGRAM.

GP-1.

LODGE

JTC

NOTE: ADVANCE DELIVERY TO S/S-0 AT 7:15 AM, AUGUST 29.

NOTE: PASSED WHITE HOUSE, OSD, CIA WITH SPECIAL CAPTIONS 8/29/63.

~~TOP SECRET~~

OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

INDICATE: ☐ COLLECT
☐ CHARGE TO

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~~TOP SECRET - EYES ONLY~~

Classification

Origin

Info

ACTION: Amembassy SAIGON EMERGENCY #72
TOP SECRET EYES ONLY FOR AMBASSADOR LODGE & GENERAL HARKINS--
INFO: CINCPAC POLAD--Exclusive for Admiral Felt

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

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2. In response to your recommendation, General Harkins is hereby authorized to repeat to such Generals as you indicate the messages ~~press~~ 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 concerns and asks your comment.

EYES ONLY

Drafted by:

Text Received from White House

Telegraphic transmission and

classification approved by:

S/S - JAMcKesson

Clearances:

The Secretary
FE - RHilsman

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FORM DS-322

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Authority House print DOD study V.12 p.538
By MEE, NARS, Date 6/25/76

~~TOP SECRET~~

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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~~ 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 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.

GP-1.

END

RUSK

~~TOP SECRET~~

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INDICATE: ☐ COLLECT
☐ CHARGE TO

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Classification

RECEIVED
JUN 29 1963
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Origin

ACTION: Amembassy SAIGON EMERGENCY 279

Info:

INFO: CINCPAC POLAD -- Exclusive for Admiral Felt

EYES ONLY FOR THE AMBASSADOR FROM THE SECRETARY

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 Viet-Nam, 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 Counselor and Madame Nhu.

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Authority Houseprint DDD Study V.13 P.539
By MFE, NARS, Date 6/25/76

Drafted by:

S:DRusk:fr/mk 8/29/63

Telegraphic transmission and
classification approved by:

FE - Roger Hilsman

Clearances:

S/S - Mr. McKesson White House

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Classification

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 conversations 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 Viet-Nam. 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 Viet-Nam 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

~~TOP SECRET~~
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protect succeeding Viet-Nam 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 instructions on other matters through other messages. Good luck.

GP-1.

End.

RUSK

~~TOP SECRET~~

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50

Action

Control: 25260
Rec'd: AUGUST 30, 1963
7:38 AM

SS

Info

FROM: SAIGON

TO: Secretary of State

NO: 383, AUGUST 30, 6 PM

DECLASSIFIED

Authority JEL 4177-10001-10461

By *fw* NARA, Date 3-4-98

EMERGENCY

ACTION DEPARTMENT 383, INFORMATION OPERATIONAL IMMEDIATE
CINCPAC 244.

EYES ONLY FOR THE SECRETARY

CINCPAC POLAD EXCLUSIVE FOR ADMIRAL FELT

DEPTEL 279.

1. I AGREE THAT GETTING THE NHUS OUT IS THE PRIME OBJECTIVE AND THAT THEY ARE "THE GREATER PART OF THE PROBLEM IN VIETNAM, INTERNALLY, INTERNATIONALLY AND FOR AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION."
2. THIS SURELY CANNOT BE DONE BY WORKING THROUGH DIEM. IN FACT DIEM WILL OPPOSE IT. HE WISHES HE HAD MORE NHUS, NOT LESS.
3. THE BEST CHANCE OF DOING IT IS BY THE GENERALS TAKING OVER THE GOVERNMENT LOCK, STOCK AND BARREL.
4. 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 DONT WANT HIM.
5. 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

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8 OFFICE SYMBOL			

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-2- 383, AUGUST 30, 6 PM; FROM SAIGON

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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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 WE WILL NEVER HAVE TO USE IT.

9. IT IS POSSIBLE, AS YOU SUGGESTED IN YOUR PENULTIMATE PARAGRAPH, 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.

10. 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.

11. IT IS BETTER FOR THEM AND FOR US FOR THEM TO THROW OUT THE NHUS THAN FOR US TO GET INVOLVED IN IT.

12. I AM SURE THAT THE BEST WAY TO HANDLE THIS MATTER IS BY A TRULY VIETNAMESE MOVEMENT EVEN IF IT PUTS ME RATHER IN THE POSITION OF PUSHING A PIECE OF SPAGHETTI.

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

-3- 383, AUGUST 30, 6 PM; FROM SAIGON

13. I AM CONTEMPLATING NO FURTHER TALKS WITH DIEM AT THIS TIME.

GR-1.

LODGE

JTC

NOTE: ADVANCE DELIVERY TO S/S-O AT 8:06 AM, AUGUST 30.

RELAYED TO WHITE HOUSE, OSD, CIA WITH SPECIAL CAPTIONS.

~~TOP SECRET~~

OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

Sp

10000

INDICATE: ☐ COLLECT
☐ CHARGE TO

~~TOP SECRET~~

Classification

Origin

ACTION: Amembassy SAIGON EMERGENCY 284

Info

INFO: CINCPAC POLAD -- Exclusive for Admiral Felt

EYES ONLY FOR AMBASSADOR

MICROFILMED

KENNEDY

Following is report to you on today's meeting which reviewed your 383 and other messages.

Discussion focused on "inertia" mentioned your para 5. Generals so far appear have no plan and little momentum. Further, bits and pieces of information here suggest that Diem and Nhu are moving to normalize situation and head off possibilities of being upset. Prospect of changing government by strong and concerted Vietnamese elements seem very thin on basis of any hard information we have. This raises possibility that Nhu will try to ease internal and international pressures and perhaps bring about quiet liquidation of potential opposition. Possibility therefore increasingly is that if there is to be a change, it can only be brought about by American rather than Vietnamese effort. Obviously, an abortive effort inspired by or attributed to the United States will be disastrous. Central question therefore comes to be how much reality there is in attitude expressed by generals with whom contacts have been made and their capabilities

Drafted by:

S DRusk:ma 8/30/63

Telegraphic transmission and classification approved by:

The Secretary

Clearances:

FE - Mr. Hilsman

JCS - General Krul

Mr. Forrestal

SS - Mr. Rowe
RX

~~TOP SECRET~~

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FORM 5-61 DS-322

DECLASSIFIED

Classification

Authority JFL 177-10001-10462

Rv RW NARA Date 2-26-98

~~TOP SECRET~~

Classification

and determination with respect to what has been said thus far. The distinction between what is desirable and what is possible is one which we may have to face in the next few days. This telegram changes none of your instructions but expresses our uneasiness at the absence of bone and muscle as seen from here. Can assure you that highest levels in Washington are giving this problem almost full-time attention.

GP-1

END

RUSK

~~TOP SECRET~~

Classification

INCOMING TELEGRAM

Department of State

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W.

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Action

SS

Info

EYES ONLY

Control: 26461
Rec'd: AUGUST 31, 1963
7:16 AM

59

FROM: SAIGON

TO: Secretary of State

NO: 391, AUGUST 31, 6 PM

DECLASSIFIED

Authority JFK #177-10001-10463

By ju NARA, Date 3-4-98

OPERATIONAL IMMEDIATE

ACTION DEPARTMENT 391, INFORMATION CINCPAC OPERATIONAL IMMEDIATE
253

EYES ONLY FOR SECRETARY

CINCPAC POLAD EXCLUSIVE FOR ADMIRAL FELT

DEPTEL 284

1. YOU WILL HAVE SEEN HARKINS' REPORT WHICH MAKES IT CLEAR THAT THERE IS NEITHER THE WILL NOR THE ORGANIZATION AMONG THE GENERALS TO ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING. (IT IS CONCEIVABLE BUT ONLY CONCEIVABLE THAT FURTHER TALK BETWEEN BIG MINH AND HARKINS WILL ALTER THIS ESTIMATE.)

THIS MARKS THE END OF ONE WEEK WHICH BEGAN WITH YOUR INSTRUCTIONS OF LAST SUNDAY. WE USED EVERY ASSET THAT WE HAD INCLUDING GENERAL HARKINS. OUR RECORD HAS BEEN THOROUGHLY RESPECTABLE THROUGHOUT AND WE HAVE SHOWN OUR WILLINGNESS TO PUT OURSELVES ON THE LINE.

2. AT SOME UNDETERMINATE DATE IN THE FUTURE SOME OTHER GROUP WITH THE NECESSARY STRENGTH AND LUST FOR OFFICE COMES FORWARD, WE CAN CONTEMPLATE ANOTHER EFFORT.

3. I BELIEVE THE GOVERNMENT SUSPECTS US OF TRYING TO ENGINEER A COUP. THIS BELIEF PLUS THE FACT THAT I HAVE BEEN STRICTLY CORRECT AND HAVE NOT IN ANY WAY SOUGHT TO FLATTER OR CAJOLE

• This copy must be returned to RM/R central files with no reproduction from this copy is

ACTION	ACTION
ASSIGNED TO	TAKEN
NAME OF OFFICER	DATE OF ACTION
Q OFFICE SYMBOL	DIRECTIONS TO RM/R

~~TOP SECRET~~

-2- 391, AUGUST 31, 6 PM FROM SAIGON

THEM HAVE PUT THEM IN AN APPREHENSIVE STATE OF MIND. THEY ALSO BELIEVE I COULD SAY SOMETHING WHICH WOULD HELP THEM WITH U.S. PUBLIC OPINION IF THEY DID SOMETHING TO JUSTIFY IT. FINALLY THEY EXPECT ME TO MAKE A REPORT TO WASHINGTON.

4. PERHAPS AN ARRANGEMENT COULD BE WORKED OUT WHEREBY THE FOLLOWING COULD BE MADE TO HAPPEN: MADAME NHU TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY, MR. NHU'S FUNCTIONS TO BE LIMITED ENTIRELY TO STRATEGIC HAMLETS, THE OFFICE OF PRIME MINISTER TO BE CREATED AND MR. THUAN TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER; ARCHBISHOP THUC TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY. IN ADDITION THE STUDENTS AND BUDDHISTS WOULD BE LIBERATED; DECREE LAW 10 WOULD BE REPEALED; THE PAGODAS WOULD BE REPAIRED AND CONCILIATORY GESTURES WOULD BE MADE. ALL OF THIS, IF AGREED TO MIGHT BE ANNOUNCED BY PRESIDENT IN WASHINGTON. I THINK THERE IS A DEPENDABLE PERSON OF HIGHEST QUALITY AND PRESTIGE WHO WOULD BE THE GO-BETWEEN. I WOULD NOT TALK OF THIS TO NHU OR DIEM WITHOUT FURTHER CLEARANCE WITH YOU.

5. I THINK THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WAS RIGHT TO INSTRUCT ME AS IT DID LAST SUNDAY NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF THE STATE OF OPINION IN AMERICA AND FREE WORLD BUT BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT OF VIET-NAM HAVE ACTED BOTH AS LIARS AND CRIMINALS. BUT NOW THE ONLY ATTEMPT TO CHANGE THE GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD SUCCEED WOULD BE ONE WHICH THE U.S. COULD MOUNT ITSELF AND, OF COURSE, THAT IS OUT OF THE QUESTION.

6. TO TAKE UP A DIFFERENT BUT RELATED MATTER, I AM VERY RELIABLY INFORMED THAT FRENCH AMBASSADOR LALOUETTE WAS WITH NHU FOR FOUR HOURS ON AUGUST 20 WHEN THE ATTACK IN THE PAGODAS TOOK PLACE. I AM ALSO ADVISED BY A DEPENDABLE SOURCE THAT HE WANTS THE U.S. GOVERNMENT OUT OF VIET-NAM SO THAT THE FRENCH CAN BECOME THE INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN SOUTH AND NORTH VIET-NAM. ON FRIDAY (THE DAY ON WHICH I HAD MY TALK WITH LALOUETTE) HE GAVE A LUNCH AT WHICH WERE PRESENT THE PAPAL DELEGATE AND THE ITALIAN AND AUSTRILIAN AMBASSADORS. AFTER THE AUSTRALIAN HAD GONE LALOUETTE SAID: "WE MUST SAVE THE FAMILY", AS THOUGH THE FAMILY WERE THE FIRST CONSIDERATION.

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

-3- 391, AUGUST 31, 6 PM FROM SAIGON

7. I HAVE GOOD REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE HOLY SEE WOULD BE WILLING TO INTERVENE WITH GENERAL DE GAULLE. I UNDERSTAND THAT THE PAPAL DELEGATE TOLD DIEM THAT HE HAD BETRAYED HIS CHURCH AND HIS COUNTRY. I AM RELIABLY ADVISED THAT NHU IS IN A HIGHLY VOLATILE STATE OF MIND AND THAT SOME SORT OF GESTURE THROUGH NHU TO NORTH VIETNAM IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE.

8. AS ONE MORE PERSUASIVE FACTOR IN OUR DEALINGS WITH GVN WOULD IT BE POSSIBLE FOR HOUSE OR HOUSE COMMITTEE TO CUT OUT APPROPRIATION FOR FOREIGN AID FOR VIET-NAM? GIVING ME CHANCE TO GET GVN TO AGREE TO OUR POINTS ON THE GROUND THAT THIS WOULD FACILITATE RESTORATION OF THE ITEM. I AM TOO FAR AWAY TO KNOW WHETHER OR NOT THIS WOULD BE PRACTICAL POLITICS. BUT HERE IT COULD HAVE CERTAIN ADVANTAGES.

GP1.

LODGE

DMB

NOTE: ADVANCE DELIVERY TO S/S-0 AT 7:49 AM AUGUST 31

NOTE: RELAYED WHITE HOUSE, OSD, CIA WITH SPECIAL CAPTIONS
8-31-63.

~~TOP SECRET~~

OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

INDICATE: ☐ COLLECT
☐ CHARGE TO

~~TOP SECRET~~ -- EYES ONLY

Classification

Origin

Info:

ACTION: Amembassy SAIGON EMERGENCY 294
INFO: CINCPAC POLAD - Exclusive for Admiral Felt
EYES ONLY FOR AMBASSADOR LODGE

Re your 391, agree your conclusion favoring direct effort on GVN. US cannot abandon Viet-Nam and while it will support Vietnamese effort to change government that has good prospects success US should not and would not mount and operate one. To use your metaphor, when the spaghetti was pushed, it curled; now we must try pull it. In the meantime, our primary objective remains winning war and we concur your suggestion that we should now reopen communications with Diem. Decision on exact course awaits your recommendations and consideration by highest authority. What follows is thinking of interdepartmental meeting chaired by Secretary today.

As to general posture, it seems desirable to maintain both publicly and in our private talks with GVN the leverage of US discontent with repression which has eroded war effort within Viet-Nam as well as support of Congress, US public, and world. ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ Impression should be, both privately and publicly, that US engaged in candid and critical discussion to improve government not overthrow it. Decision on changing government is Vietnamese affair.

Drafted by:

FE:RHillsman:mm 8-31-63

Telegraphic transmission and classification approved by:

FE - Roger Hillsman

Clearances:

The Secretary (draft)
S/S-O- Mr. Parker

S/S - Mr. Rowe
White House - Mr. Forrestal

~~TOP SECRET~~ -- EYES ONLY

Classification

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FORM DS-322

DECLASSIFIED

Authority: JFK #177-10001-10464

By: *fw*, NARA, Date: 4-20-98

~~TOP SECRET~~ -- EYES ONLYClassification

In your talk with Diem, our thought is you should first stress common interest in defeating Viet Cong. Then in frank but tough line point out that daily juxtaposition of continuing American casualties and massive US aid with repressive measures contrary deepest American convictions will make it difficult for Executive and Congress to continue support. Common problem for US and GVN in general and you and Diem in particular is to work out set of GVN policies and actions that will make possible continued US support. But time is rather short. President Kennedy may well be obliged at next press conference to express US disapproval of repressive measures. Should we find it impossible to reach an agreement with GVN on a program to undo the damage caused by recent GVN actions, then suspension of aid might soon be forced upon us.

Specific policies and actions should be designed to develop political support within Viet-Nam necessary to win the war and also to restore damaged image abroad. Our feeling is that your list of specifics should begin with blunt warning, if required, not to arrest Generals who are so badly needed in war effort, and with strong demand Madame Nhu leave country on extended holiday. (Question of future role of Nhu could be left to later discussions.)

In the intermediate discussion the most important is relations

~~TOP SECRET~~ -- EYES ONLYClassification

~~TOP SECRET~~
Classification

with the Buddhists. Our feeling is that you should frankly say that negotiations with puppet bonzes will not accomplish purpose. We recognize that the other side of this coin is that we must assure Diem that we will make every effort to persuade the Buddhist leaders to ~~xxx~~ throw themselves fully into the common effort for the independence and security of South Viet-Nam.

Other points might be:

1. Repeal of Decree 10 by immediate executive action or by special session of the National Assembly.
2. Restoration of damaged pagodas.
3. Release of students and reopening of closed universities.
- ~~XX~~
4. ~~X~~ X. Removal of press censorship.

At some stage, you will wish to talk about future relationships between

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American advisers et al and free scope to them in helping to carry on the war effort at all appropriate governmental levels. (In this respect we fully agree with Harkins' decision to refrain from giving assurances in light of statements made to him. He and all military advisers should now concentrate on reestablishing normal relationships at all levels GVN to get on with the war.)

Also would you think it useful if we tried to get Vatican to summon Archbishop Thuc to Rome for lengthy consultations?

If initial discussions go well, at some stage you may want to urge some form of reorganization of government introducing Generals and perhaps other civilian leaders into ministerial posts.

It may be important at a fairly early stage to raise the subject of the GVN improving its relations with its neighbors and especially to avoid interfering with Cambodian ~~xx~~ traffic on the Mekong.

The above is not an instruction but intended only for your comments.

We will appreciate your views on it and on any additional actions we should require of the ~~GVN~~ GVN in order to get on with the task.

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~~TOP SECRET~~

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~~TOP SECRET~~*Classification*

President has reviewed this message and approves it in general. He suggests you should also plan your response to probable Diem claim that all this trouble comes from irresponsible press. He thinks you should say we hold no brief for press but Diem had been playing into their hands. Fact is that actions of GVN have now created a situation which is very difficult indeed for USG. For example, large cut in aid program in House largely due to sense of disillusionment in whole effort in Viet-Nam. ~~XX~~ There are reports that still further cuts may be pressed on same ground, and in such a case USG simply would not have resources to sustain massive present level of support. So we need very quick and substantial response to your demarche. You should add that President will be commenting on situation in SVN in TV interview to be taped Monday a.m. at Hyannis and broadcast Monday evening. While in this interview he will be as restrained as possible, if asked it will be impossible to avoid some expression of concern. This expression, however, will be mild in comparison to what may have to be said soon unless there is major improvement.

GP-1.

End.

RUSK

~~TOP SECRET~~*Classification*

AMERICAN TELEGRAM Department of State

INDICATE: ☐ COLLECT
☐ CHARGE TO

~~TOP SECRET~~ -- EYES ONLY

Classification

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Origin

ACTION: Amembassy SAIGON EMERGENCY 295

Info

INFO: CINCPAC POLAD - Exclusive for Admiral Felt

FOR AMBASSADOR LODGE FROM THE SECRETARY

Re Deptel 294

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It seems to me that we must keep our eye fixed on the main purpose of our presence in South Viet-Nam and everyone on the US side needs to review the bidding on this elementary purpose: why we are there, why are we asking our fellows to be killed and what is getting in the way of accomplishing our purpose. The actions of the GVN and the Nhus have eroded this purpose-- and inside Viet-Nam internationally and they have also eroded our capacity to provide political leadership in the US necessary to support the effort in Viet-Nam. To raise these questions is not merely an emotional reaction to two individuals. They involve the fundamental requirement of political leadership in Viet-Nam which is necessary to coalesce the Vietnamese people in a war effort which we can support. Diem must realize that his obligation of political leadership runs to the solidarity of his people which may require conciliatory actions which are distasteful to him personally. He must make a systematic effort

OK/2

Drafted by:

S:DRusk:mm 8-31-63

Telegraphic transmission and classification approved by:

FE - Roger Hillman

Clearance:

S/S-Mr. Rowe

White House -

~~TOP SECRET~~ -- EYES ONLY

Classification

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FORM 8-61 DS-322

DECLASSIFIED

Authority JF 177-10001-10465

By XN, NARA, Date 4-20-98

~~TOP SECRET~~ -- EYES ONLY

Classification

to improve his international position, and a demonstration to the American people that we are not asking Americans to be killed to support Madame Nhu's desire to barbecue bonzes.

GP-1.

END

RUSK

~~TOP SECRET~~ -- EYES ONLY

Classification

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TAG B

~~SECRET~~

5u

23 October 1963

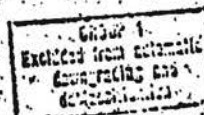
SUBJECT: Sequence of CAS Contacts with Vietnamese Generals,
23 August through 23 October 1963

- 23 August CAS officer meets with General Tran Van Don, Acting Chief of Staff, Vietnamese Armed Forces. General Don states Generals had participated in decision to impose martial law. Don implies further developments of which the imposition of martial law is the first step but refuses to reveal succeeding steps. Don discusses alternatives to Diem but rejects present political exiles as feasible alternative.
- 25 August Brigadier General Nguyen Khanh, Commanding General II Corps, contacts CAS officer in Saigon. General Khanh states generals fear Ngo family thinking of accommodation with DRV, and if this proves true generals will act. General Khanh requests statement of U. S. position.
- 26 August Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins propose that CAS convey word of new U. S. position to generals. As first step, General Tran Tuyen Khiam, Chief of Staff, Joint General Staff and General Nguyen Khanh chosen for contact. Following nine points are decided as basis for approach to generals:
- Solicitation of further elaboration of action aspects of present thinking and planning. What should be done?
 - Agreement Khan's must go.
 - Question of retaining Diem or not left up to generals.
 - Boncos and other arrestees must be released immediately and five-point agreement of 16 June be fully carried out.
 - U. S. cannot be of any help during initial action of assuming power of the state. Entirely their own action, win or lose. Don't expect to be bailed out.
 - U. S. will provide direct support during any interim period of breakdown central government mechanism.

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Authority JFL Act / NW 53244
By CTS NARA, Date 2/9/18

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- g. If Nhu's do not go and if Buddhist 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 Vietnamese and Americans which will allow for progress of country and successful prosecution of the war.

26 August General Khiem contacted and acquainted with above points. Khiem states that generals are in accord with these points and that CAS officer should discuss them with General Duong Van Minh, Military Advisor to President. General Khiem occurs in similar contact with General Khanh by CAS officer.

26 August General Khanh contacted at Pleiku. Khanh states he not yet ready to move but awaiting indications Nam preparing rapprochement with DRV. Requests protection for families of Generals in the event decision for action.

27 August General Khiem again contacted and states that the question of a military coup had been discussed by a committee of generals headed by General "Big" Minh and they are agreed a coup will occur within one week. General Khiem receives assurance that all possible steps will be taken to assist the families of generals in the event of failure of the coup.

28 August General Khiem during brief contact with CAS officer makes arrangements for meeting between CAS officers and General "Big" Minh on 29 August.

29 August Generals "Big" Minh and Khiem contacted by CAS officers. General Minh asked for token of U. S. determination to support coup group and stated that token should be a severance of economic aid in order to force Nhu's hand. No specific response was given to his request for a cut in economic aid.

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- 23 August Major General Tan Van Kim and oppositionist Dai Viet politician Dai Dien seek out Mr. Rufus Phillips, USOM, and request specific verification that meeting between General Minh and CAS officers had Ambassador Lodge's approval. Mr. Phillips discusses this with the Ambassador and is told to inform General Kim that approach was bona fide and had Ambassador's complete blessing. This assurance passed to General Kim later on 25 August.
- 25 August British MI-6 station chief in Saigon informs CAS officer of report that Diem government will begin arrest of generals within twenty-four hours. General Kim contacted at his home by CAS officer and asked to pass on warning to General "Big" Minh. General Kim agrees to do this.
- 31 August General Eardley meets with General Khiem. General Khiem states ARVN generals were not ready as they did not have enough forces under their control.
- 31 August Mr. Phillips meets General Kim who takes same line.
- 4 September Contact with General Tan That Dinh at his initiative. General Dinh in highly agitated state made vague threats against anyone attempting to encroach upon his powers. No specific points raised by Dinh. Over-all impression from meeting was Dinh highly emotional with grandiose estimate of his own influence.
- 16 September General Khiem requested a meeting at which he stated that the generals still had a plan and that they were growing more and more concerned over the possibility of a reconciliation between North and South Vietnam sponsored by Ngo Dinh Nhu. The general told of requests made to President Diem for the Cabinet posts of Defense, Interior, psychological Warfare and Education: the generals having asked for these to be assigned to military men.
- 26 September Meeting with General Khiem at his request. He stated that General "Big" Minh had directed that meetings be held in order to keep contacts open with American community. He stated no coup would be mounted until Diem's answer to Cabinet posts demands mentioned 14 September had been

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received. General Kham cited growing Viet Cong strength, stated he felt that would force Diem to accede to generals' demands for Cabinet posts.

2 October Accidental meeting with General Don who said he had been trying to establish contact for some time. Requested meeting later that day at Nha Trang.

3 October Meeting with General Don which had been cleared with DCM Truchaut. General Don stated "Big" Minh wanted a 5 October meeting. Added that generals had a specific plan.

5 October Meeting with General "Big" Minh which had been approved by the Ambassador. (CAS was instructed to elicit information, to be non-committal re coup plans and not to speculate on U.S. policy.) General Minh requested U.S. position on a coup, asking assurances such a plan would not be thwarted. He outlined three possible plans for a coup which were

- a. Assassination of Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can, retaining President Diem
- b. Encirclement of Saigon by military units
- c. Direct confrontation between military units in Saigon

CAS officer non-committal in his replies to Minh's request for assurances. Minh indicated his understanding of this. Stated he would contact CAS for subsequent meeting.

8 October In course of routine liaison contact, CAS met with General Kham. His impression was that Kham was getting cold feet, wanting to take by-stander role if any coup attempts still being planned.

10 October CAS officer contacted by Vietnamese citizen who had been previously agreed upon as a message passer. General Don had made this suggestion as a way of establishing an alternate means of communication between himself and

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CAS officers. The message was that on the night of 18 October at a reception given by General Harkin for Ambassador Lodge, either General Don or General Minh would approach the Ambassador and ask if CAS officer (Colonel Conain) spoke with authority. The Ambassador was informed and agreed to answer this question affirmatively. (At 18 October reception both Generals Don and Minh were present; no mention was made of Colonel Conain.)

23 October

Meeting with General Don at his initiative. General Don upset by recent meeting with General Harkin at which the latter had asked General Don to stop the coup plotting of one of his subordinate colonels. General Don demanded to know the answer to his previous questions with respect to U. S. attitude toward a coup. CAS officer replied, speaking on instruction that U. S. would not thwart a change of government or deny support to a new regime if it appeared capable of increasing effectiveness of military effort, assuring popular support to win the war, and improving working relationships with U. S. CAS officer asked General Don to produce proof that the generals' coup committee existed. General Don replied that plans were well advanced and that he would seek permission on 24 October to hand to CAS officers the generals' political organization plan. A meeting is scheduled at 1900 hours, 24 October in order to receive this plan.

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TAR C

H. C. Sandy 5W

'WASHINGTON

DECLASSIFIED

Authority House print DOD study V. 12 p. 574
By MIE, NARS, Date 6/25/76

SUBJECT: Report of McNamara-Taylor Mission to South Vietnam

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

DOWNGRADED AT 12 YEAR INTERVALS
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DOD DIR. 5200.10

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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

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(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 1000 U.S.

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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 potential 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.

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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. aid intentions. We should work with the Diem government but not support it.*

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

* 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.

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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

** Editor's Note: See actual text issued by the White House on 2 October 1963, reflecting changes and modifications in this proposal.

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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 its 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 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.

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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 ^{but} where VC strength once threatened to cut the country in half 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. 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

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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.

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INDICATORS

	June	July	August	September (estimated)	Mo. Ave. Year ago
No. of government initiated:					
Small operations	851	781	733	906	490
Large operations	125	168	166	141	71
Viet Cong Killed	1896	1918	1685	2034	2000
GVN Killed	413	521	410	525	431
GVN Weapons Lost	590	780	720	802	390
VC Weapons Captured	390	375	430	400	450
Viet Cong Military Defectors	420	310	220	519	90
Viet Cong Initiated Incidents of all Types	1310	1380	1375	1675	1650
Viet Cong Attacks	410	410	385	467	410
Estimated Viet Cong Strength					
Hard Core	21000	21000	21000	21000	22000
Irregular	85000	82000	76000	70000	98000

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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

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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. behaviour 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

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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 discern but the business community was optimistic before the present crisis. Rice exports for the current calendar year are projected at approximately \$30 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

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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 its 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

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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 of 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 decision, both in industry and in the limited capital market. Investors 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

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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 expected that the private sector of the economy will react in an inflationary manner.

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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 country-wide 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

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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

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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 enough 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.

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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,

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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.*

* 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 ²¹ to take action against the Diem government.

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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

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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

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conceivably continue to carry the effort forward even if Diem remains in power and political tensions continue, any significant slowing in the 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.

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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

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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.

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(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

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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.

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[Section VIII is TOP SECRET and LIMITED DISTRIBUTION. It is omitted from this edition, which is the same in all other respects.]

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.

3. Move immediately to promote an alternative government.

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

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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.

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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. An immediate move to promote an alternative government.

We believe this course of action should not be undertaken at the present time.

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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

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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

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

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Authority JFK 177-10001-10467

March 14, 1964

By W, NARA. Date 3-4-98

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As I leave Government service and the post of Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, I thought it might be useful for me to set down my thoughts on the persistent and stubborn problem of Southeast Asia, which has plagued us for the past decade.

Although our ability to control the course of events in Southeast Asia is inherently limited, I think the root of our present troubles there--in South Viet-Nam, Laos, Cambodia, and even Thailand--lies primarily in the gnawing doubts of both the Southeast Asians and the Communists as to our ultimate intentions in the region.

Since the fall of Dienbienphu, all Asians have wondered about our determination to fight in Southeast Asia, should fighting become necessary. Given the facts of life in a nuclear world, they are not impressed with the totality of our power even though the strategic balance tips heavily in our favor. Both free and Communist Asians scrutinize our actions and words for signs of U.S. determination to use appropriate force, tailored to the essentially limited political objectives we seek in this part of the world--that is, free and independent nations rather than bastions of anti-communism. But of such determination they seem to feel they have seen few signs. The alacrity with which the Communists fell into line after we introduced troops into Thailand following the fall of Nam Tha illustrates the effectiveness of such moves as well as the fact that the Communists continue to worry that we might well fight if they push us too hard.

It seems to me that these doubts about our ultimate intentions are fundamental and recurrent wherever you look in Southeast Asia. We all say that Sihanouk is misbehaving because he feels that we are

The Secretary,
Department of State.

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losing in South Viet-Nam. But even Sihanouk understands the extent of American power, and what he means by his statement that communism is the wave of the future is most probably that he feels the United States is not prepared to do what is necessary to preserve Southeast Asia as a whole. Generosity, maturity, and restraint have not worked with Sihanouk. But so far it must seem to him that we are acting from weakness, and he might respond quite differently if he thought we were acting from strength.

In Laos, the Communists have pursued a two-track policy. They scratch away at the neutralist and conservative positions with one hand, pausing on each occasion to assess our reaction. With the other hand, they continue to toy with talks about a Government of National Union and implementation of the Geneva Accords. Quite clearly, they are keeping both lines open--ready to go ahead with implementing the Geneva Accords if and when they finally become convinced that we are both able and determined to permit them no other honorable alternative, and ready to nibble our position away completely if we appear indecisive.

The Thais, with infinite patience, are merely waiting. Although their indecision shows occasionally in reminiscences about their past successes in balancing off the rivalries of Great Powers, most Thais are prepared to be stubborn: they will match what they think is vigor with vigor and what they think is indecisiveness with indecisiveness.

The South Vietnamese are equally concerned. DeGaulle, Lippmann, and Mansfield have set the neutralist hares running with self-fulfilling prophecies that dishearten those who wish to fight and encourage coup-plotting among both the true neutralists and the simple opportunists. But what gives these lofty, unrealistic thoughts of a peaceful neutralist Asia their credibility is, again, fundamental doubts about our ultimate intentions.

A corollary to the preceding analysis is that we have so far failed as a Government to mesh fully the many different instrumentalities of foreign policy and thus to obtain full benefit from mutually reinforcing

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actions. This is true throughout Southeast Asia, but especially in South Viet-Nam. It applies to all instrumentalities of foreign policy equally, but it can best be summed up by Clausewitz's dictum that war is politics pursued by other means. We must learn better how to tailor our military might, aid, etc., to political purposes and, most important, to orchestrate military power more neatly with diplomacy and politics.

If we can successfully convince our friends and allies as well as the Communists and those, such as de Gaulle and Sihanouk, who tend to serve the Communists' purposes, that we are determined to take whatever measures are necessary in Southeast Asia to protect those who oppose the Communists and to maintain our power and influence in the area, we will have established an atmosphere in which our problems in Laos, Viet-Nam and Cambodia may be amenable to solution. In such an atmosphere, the Communist side must inevitably be more cautious as it contemplates the possibility that we might escalate hostility to a level unacceptable to them. It is not necessary that they be certain of what we will do; but we must give them reason to assume that we are prepared to go as far as necessary to defeat their plans and achieve our objectives.

I believe, therefore, that we must urgently begin to strengthen our overall military posture in Southeast Asia in ways which will make it clear that we are single-mindedly improving our capability to take whatever military steps may be necessary to halt Communist aggression in the area. Because Thailand, a loyal friend and ally, is the keystone of our position in Southeast Asia, we should begin by introducing substantial U. S. ground and air forces into that country in order (1) to imply clearly that we are prepared to introduce U. S. ground forces into Laos if necessary, and (2) to guarantee that, whatever else happens, Thailand itself will not be left to the mercy of Communist aggression. This step, in which some of our SEATO allies should be willing to join, must be accompanied by a diplomatic offensive designed (1) to reassure our friends as to our determination, and (2) to warn the Communist side that they are indeed playing a "deeply dangerous game."

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I scarcely need add that I do not envisage this U. S. buildup of a military presence in Thailand as susceptible to dismantlement in the short term. No matter what we do, our problems in South-east Asia are not going to vanish overnight and we must be prepared to maintain a strong military posture in the area quite indefinitely. (I believe the Thais will gratefully accept and fully cooperate with such a determined U. S. approach to the mutual threat; as I say, all that really bothers them is doubt as to our intention to remain in the area.)

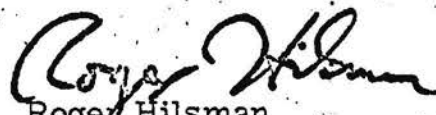
At the same time, we should keep clear in our own minds an important distinction between means and objectives in Southeast Asia. A strong military posture in Thailand is an instrument, not an objective. Its purpose will be served once Thailand and its neighbors have the wherewithal to maintain their own freedom and independence--whether through new collective security arrangements or a gradual receding of the Communist threat.

Meanwhile, the strengthening of our position in Thailand, together with our flat assertions of determination to take whatever steps the situation in the area requires and our clear commitment to a victory in the guerrilla war in South Viet-Nam, would, in my view, make all of the problems we face in the area more susceptible to effective treatment.

By way of conclusion, I would say that we have not yet lost the struggle for Southeast Asia, and I see no reason for despair. But I believe we must focus on the essentials of the problems confronting us and pursue an integrated and coordinated policy toward the area as a whole if we are to come out on top. We must take action that will make it clear to friend and foe alike that we mean to fulfill our responsibilities in Southeast Asia.

I am attaching a separate summary of my views on the situation we face in South Viet-Nam.

Sincerely,


Roger Hilsman

Attachment (1)

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ASSISTANT SECRETARY

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TO : The Secretary
FROM : FE - Roger Hilsman
SUBJECT : South Viet-Nam

Roger Hilsman

In my judgment, the strategic concept that was developed for South Viet-Nam remains basically sound. If we can ever manage to have it implemented fully and with vigor, the result will be victory.

The concept is based on the assumption that villagers in Southeast Asia are turned inward on themselves and have little or no sense of identification with either the national government or Communist ideology--that the villagers are isolated physically, politically and psychologically. In such circumstances, it is not at all difficult to develop a guerrilla movement. In Burma during World War II, about 150 Americans created a guerrilla force of 30,000, and did it with white faces. It is hardly surprising that the Viet Cong could do equally well or better in South Viet-Nam.

A corollary to this assumption is that the villagers' greatest desire is security and that, if the villagers are given security, some simple progress towards a better life, and--most important of all--a sense that the government cares about them and their future, they will respond with loyalty.

The recent USIA survey of Long An gives some evidence of the validity of this assumption. 1,250 families were interviewed in Long An, which is among the worst of the Delta provinces. The results were as follows: In insecure villages, 75 percent of the people expressed an attitude towards the Viet Cong and the government that was essentially "a plague on both their houses", and 25 percent of the people were silent. In relatively secure villages --those which could be penetrated by large Viet Cong groups but not by small patrols--50 percent of the people took a "plague on both their houses" point of view, and 50 percent were mildly pro-

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Authority 15K * 127-10001-10468

By ju, NARA. Date 4-20-98

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government. In very secure villages, which had also received some benefits, such as a school or a well, the people were 100 percent pro-government and expressed a determination to fight the Viet Cong.

On the basis of such an apparently valid assumption, the strategic concept calls for primary emphasis on giving security to the villagers. The tactics are the so-called oil-blot approach, starting with a secure area and extending it slowly, making sure no Viet Cong pockets are left behind, and using police units to winkle out the Viet Cong agents in each particular village.

This calls for the use of military forces in a different way from that of orthodox, conventional war. Rather than chasing Viet Cong, the military must put primary emphasis on clear-and-hold operations and on rapid reinforcement of villages under attack. It is also important, of course, to keep the Viet Cong regular units off balance by conventional offensive operations, but these should be secondary to the major task of extending security.

All this requires careful coordination of military operations, police efforts and rural development towards the primary objectives: the extension of security over the heavily-populated regions of the Delta, the cutting off of Viet Cong sources of supplies and especially recruits, and their dispersion into the jungles and mountains where they can be worn down by attrition, starvation and more conventional military means.

At the heart of the strategic concept are two basic principles:

The first is that of the oil blot. In the past, the GVN sought to blanket the whole country with so-called strategic hamlets which in many cases involved nothing more than wire-enclosed villages doused with political propaganda, with the Viet Cong agents left in place. The result was to blanket the Delta with little Dienbienphus-- indefensible, inadequately armed hamlets far from reinforcements, that lacked both government benefits and police facilities to winkle out Communist sympathizers, with Viet Cong pockets left behind. In

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effect these were storage places of arms for the Viet Cong which could be seized at any time. After November 1st, the military began to demobilize some of these vulnerable villages and outposts, and a race developed between the government and the Viet Cong. The race may have ended in a tie, but the result is that the Viet Cong now have much better weapons and greater stocks of ammunition than they ever had before.

The second basic principle is that the way to fight a guerrilla is to adopt the tactics of the guerrilla--night ambushes, small patrols, and so on. In spite of all our pressures, this has never been done in Viet-Nam. Instead, the emphasis has been on large operations, artillery and air bombardments, and the use of cumbersome battalion-sized units which telegraph their movements to the Viet Cong.

As to the question of operations against North Viet-Nam, I would suggest that such operations may at a certain stage be a useful supplement to an effective counterinsurgency program, but that they would not be an effective substitute for such a program.

My own preference would be to continue the covert, or at least deniable, operations along the general lines we have been following for some months with the objective, since these are only pinpricks, not of forcing North Viet-Nam to its knees but of keeping the threat of eventual destruction alive in Hanoi's mind. Then, after we had made sufficient progress in the Delta so that all concerned began to realize that the Viet Cong were losing the support of the population, and that their ability to continue the war depended solely on North Vietnamese support, I think we should indicate as much privately to the North Vietnamese and follow this by selected attacks on their infiltration bases and training camps.

In my judgment, significant action against North Viet-Nam that is taken before we have demonstrated success in our counterinsurgency program will be interpreted by the Communists as an act of desperation, and will, therefore, not be effective in persuading

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the North Vietnamese to cease and desist. What is worse, I think that premature action will so alarm our friends and allies and a significant segment of domestic opinion that the pressures for neutralization will become formidable.

In sum, I believe that we can win in Viet-Nam with a number of provisos.

The first proviso is that we do not over-militarize the war--that we concentrate not on killing Viet Cong and the conventional means of warfare, but on an effective program for extending the areas of security gradually, systematically, and thoroughly. This will require better teamwork in Saigon than we have had in the past and considerably more emphasis on clear-and-hold operations and on police work than we ourselves have given to the Vietnamese.

The problem of getting effective teamwork is troublesome. Ideally, what we need is what the British had in Malaya--a Gerald Templar who has absolute authority to hire and fire anyone in any agency or department and through whom all reporting and all orders are transmitted.

My second proviso is that there be political stability in Saigon. The talk of neutralization is clearly very dangerous. It tends to be in the nature of a self-fulfilling prophecy--talk about neutralization disheartens those who must fully and vigorously implement the strategic concept and encourages those who are plotting for a neutralist coup.

I think we can counter such dangers most effectively by the proposals in my letter to you of March 14 dealing with the whole of Southeast Asia; if necessary, however, we might also station a Marine battalion in Saigon. Publicly, we could explain this as a move to protect American dependents; privately, we could pass the word in Viet-Nam that we wanted no more coups.

To reiterate, I think that we have made the necessary and fundamental policy decisions on the over-all strategic concept. What remains is to implement this concept vigorously and with effective coordination.

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CC of letter and attachment to:

Mr. McNamara
Mr. McCone
Gov. Harriman
Mr. McGeorge Bundy
Mr. William P. Bundy
Mr. Forrestal

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